

July 18 2021 – Shared Summer worship – led by Elizabeth Brown
Welcome Video from All Churches

Welcome to Worship from Trinity United Church; we're delighted to be worshipping with people from all over Winnipeg, those listening on the phone, those from across Canada and in other parts of the world. We hope that you find this time meaningful, and a good way to connect with God in worship, today.

Lighting the Candle Near and Far: we take the light from the Christ candle and light our affirming candle as a reminder that everyone is welcome to worship; that the light moves from these candles into our hearts so we may shine the light of God, the light of Christ, the light of the spirit, alive in our world.

Acknowledging the land

We call ourselves to worship by singing MV8, which is played and sung by Bert Johnson from Trinity United

Call to Worship: MV8 And On This Path – played and sung by Bert Johnson

**And on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide!
Open wide! Open wide! Open wide! The gates are open wide!
So enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide,
so enter in, the gates of holiness are open wide!
Open wide! Open wide! Open wide! The gates are open wide!
And on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide,
and on this path, the gates of holiness are open wide!
Open wide! Open wide! Open wide! The gates are open wide!***

Opening Prayer: I invite you to breathe deeply, to come to God in an attitude of prayer, to find the place you feel close to God as we pray together: holy one, creating one, loving one, we come to worship today bringing with us all that fills our lives: concerns and celebrations; worries and joys; abundance and need; sadness and smiles. As we hear the music and prayers, the stories about you and words of our minds and hearts, may we be open to your message to each one of us. Whether we are near or far, by ourselves or with others, may your spirit move into our hearts and remind us we are loved, we are beloved, as we worship together.

Scripture: Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 – is read by Rev. Noelle Bowles – Spirit Path United Church

Reflection: created by Rev. Jeff Cook – Transcona Memorial UC

One of my funniest experiences at a movie theatre experiences had nothing to do with the movie that was shown, it had to do with the movie that wasn't shown, or at least that wasn't shown when it was supposed to be shown. I arrived at the theatre, sat down, and the movie started,
... and about an hour later the movie ended!

Part way through the movie I had thought that relationships between characters seemed to have progressed quickly, but it wasn't a particularly profound movie, so I didn't think much of it. As we left, the projectionist met us in the lobby to apologize. There were three reels to the movie. When it had come time to change from the first reel to the second reel, the projectionist had accidentally put on the third reel! – So, we had all watched the beginning of the movie and the end of the movie but had missed the middle of the movie. We all went back into the theatre and re-watched the movie from the start of the second reel through to the end.

Sometimes the Sunday scripture readings are like that movie – missing something from the middle.

Many faith communities use a resource called the lectionary - a list of scripture readings chosen for every Sunday of the year for following a three-year cycle. Usually, each Sunday includes a passage from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the New Testament and one of the New Testament Epistles.

Today's Gospel lectionary reading comes from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Mark including verses 30 to 34...and then....verses 53-56. Verses 35 to 52 are not included in today's reading. The middle reel is missing!

This missing reel contains some significant, familiar stories. Today's reading begins with the apostles having returned to Jesus after he had sent them in pairs to heal the sick, cast out demons and anoint people. The disciples are like people returning from a trip, wanting to show photos and tells stories of what they have seen.

While they were gone, however, the missing reel was playing. In that reel, King Herod, Rome's ruling authority in Judea, had executed John the Baptist, the prophet who had baptized Jesus. Suddenly, this is no longer a story about charismatic disciples making lame people walk...now it's about the Roman Empire killing anyone it considers to be a threat.

So, when the disciples return to Jesus, excited and anxious to tell him about healings and demons cast out, they find Jesus pondering the news of John's execution. Rather than saying, "tell me all about what you have experienced", Jesus says, "we need to go into the wilderness, away from public places, someplace isolated."

So they get in a boat and sail off to a deserted place – except that in deserted place they are met by a crowd who got there ahead of them; a crowd that Jesus, in the missing reel, will eventually feed with five loaves and two fish.

There is another story in the middle reel – the story of the disciples battered by a storm until Jesus is with them and the storm is stilled.

...and then the third reel gets installed, and the edit is almost so smooth that we don't know we missed some stories. We have gone from disciples wanting to tell Jesus about their experiences of healing, to a boat trip and teaching, to a boat trip and people bringing the sick and lame to Jesus, asking Jesus to heal the sick and to allow people just to touch him to be healed.

Had we watched just the first and last reels of this reading, we would have a sense of Jesus' popularity and of Jesus' reputation as a healer. We might get the impression that this was just another moment in the great healing tour of Jesus, adored by many and sought after by multitudes. What a success story.

The middle reel, I think, changes that!

The middle reel tells us that Jesus, is on a collision course with the wielders of power in that Roman Empire.

The middle reel tells us that popularity is no protection from execution.

The middle reel tells us that Jesus is offering an alternative world to that of the Roman Empire. In Rome, the emperor practiced a political strategy of 'bread and circuses.' - giving citizens free wheat – the stuff you make bread with – and circuses – entertainment, watching gladiators battle in an arena. It was a strategy to appease the populace, to give the appearance of generosity on the part of the emperors while making people more dependent and exposing them to the Empire's world of violence and fighting prowess.

Yet, this middle reel tells us that Jesus also gives bread and many are fed. This is the Jesus who will teach his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" – God, give us bread - not Casear, not the Emperor, but God is the giver of bread.

This middle reel tells us that Jesus' disciples will be battered by storms in this world.

The middle reel tells us that something powerful and dangerous is happening when people come from villages, cities and farms to lay the sick along the way of Jesus. A storm is coming. The sick who are brought to Jesus are those cannot contribute to the Roman economy and so they no longer matter in the movie reels featuring the Roman Empire.

Jesus lived in a Galilee of extreme poverty. Historians estimate that about 60% of the population lived in severe or extreme poverty. Another 30% continuously struggled to survive economically. (Information about the economic conditions of Galilee and the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus are referenced from 'Poverty in the first-century Galilee' by Sakari Hakkinen, Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, published in the journal 'HTS Theological Studies' in 2016)

Historians Garnsey and Saller describe the economy of that time as "the Roman system

of inequality”.

Most of the population lived in villages and depended on agricultural production to live. The urban elite, the wealthy, used taxes to maintain a flow of agriculture and wealth from the villages to the cities. Debt caused farmers to lose their farms to landowners who lived in the cities. Without your own land, you were in risk of becoming an itinerant labourer or a beggar. There was no middle class. There were the wealthy few, and everyone else.

The people who came to Jesus were people who lived on a precarious edge between life and death; survival and extinction. They had no standing in the political-economic world they inhabited and no way out of their impoverished life.

Then Jesus arrives speaking about another type of world, another way economy, another kingdom. Jesus arrives and notices them, Jesus ‘sees’ them, Jesus touches them, Jesus lets them touch him, Jesus affirms that they are people, that they matter, that God cares...about...them!

The lame may have gotten up and walked, and those with skin rashes may have gained unblemished flesh, but another healing was also occurring – they were being healed of the stigma of being nobodies; Jesus valued them as human beings, as members of the community, as children of God.

The people have been watching and participating in a movie called ‘the Roman Empire’ in which they are cast as extras – as people with no major role, no people on the periphery, unnoticed by the people of power and privilege, people whose names never appear in the credits; valued only for what they can produce for others to consume. No one notices them, for they are no ones in this movie. The people who reach out to touch the fringe of Jesus’ cloak are reaching out from the fringes of their society.

Jesus’ presence with the people in this story is a different movie, is the insertion of a different reel into the movie of powerful and poor that was running the world.

It is a reel that recalls the story of faith in which Jesus was nurtured:

- The story of God hearing the cries of slaves in Egypt, and moving to free people from being slaves to an exploitive economic system
- The Story of God whose prophets repeated the litany of care – care for the widows, the orphans and the foreigners – care for the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, the most at risk
- the story of God who calls us to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God
- the story of God who accompanies exiles into a strange land and who then accompanies them home through the wilderness
- the story of God who proclaims good news to the poor, a year of jubilee and debt forgiveness to the despairing, a promise of blessing for those who grieve, who are poor, who are imprisoned for debt, who are peacemakers in a world of rule by force.

The middle reel tells us that the world is under new management, that it is God’s world.

I think one reason Christians gather to worship weekly is because that is a time for

seeing the reel that is too often missing from the story we watch the rest of the week.

During the first months of this pandemic, when we were globally in lockdown and no one was seeing anyone, I noticed that the news media focused on good news stories of people who were emotionally touching and being touched by others – stories of musicians giving concerts from their apartment balconies; stories of people decorating their front windows with hearts and rainbows so that anyone walking by could receive an artistic hug; stories of neighbours delivering groceries to one another.

It was like a neglected news reel had been found and was being run.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry by repeating words of John the Baptizer – Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. I like to translate the word 'repent' as 're- imagine'. Re-imagine living and relating as God's people. Reimagine the world, so that everyone is seen and valued, reimagine a world in which God is found amongst those on the fringes, touching and being touched to heal; to bless each and everyone as a child of God and a wondrous unique expression of the divine.

These Bible stories are not just documentaries about what happened then; they are poetry to help us reimagine world we live in so that we see, relate and love differently, as we touch and are touched by God present in the fringe places of our world.

May God give us imaginations to reimagine our world. Thanks be to God. AMEN

Hymn: Free – John Buller – played be and sung by Second Chance

Freedom came my way one night I could not help but see it

Truth was just within my sight So I reached out.

I held the hand that led me Through wind and rain and the snow

And I found purpose on my journey Now this is what I know.

In paradise I sing my praises to the Lord Amidst my glorious shouts of praise

Freed in the beauty and the splendor of my God Content to sing there for all of my days and . . .

I will sing Him praise The one who loved me

I will sing Him praise The one who gave me life.

It was a wonder to me That this humble guide had stayed

Of yet more wonder was the freedom With the commitment that I made.

In paradise I sing my praises to the Lord Amidst my glorious shouts of praise

Freed in the beauty and the splendor of my God Content to sing there for all of my days and . . .

I will sing Him praise The one who loved me

I will sing Him praise The one who gave me life.

Just feel the wind and watch the sea Just as the waves are so I will be Rising with grace and rising with strength Rising to sing.

I will give Him praise The one who loved me

I will give Him praise The one who gave me life. I will sing Him praise The one who loved me

I will sing Him praise The one who gave me life.

Freedom came my way one night I could not help but see it So I reached out. *

Offering – there are many ways we give to the mission and ministry of all our churches; people have been creative in finding ways to give financially: some drop off their envelope on a weekly walk or drive past the building; some have given through Canada Helps; some have signed up for Pre Authorized donations; others have mailed in their cheques. I know that all the ministries and missions have benefited from the many gifts given by so many in time, energy, activities, support and caring. Please check the website of the church you connect with for all the ways you may offer your gifts. We say, thank you and bless all of you.

Prayers for the people – created and read by Caryn Douglas, United Church in Meadowood the Lord's prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses; as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Hymn: VU326 O For a Thousand Tongues – sung by Rebecca McIntosh and Fred Simpson; played by organist Don Menzies all from Westminster United Church

**O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of God's grace.
Jesus! the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease; 'tis music in
the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace.
He speaks, and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive, the mournful
broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.
Hear him, you deaf; you voiceless ones, your tongues again employ; you blind,
behold your Saviour comes, and leap, you lame, for joy!
My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad the honours of your name.***

Blessing – as we reimagine and recreate the world, as Jeff suggested, may our dreams and visions be as creative and God-like as possible! May we bravely share God's love, live God's justice, bring God's peace to our world.

May the grace of God, the love of Jesus and the power of that amazing spirit be with us all, today and always. Amen.