

Claremont United Church

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WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Image: "Samaritan Woman at the Well"



Welcome to this sacred moment

as we gather online

to center our hearts in this time of worship.

Though we may not be physically together this morning,

we take this moment to remind ourselves

that we are one in Christ's love

and held in God's tender embrace.

A Greeting

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust.

Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

(Psalm 143:8)

A Call to Worship

We centre our hearts to worship God,

who makes streams flow from rock,

who turns the parched earth into springs of water,

who sends the rain from heaven

and makes the wilderness blossom and flourish.

As the deer thirsts for flowing streams,

so we thirst for You, O God.

Let us worship our life-giving God,

who pours out living water on all whose hearts thirst.

Like a mighty river flowing
Like a flower in beauty growing
far beyond all human knowing,
is the perfect peace of God.

Prayer of the Day

Source: Prayers for an Inclusive Church, Steven Shakespeare, page. 15

**Lord of the wellspring,
source of life and truth:
Jesus asked for water
from the hands of a woman
in the land of the stranger;
may he teach us to name our need,
to love our neighbor
and to worship you
in spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ,
who shows us who we are. Amen.**

An excerpt from today's Gospel reading for the 3rd Sunday of Lent: John 4:5-42

⁵So Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

A message from Rev. Lionel:

Dear Friends:

As I write these words,
I am picturing the faces of the congregation members
of both Goodwood and Claremont United Churches,
where instead of worshipping in community,
we find ourselves worshipping and connecting with each
other in a new way –
through the written word, and social media.

I hope that the words that I offer and have chosen
can speak to your hearts and offer some measure of
reassurance
as we all await more answers and more clarity
around the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic
that we are now dealing with.

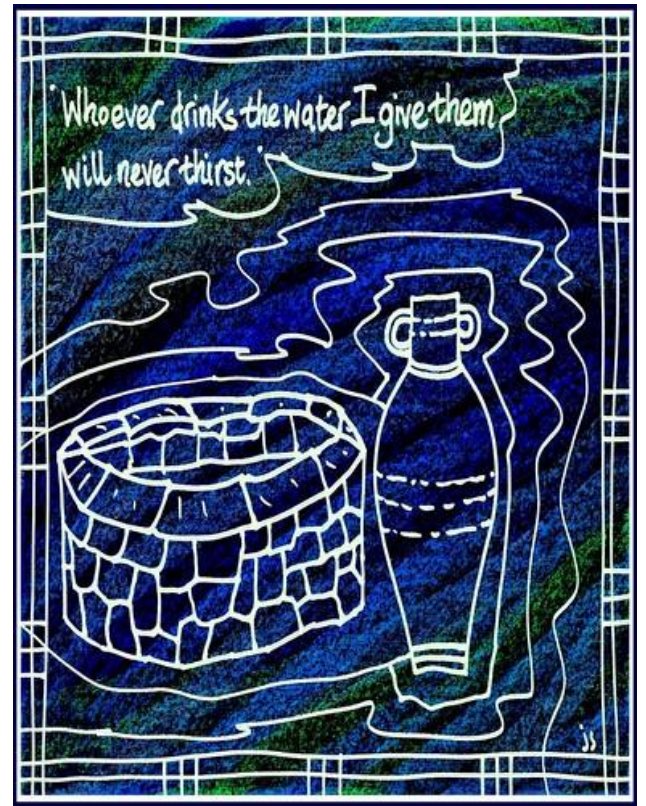
In today's Gospel lesson, we hear the story of Jesus
encountering a Samaritan woman
during his travels Samaritan city called Sychar.

The Samaritan woman was an utter outsider to her Jewish neighbours in so many ways:
because of her gender, her culture and her religious traditions.
And yet Jesus intentionally seeks out this 'outsider'
and engages with her in ways that embodies caring, respect and grace.
The God who we meet in the Scriptures
is always about the business of breaking down barriers of fear and distrust,
and this story is no exception.

Through Jesus encounter with an un-named Samaritan woman,
Jesus uncovers her deep thirst for living water.
The living water of God's own unconditional love and healing and acceptance.

This story leaves me wondering:
what we are thirsting for today
as we encounter all of the fear and uncertainty that surrounds the COVID-19 pandemic
and our efforts to maintain the wellness of our communities?
And how does our faith in God's continued presence speak to that thirst and our fears?

In my explorations surrounding this Gospel text, I came across a lovely reflection
on a website called: Lutherans Connect, an online ministry of Lutheran Campus Ministry in Toronto.
And so I'd like to share these words today, which spoke so meaningfully to me,
and which I hope can speak to you as well.



Sabbath Days in a Time of Pandemic **Special devotions in response to COVID-19**

Today, as we take special sabbath days of rest, we are also using the time to reflect on how God meets us in the midst of health crisis. The rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus has left us feeling anxious and uncertain as institutions and festivals shut down, borders close and as we are all urged to take special care with our bodies, including 'distancing' ourselves from social contacts as a precaution.

In a strange and unexpected way, we have been returned to the first day of Lent, when we journeyed with Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus himself has gone into a kind of self-isolation, not in fear of disease but in order to better hear himself and God, to be close to God and to test his own capacity for survival in the midst of trials. This is not unusual: biblical figures frequently find themselves isolated in the desert, sometimes by their own choosing, sometimes driven out by others. Hagar and Elijah knew it well. John the Baptist lived and worked there. When they are in the wilderness, prophets experience changes of plan, new visions, periods of despair but also a new resolve and sense of mission. In our contemporary crisis, we are hearing from both our health authorities and our own church leaders, cautions with regard to care for our bodies: we are urged to find different ways than we might traditionally use for greeting or passing the peace, for instance. What we are doing in these moments is showing each other caring love. We are being called to dwell in trust, in the love we have for each other, in the love we have for God and in God's love of us. We are being asked to put our spiritual arms around our friends, families and communities in prayer, and through the ways in which we show our kindness and compassion with our smiles and in our eyes, through food left at the door, or through phone calls of inquiry and check-in. In today's song, we hear, "I am still and wait here in the silence, until you come and sit awhile with me."

God is always sitting with us, in silence, or in groups where we are not able to be in physical contact. In Hebrew, 'face' has the same meaning as 'presence'. We hear in the blessing from Numbers that God makes God's face to shine upon us. In the coming days, how can we become that shining presence of the blessing of God? How can we make our presence felt and known wherever we are, knowing God's love journeys with us in every moment?

Source: Lutherans Connect / Lutheran Campus Ministry Toronto,

https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=lutherans%20connect&epa=SEARCH_BOX

A Prayer

O God our Healer,
show your compassion for the whole human family that is in turmoil and burdened with illness and with fear. Heal our self-centredness and indifference that makes us worry only when the virus threatens us, open ways beyond timidity and fear that too easily ignore our neighbor. Heal our world, heal our bodies, strengthen our hearts and our minds, and in the midst of turmoil, give us hope and peace. Remember all your family, the entire human race, and all your creation, in your love. Amen.

Source: excerpted from "Intercessory Prayer in the Midst of the Spread of COVID-19", Lutheran World Federation.

Blessing & Commissioning: The Church Doesn't Close.

By Richard Bott, Moderator, United Church of Canada

It's important to remember:
church doesn't close. Ever.

We may need to temporarily stop our face-to-face, full-on-peace-passing, communion-by-intinction,
and offering-of-the-plates,
but the church -
the body of Christ -
is a 24/7/365 reality.

It's lived, around the world,
and in our homes;
it acts, when our hearts reach out;
it keeps going,
wherever there is one disciple of Jesus,
or two, or three -
living the Way we've been taught.

And, with Paul, I'd like to remind you
there is nothing -
there is NOTHING -
not a single thing -
not in the sky above, or the earth below,
not powers, nor principalities,
not things seen, or unseen -

nothing in all creation
that can separate that creation
from God's love in Christ.

We are the church.
Always.
And all ways.

Amen.

Continued Support for our Congregation

During these weeks when our church is not meeting for public worship, we ask you to please prayerfully consider how you are able to continue supporting our congregation with its continued financial obligations. Offerings can be mailed to the church address itself (see the top of this email for the church's mailing address) and also to your congregation's treasurer. PAR forms are also available if you would like to use one for direct debit givings. Thank you for your continued support of our congregation's ministry.



NEWS

EAST CENTRAL ONTARIO REGIONAL
COUNCIL of the United Church of Canada

*The link below provides an updated Statement and resources on COVID-19
from East Central Ontario Regional Council of the United Church*

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/FMfcgxwHMPfbkfJkBVhWWbVQIMXvgcXq>