

Immanuel United Church

April 23, 2023

Third Sunday of Easter

PRELUDE

Acknowledgement of the Land and Treaties

Today, we acknowledge the land that we are gathered on is Treaty 1 territory..... the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, and Dakota Peoples, as well as the homeland and the heart of the Red River Metis Nation, who for thousands of years, walked gently on this land with deeply rooted gifts of spirituality, culture and ways of knowing.

We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and give thanks for the connection we share with this land – in times past and also in the present day.

Today we are called to seek a new relationship as Indigenous and non-indigenous people, creating one based on friendship, built on respect, and one that produces peace, remembering that we are all treaty people.

As we enter this time of worship,

The rainbow candle is lit

To symbolize and remind us

Of the commitment that we have made

To be an inclusive and affirming community

And that all God's people belong here.

Welcome and Announcements

Lighting of the Christ Candle

As we walk in the light that is Jesus, we share our stories.

We give voice to the longings of our heart.

As we tell the tales of long ago, we search for meaning.

We need loving guidance for each step.

The Christ candle is lit and will continue to shine throughout all the coming journeys.

Thank-you for showing us the way.

Call to Worship

We come before God on this day with great anticipation.

Our souls are listening for the unexpected.

We stand in holy awe as the Almighty speaks in untold ways.

Our vision and sight will be restored.

We are gathered to be one with the Divine.

Our communion with each other and God will bind this holy union.

We are united in our resolve to give praise and honour.

Our every breath gives voice to the glory of God.

Hymn VU#395

Come In, Come In and Sit Down

Opening Prayer

We come before you, O God, on this holy Sabbath with many expectations. We pray that this worship service will bring us closer to you as we ask, what should we do? May we find strength in each element of this service to be the instruments of your peace and love for the world. Allow us to remain open to all possibilities as we spend time together as your community of faith. Amen.

Hymn VU#482

Shout for Joy

Scripture:

Acts 2: 14, 36-41

Luke 24: 13-35

Choir Anthem

“Two Were Bound for Emmaus”

Reflection – What Did You Expect?

Have you ever had expectations that were dashed? Have you ever gone home with your tail between your legs in defeat? There are all kinds of things that we expect from life, our family, our God. Things are, in turn, also expected from us. We have expectations for our favourite sports team. Yes, the Jets made the playoffs. Yes, my child is going to university. But what about those expectations that are dashed? No, I can't afford to retire now? No, my health does not allow me to do what I want. But what if you had expectations that a great leader, a Messiah, an anointed saviour would come and make things right for your country? Would you expect all the evil to be gone? Would you expect the oppressors to be transformed? With this hope dashed how is it possible to remain optimistic? We would be sad and have a heavy heart. What are our expectations of the Risen Christ? What is expected of us?

Today, I would like to explore the readings from Acts and Luke to examine more closely what people were expecting after the death and resurrection of Christ and also what was expected of them.

As we know there are many times when our expectations are not met and there are times when we can be surprised and have our

expectations exceeded. We join Peter as he speaks to people whose expectations are about to be upended. We know from our own lives that recognitions—those “aha!” moments we experience—create pivot points. When recognition happens, things cannot stay the same. New possibilities emerge. There are many times when we don’t always get things immediately. It takes a few takes for the lightbulb to really be turned on.

Peter said these simple words to the crowd, “Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah,[a] this Jesus whom you crucified.’

You could have heard a pin drop. He might as well have dropped a bomb into that assembly of the faithful. “When they heard this,” this combination of what they had done to Jesus and what God had done to Jesus, “they were cut to the heart....” What does that mean? Was this an “Aha” moment for them, or an “Oh no” moment. Are they feeling awe— “what wonders God has done!?” Or are they feeling horror— “what have we done with God?” Probably both.

They don’t know what to do in response, so they simply ask, “Brothers, what shall we do?” What do Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation demand from Peter’s audience? First, Peter calls for repentance. Popular understandings of repentance often define it in moral categories: as reformed behavior, expressions of remorse, or the rectification of wrongs. But this is not the term’s primary meaning. The original Greek word for repent refers to a changed mind or a new understanding. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus require from ignorant humanity a new understanding of who he is. What God has done through Christ creates a point of recognition about God and Christ. This new understanding, of course, leads to new possibilities.

The Greeks believed that a change of one's mind would naturally lead to a change in one's actions, because beliefs determine behavior. This is quite different from many psychological disciplines today that emphasize feelings as the determinant of behavior—in other words, to change behaviors we must first “get in touch with” our feelings. However, there has been a movement in recent decades that emphasizes beliefs as the determinant of actions. Beliefs constitute the starting point in the action-cycle. A change of thinking has the power to change both feelings and actions.

Second, Peter tells his hearers to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” so that they may be delivered from their sins. In the wake of Jesus' resurrection, baptism symbolizes more than washing away defilement. It becomes itself an image of resurrection, of new life emerging from death. Peter does not elaborate on the significance of baptism, but the rite's explicit connection to the name of Jesus Christ is consistent with other New Testament texts that describe baptism as a means of participating in Christ's own death and resurrection.

In that time and place, people considered a person's name to be more than a label to identify that person. They believed that something of the person's identity was tied up in the name—that the name expressed something of the person's identity. As is obvious from this verse, they also assumed that a name possessed something of the power of the one who wore that name. To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ was to appropriate in some way a measure of the person of Jesus Christ—to receive something of Christ into oneself—to become a new person in the likeness of Christ.

Third, Peter declares that the Holy Spirit is promised to all whom God calls. This is the same Spirit of power that Jesus said God promised and would empower Jesus' followers. The presence of the Spirit testifies

that salvation is at hand, for it is the same Spirit that was so active in Jesus' own ministry.

Finally, the new order of things instituted by Jesus' resurrection and exaltation allows for rescue from all that is debilitating about this corrupt—literally, “crooked”—generation. Jesus occasionally spoke of “this generation” to designate a general condition among humanity that cannot perceive the activity of God in its midst.

Peter's interpretation of the Christ event and arrival of the Holy Spirit brings the assembled crowd to a point of recognition about themselves and about God. The recognition causes something to happen, allowing for new possibilities. This is because the enthronement of God's Messiah is not the end of the story.

In Luke we find Cleopas and the unnamed disciple walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. This was a distance of about 11 kilometres. It's Sunday and these two disciples are journeying together. As they walk they are trying to make sense, together, of all that has happened.

Perhaps they were so engrossed in that conversation that they didn't think at all about the fact that this third person has seemingly caught up to them, unannounced. The gospel writer purposefully emphasises that it was “Jesus himself” that “came near and went with them”.

Though they are kept from recognizing that it is Jesus—is it their grief that keeps them from recognizing, is it God—the disciples stop in their tracks when this man asks them what they are talking about.

It sounds as if they were overcome with the realization that their dreams were shattered and in that moment, they were frozen. They also could not believe that there was someone who had not heard of this event and the things that had happened. I wonder why Jesus did not try harder to make himself known. I wonder why he did not say, I am he and I know what you're talking about. Maybe the disciples

needed to clarify things for themselves or maybe Jesus wanted to take them to a place where they were ready to see him.

The disciples go on to explain what had happened and how Jesus had been their great hope for Israel. Like Cleopas and his companion, we talk endlessly. How many library shelves are filled with the words of theologians? How many blogs bandy about words about God, Jesus, religion, faith—both pro and con? Our talk does not always lift our sadness or our lowered expectations of what God could do or would want to do. There is a kind of resignation in all this, both Luke's story and often our own lives. Get real. Grow up. Back to work. I can only imagine how the families and friends of Cleopas would offer advice and opinion when the two got home to long untended work and family obligations.

After these two had finished talking, Jesus said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.' That response from the stranger must have set their heads reeling, but it seems they have run out of road because they have neared the village.

We come to the heart of this passage, the place where the dynamic changes, the meal in Emmaus. The two travelers nearly force Jesus to stay with them. But it did not come to that, of course. Jesus was planning to stay the whole time. In fact, Jesus was there the whole time.

It was in Jesus' characteristic behavior of giving, of feeding, of caring for his sheep—whatever way you want to describe the blessing and distributing of bread—that they knew him. Suddenly. Fully. Jesus spent

a lot of time in Luke's gospel eating with people of all sorts. He described a wise and faithful disciple as one who makes sure others have what they need to eat at the right time.

In feeding others at the right time and in receiving the bread broken for us with thanksgiving, we are given Jesus. Stop talking, stop everything, and pay attention as you reach out to receive what is blessed. A glimpse of the Lord may propel you new confidence, new hope, even a new way of remembering. New expectation.

I like this catch phrase that I found. Hospitality leads to revelation—to blessing.

The Easter season is all about coming to faith and belief, of having the testimonies of one another be heard and trusted, of receiving personal confirmation via experience, and of being reminded that sometimes we ask for more proof than we actually need. Throughout, we see how it takes people different kinds of experiences and different amounts of intel to believe, and how it often requires some sort of encounter directly with the presence of God, where God makes us understand who we are encountering.

The Hebrew word is messiah (messias) and the Greek word is Christ (Christos). Both messias and Christos mean "anointed." Anointment with oil was a rite used to set people apart for service as kings, priests, or prophets.

The Jewish people looked forward to the coming of the messiah, anticipating that he would deliver them from oppression and restore Israel to greatness. They anticipated that the messiah would be like Moses, who led Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, or David, who established Israel as a great nation. Because of these expectations, Jesus was reluctant to call himself messiah—although when the high

priest asked, “‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am’.

When the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the messiah, it presents him as the deliverer, not from military or political rivals, but from sin. And that, I think, is an interesting distinction.

What kind of messiah are we expecting? Many people say that the anointed one hasn’t arrived because the world is still a mess. Just as the Jews in the New Testament were expecting someone to save them from the oppressors and all the injustices that prevailed, I think that we are faced with some of the same expectations. We expect to be delivered from the evils around us rather than the evil within. God, working through Jesus, doesn’t operate that way.

The text from Luke takes people on the road, going home, back to ordinary life. They are saddened that their greatest hopes have not come to pass. In spite of all they knew, all the stories they could rehearse, in spite of the witness of others, they simply had not seen Jesus—nor had anyone else they knew. The prophecies of Jesus and hope of redemption grew cold and were not able to sustain them any longer. They began to suspect that the whole thing had been a mistake, a worthy hope and one unlikely ever to be realized. For them, Good Friday had not been Good. Time had passed and there was no change, no resurrection, no Jesus.

Does not time also pass for us, as we go our many ways “back”? We “outgrow” our hopes or become more realistic, and we no longer expect anything real to happen. We know the stories. We’ve heard the biblical word. Notice that even when Jesus propounds all of Scripture to the two travelers in the story, they do not recognize him!

Cleopas and his companion are us. They know a lot. They care a lot. They think about things and are saddened by their diminished hopes. More important, they don't even know that their eyes have been closed until suddenly they are opened. We can't control the One who opens and closes eyes. But from this story, we might find hope that Jesus walks with us. We do find hope that in such acts as the breaking of the bread, we catch a glimpse of the Messiah. And in that glimpse our expectations are met. Amen.

Hymn MV#176 Three Things I Promise

Offering #540 VU Grant Us, God, the Grace

Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.

Offering Prayer

Dear Bountiful God, our lives are rich with your blessings. We offer our gifts of time, talent, and money to use for your service. Help us to be wise stewards of your resources as we reach out to our community and the world beyond. We are so grateful for all that you provide and for your willing servants who make this church a beacon of hope. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Dear God, you know our thoughts and desires. You know that we have expectations that are often unrealistic. We see the world and want

instant change. We want a saviour who will swoop in and save us all. We pray for insight into your perspective. We pray that each of us will not be discouraged when things don't go the way we think they should. Help us to listen, to really listen to your voice and be aware of those moments when Christ has made his presence known in our lives. We draw on that inspiration as we continue your work.

We pray for those who live in poverty and despair. There are many in our own city who don't have enough to eat or a place to live. We hold them before you, O God. Help us to intervene and find ways to end the cycle of hopelessness that many feel. Each of us has a unique story to tell with unique answers to our common needs.

In this world we see that power and corruption are so much a part of many nations. We pray for the leaders of all countries that they will find the true power of leadership is not control and greed. Help them to remain faithful to the people who they serve and be a voice of justice and equity for all.

Our prayers go out to those who are sick and in need of your support, loving God. We know that we can come to you with anything. We bring those members of our church family who are suffering. Let them know they are loved and that we, as a community of faith, care.

In silence we take a moment to voice our deepest concerns that lie within our hearts....

Let us say the words that Jesus taught us to pray....

Prayer of Jesus

Hymn VU#289

It Only Takes a Spark

Commissioning and Benediction

Our expectations may not always be realized, we may face disappointment, but thankfully the wisdom of God will prevail with reassurance that all is well.

We have been blessed with the risen Christ. We have felt him walk among us and our lives are rich with the wonder of this experience. Find in this loving relationship all that we need to be the voices of peace and forgiveness to a world that so desperately needs us. Amen.

Choral Amen

Postlude