

Immanuel United Church
December 4
Advent 2: Peace

Welcome & Announcements
Centering Music
Land and Affirming Acknowledgment

Lighting the Advent candles (Pat Schulz)

Come and let us build a new creation
To find a way through the wilderness together.
Let us imagine how our journey
Will lead us to new discoveries
And a willingness to nurture the tiny green shoots of new life.
In the wilderness of this moment,
We wait for the dawn to break
And give light to all who find the landscape
Bleak and full of shadows.
We look for the light to illumine our path forward.
We need light to guide our feet
Into the way of peace and so today,
We light a candle to join our hope in
Our constant prayers for PEACE.

Prayer:

**With this one light, we pray O God,
Be light along our paths,
Lead us to a more just world,
And help us to stay awake
And present to your love
In each and every ordinary day.
Amen**

Sung Response: MV#220 Peace Shines as the Solidary Star.

Prayer Litany – “Clear the Way”

God of Surprises, you call us
From the narrowness of our traditions
To new ways of being church,
From the captivities of our culture
To creative witness for justice,
From the smallness of our horizons
To the bigness of your vision.

**Clear the way in us, your people,
That we might call others to freedom and renewed faith.**

Jesus, wounded healer, you call us
From preoccupation with our own histories
And hurts to daily tasks of peacemaking,
From privilege to pilgrimage,
From insularity to inclusive community.

**Clear the way in us, your people,
That we might call others to freedom and renewed faith.**

Holy, Transforming Spirit, you call us
From fear to faithfulness,
From clutter to clarity,
From a desire to control to deeper trust,
From the refusal to love to a readiness to risk.

**Clear the way in us, your people,
That we might all know the beauty and power
And danger of the gospel.**

Sung Response: VU#1 O Come, O Come Emmanuel (v. 1, 2 &7)

Scripture: Isaiah 11: 1-10

Matthew 3: 1-12

Choir Anthem Peace, Peace ~ Cindy Smyth, violin

Reflection

Ah, John the Baptist...
The eccentric cousin of Jesus.
Dressed in itchy, rough clothing,
Eating bugs and honey,
Hanging out on the banks of the Jordan River,
Preaching about repentance and fire and baptism.
He either makes you giggle
Because he is so out there compared
To so many of our biblical ancestors,
Or he gives you the heebie jeebies
Because his words hit too close to home.
Regardless of the emotions he raises in you,
His presence in the Advent story is expected/
Regardless of the gospel focus for
The liturgical year,
John shows up to rattle us and
Make us uncomfortable.
While most of the time we focus
On his role in kick starting Jesus' ministry
Through the baptism he offers his cousin
In the river,
Every once and while
It's important to look to what it is John
Is actually saying before Jesus
Even graces the edge of the river.

This week as I was thinking
About the passage,
As I was reading commentaries,
Flipping through past sermons,
And mulling over the theme
That we have for our Immanuel Advent season:

On the Road to Find Out,
Two words from John's story
Kept coming to mind...
Repent
Prepare

Repent is one of those words
That can make those of us in the United Church
Squirm a little.
Some of our Christian siblings
Have taken that word and
Given it a harsh, condemning tone.
We need to repent
Because each and every one of us is sinful by nature,
And in repenting we acknowledge this,
Giving meaning to Jesus' death on the cross.
Blah blah blah...
Sorry, as you can tell,
I don't give a lot of weight to this line of thinking...
Substitutionary atonement is a whole other sermon.
But here's the thing...
Jesus wasn't a Christian.
John wasn't a Christian.
Both of these men share a deep grounding
In the Jewish faith,
And in the Hebrew language.
(An aside here...the writings that make up
The gospels and the Christian testament
Would have been written in Greek,
But Jesus and John likely would have
Spoken Hebrew.)
So, it only makes sense that we
Look at the Hebrew word that
We translate as "repentance."
Teh-shoo-va (teshuva)

Teshuva is more than just
A feeling of guilt or regret.
It's more than confession and apologies.
Teshuva derives from the Hebrew verb "To return"

So repentance is more than just a feeling,
Where we punish ourselves for actions and words
In a seemingly neverending process of
Feeling bad and asking for forgiveness.
Instead, Teshuva is a decision, an action.
It is deciding to turn away from
Where you are heading and to turn
Back to God.
When we teshuva, when we repent,
God pulls us towards himself.
It is a continuous decision to turn to God
And to receive a new beginning.
It's about transformation.
It's about the courage to know
That sometimes things need to shift
In order for new life to blossom.

But what about the other stuff
From the beginning of the sermon...
What about prepare
What about "on the road to find out".
Well, here's the thing...
We need to turn around,
We need to turn toward God
And God's dreams for us,
And then we need to prepare
So that we can be ready for the journey
On the road to find out...
See what I did there?

Advent is really all about preparing...
We hear the stories of prophesy,
Of dreams,
Of life changing hope and fear,
So that we can be ready for the
Birth of Jesus and what that means
For us as followers.
But this year,
Advent brings an opportunity
To prepare for Emmanuel,
And to prepare to continue vision
And ministry of Immanuel United.

There on the muddy banks of the Jordan,
John repeats the words of the Prophet Isaiah:
“The voice of one crying out
In the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
Make their paths straight.”
The first step in this process
Of preparing is to repent...
To turn toward God.
For those on the river bank,
There were some pretty clear things
That they needed to do...
Turn away from the old ways
And to embrace a new relationship
With the Holy through baptism.
What does that first step look like
For our particular Journey together?
Well, you’ve turned toward God...
You’ve asked the question:
Where is God calling us as we look
Toward the future?
You’ve taken time to talk together,

To pray and reflect on your hopes
Your dreams, your concerns.
You've turned your path towards
Where God is.
And you've taken these first steps
With courage and grace.
And now you prepare...
You prepare by trusting in each other
And in the Holy.
You prepare by hearing the call
To think outside the box
And to risk something new.
You prepare by having tough and real
Conversation with each other
To see what you need to carry with you
And what you can leave behind.
You prepare by having hard conversations
And by sharing hopeful dreams.
You prepare by thinking about
That which could be,
Rather than dwelling on what has been.
And you prepare by allowing the
Spirit in to gently nudge you
in new directions.

It's easy to forget in the bustle of Advent,
That as we light the candles
And as we reflect on Hope, Peace, Love and Joy,
That what we really are doing
Is opening ourselves up,
Our hearts and minds,
To be transformed,
To be turned around by the birth
Of a tiny human infant
In a world that was and is full

Of turmoil and beauty.
In the midst of your journey
To discover who and what you will
Be as you move into your shared future,
This tiny infant comes,
With it's vulnerability and unconditional love
To transform you...
To open up your vision,
To expand your quest for justice
To broaden your understanding of ministry,
To help you to discern
What you are on the road to find out...

John didn't have concrete answers for the people
Who sought him out,
But he did know that
Someone was coming who
Was going to shake up the status quo,
Who was going to challenge
The way things had always been...
And we need to get ready,
We need to prepare,
Because the road to find out
Isn't always going to be smooth...
I have a feeling it will feel
A little more like a Manitoba Highway....
You know what I mean...
But it will be transformative.
For at the heart of the journey
Is the love that is found in
The birth of a child,
And lived out in the life and work
Of each of you.
It is a road that you are not traveling alone,
For you accompany each other on it,

And God walks with you.

Hymn: VU#18 There's a Voice in the Wilderness

Offering

Offertory: MV#191 What Can I Do?

Offering Prayer

Prayer of the Community & The Prayer of Jesus

Hymn: VU#682 O Day of Peace

Commissioning and Benediction

Extroit: MV#220 Peace Shines as the Solidary Star.