

BEACHBURG PASTORAL CHARGE
United Church of Canada
December 13th, 2020
Trinity ~ 9:30 am; St. Andrew's ~ 11:00 am
Advent Communion

Minister: Rev. Kevin Moratz
Ministers: The People of the Congregation
Organist: Heather Campbell
Pianists: Barry Stephen, Murray Gutz

Our Shared Mission Statement

The congregations of St. Andrew's & Trinity United Churches celebrate and share God's accepting love known to us through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit calls us to discern God's Word as we reach out with concern and compassion to others, seeking justice, healing and hope for the world.

ORDER OF SERVICE

Welcome and Announcements

Call To Worship

We gather in this time of waiting we call Advent to reflect upon our lives, our faith, our past, present, and future.

We gather to support each other through the coming season of Christmas, with its joy for some, sorrow for others. We gather to reset ourselves on our faith journey within our Christian family, the church. Let us worship God, who gives us Jesus, the Christ, alive in the past, in the present, and in the future.

Thanks be to God!

Advent Candle Lighting

Hymn - "We Light This Candle"

Reader 1: Who do you say Jesus is?

Reader 2: To me, a tree, Jesus is like a strong root, giving me strength and support.

Reader 1: To me, a seed, Jesus is like a loving gardener, nurturing and caring for me. (Invite people to add their own sentences.)

All: **We wait for Jesus, the firm foundation and careful gardener, who nurtures peace.**

Reader 2: (Lights second Advent candle)

Reader 1: We wait for Jesus. (Reader 1 leads congregation in prayer)

Let us pray (All): **Holy One, Give us the courage to be brave, as we prepare for Christ's arrival, so that, like the Angels, we can reach out to the "unreachable," like Elizabeth and Mary, we can receive unexpected messengers; and like the shepherds make peace with the special role we play in Christ's story. Help us to be brave, as we prepare. Amen.**

Hymn: "Hope Is a Star"

1 Hope is a star that shines in the night,
leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain When God is a child there's joy in our song.

The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,
and none shall be afraid.

2 Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth. R

3 Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,
telling the world that the Saviour is born. R

4 Love is a flame that burns in our heart,
Jesus has come and will never depart. R

Ministry of Music

Prayer of Confession and Words of Assurance

We let our hearts grow cold and frozen to match the weather, rather than face our transgressions. In the cold dimness of winter, God's light can be hard to experience. We long to know God's message and to unburden our hearts. We know that God calls us to repentance and offers us the light of Christ, and so we offer our silent confession at this time:

(a time of silent prayer)

Words of Assurance

God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, seeding each of us and all creation with the love of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Isaiah 9:1-5;

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

Matthew 4:12-17 Jesus Begins to Preach

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Meditation – “*The Cause of Darkness*”

It is a long-ago night in mid-December. I am young, probably about 5 or 6, and I had fallen asleep on the couch that we used to keep in the corner of the kitchen. There was a gentle nudge on my shoulder and the soft voice of my mom saying that she has something to show me. She led me through the gathering darkness into the living-room.

I soon discover why. The Christmas tree in the corner of the living-room is alight—quite literally. Dozens of tiny lights nestle in its boughs. The room dissolves into a place of wonder. I stare in awe. I have never seen anything like it before.

What causes the effect is not just the beauty of the tree. The effect comes from the backdrop of surrounding darkness.

Darkness. We all know what that is about. In Canada, in December, we all understand about darkness. And darkness is not necessarily a bad thing. Sometimes we welcome it. Sometimes it can mean for us rest, and sleep, and quietness.

But, often, darkness is not something we feel good about. Often, darkness makes us afraid. When I was ten years old, I had a job delivering the Ottawa Journal newspaper in the village of Golden Lake where I lived.

I remember pushing my bike up a long hill, on the outskirts of the village, far past the last street light, to the last house on my route. Far from home, I had started to make my way back, walking my bike as the falling snow has made the road a little too slippery to navigate. It is quickly becoming dark, and I still have a long way to go, especially on foot.

The darkness is not my friend. I'm afraid of it, I don't want to be pushing my bike alone in the blackness. I long to see the lights of my own front porch, and know that I've finally made it home.

Darkness. Sometimes we welcome it. Sometimes we think nothing of it. Then sometimes it swallows us up, and makes us afraid. Sometimes it hides fearful things. Sometimes it brings fearful things upon us.

And from the very beginning, darkness has been a symbol of the way things should *not* be.

Listen to the first words of the Bible: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep...* [Genesis 1:1-2]. It all began in darkness—but God never intended that it stay that way. Soon God would make light.

But darkness would continue as a symbol of the ways things should not be. The Psalms speak of the grave as “*the place of darkness*” [see Psalm 88:12], and hint at “*the pestilence that stalks in the darkness*” [Psalm 91:6].

The writer of Ecclesiastes says, “*I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness*” [Ecclesiastes 2:13].

But darkness, in the Bible, is more than just a symbol of things as they should not be. It is also a symbol of all those other things that are quite simply wrong—and it connects those evil things to the persons who do them. The Book of Proverbs says, “*The way of the wicked is like deep darkness.*” Elsewhere it says, “*If a man curses his father or mother, his lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness*” [Proverbs 20:20].

John’s Gospel says, “*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” [John 3:19].

Darkness is a symbol of all that is selfish, and hurtful, and oppressive. Darkness is a symbol of what the Bible calls *sin*. And we live in a sin-darkened world.

Strangely, this same sin-darkened world often claims to be enlightened. According to the wise people in today's society, the God of the Bible, the One who defines light and darkness, sin and righteousness, doesn't even exist. Right and wrong are actually just matters of personal opinion—and everyone's opinion is equally valid.

But the darkness does not disappear just because people no longer see it.

“Jesus bids us shine” is an old children's hymn that talks about light and darkness, and what you and I should do about it. Listen to verse three:

Many kinds of darkness in this world are found: sin, and want, and sorrow....

The hymn gives names to the darkness.

Those who deny the darkness exists need only look at the suffering that is inflicted upon others. Much of want, and much of sorrow, flow out from the choices people make or fail to make.

Of course, not all want, and not all sorrow, result from sin. Sometimes they are just part and parcel of living in a broken and imperfect world. Sometimes we can't account for where they come from. But often we can. Often the trail, if we follow it back, begins in selfish relationships, selfish decisions, hurtful actions. Why I read an article where in some states they still refuse to enact mandatory It begins with a rejection of all that God says is important, and true, and beautiful, to love your neighbour as yourself.

Only someone who is blind could deny the reality of sin. Only someone who is blind could deny the evidence of the darkness.

But there is good news: Someone has already come to do something about it. His name is Jesus, and his first long-ago followers—who also knew all about the darkness—called him the Light of the World. The Light of the World has come—and in less than two weeks, just past the darkest night of winter, we will celebrate his birth.

When Jesus came as the Light, he confronted the darkness head-on.

For those who were in want, he became the Healer, the Liberator, the Provider—and the one who both taught us and showed us how to help others in need. For those who were in sorrow, he became the Comforter, the Source of Hope, the Guarantor of blessings yet to come. But he did more than that. He began with the root problem of so much of the darkness around us. He began with the problem of *sin*—and he overcame it.

How did he do that? He first of all named sin for what it is: boldly, directly, even when doing so meant plots against his life. Sin is failing to love your neighbour, he told us. It's also failing to love your enemy. It's failing to be faithful to the person you are married to. It's not going the second mile, not turning the other cheek. It's offending a little child. It's hoarding your God given gifts instead of using it for the betterment of humankind. It's hiding your light instead of letting it shine. And especially, it's being a hypocrite and pretending to do all of those things when you really don't do any of them.

So Jesus named sin for what it was. Then, just in case we couldn't understand him or didn't believe him, he lived out the very things he was teaching. He did it when the authorities ordered him not to. He did it when he was arrested.

He did it when he died.

For two thousand years now, the symbol of the followers of Jesus has been the cross. The cross is the proof of Jesus' faithfulness: the one who named sin for what it is, and lived without sin in his own life, died because of sin—the sin of a world that would not have him.

The cross is also the stake driven into the centre of human history to mark the front lines of the battle against the darkness. And even though those who first stood at the foot of that cross thought that it meant Jesus had lost, he hadn't. In fact, he had won.

And the cross was how he did it.

You see, the real problem of the darkness is the fact that no one can claim to be free from it. The world cannot be divided into those who sin and those who don't. The reality is that the very best among us have fallen short. We have all shared in the darkness. We've been a part of it—you have, and I have. And even though we have seen in Jesus the way life should be lived, we haven't lived that way. And there's nothing we can do about it.

But the good news is, there's nothing we need to do. Jesus has already done it. When he died on the cross, in some way that we can never understand, he took our sins on himself, and when he died, he took them with him. So all the things we have ever done wrong—and all that we ever will do wrong—all that has been paid for. The account has been settled. We're set free—when we ask Jesus to forgive, and trust in him.

We're set free, to begin again.

Jesus' battle against the darkness begins with telling us the way, then showing us the way, then winning for us forgiveness so we can leave the past behind and walk in that way as children of the light.

We can leave the past behind—whatever we've done, however we've failed. We can leave it all behind, and start again. We can live as children of the light.

Even as we continue to stumble from time to time, this morning we can rest assured in Jesus' forgiveness.

In a moment we'll share the bread and the wine, and as we do so we will each have the opportunity to receive God's forgiveness, and the opportunity to begin again. Jesus came to overthrow the darkness. This is our opportunity to surrender to him whatever darkness is found in us, so that we can go free.

The prophet Isaiah wrote this about Jesus: *The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned* [Matthew 4:16].

It has happened. The One who is the Light has come, and the darkness will never be the same again. It will never be the same—especially in your heart, and mine. Thanks be to God.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Dedication of Offering

Generosity is cultivated by the practice of regular giving. We give in gratitude for God's gifts to us, and because we need to live beyond ourselves; making a difference in the world. Let us pray:

Gather the gifts of our hands and hearts, living Spirit.

Use these gifts to build not monuments to your distant glory,

but testaments to your intimate love. Amen.

Hymn “A Light Is Gleaming” Vs. 1 and 2

Refrain A light is gleaming, spreading its arms
 throughout the night, living in the light.
 Come share its gladness, God's radiant love
 is burning bright, living in the light.

- 1 When light comes pouring into the darkest place,
 it hurts our eyes to see the glow.
 Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,
 our memories and tears. R
- 2 When night is round us and every shadow grows,
 a star is there to light our way.
 It tells a story of Jesus who came near to say:
 'God's light will ever stay.' R

Sacrament of Holy Communion – See Insert

Hymn “A Light Is Gleaming” Vs. 3 and 4

- 3 And Jesus showed us a brighter path to walk.
 He showed us things we hadn't seen.
 Now we, like Jesus, can help creation shine,
 and this will be a sign: R
- 4 So let us live in the brightness God has giv'n,
 and let us rise to see the dawn.
 We trust that God is here asparkle and ablaze,
 - warming all our days. R

Commissioning and Benediction

Let us go now in peace and with confidence; may God bless you with a holy peace and gift you with open hearts to give and to receive blessing. Go in peace from this place to love and serve the Lord.

Postlude

.....
December bulletins are sponsored by:

Church Office # 613-582-7174 Kevin (cell) ~ 613 585-0132
Office Secretary Betty Black pcsecretary@nrtco.net home # 613-646-2120
CD of Sunday's Service available—contact Jean at 613-582-3597.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We will be holding our regular Christmas Eve services in person. Due to current COVID restrictions on how many people we can have in our church space we will need to get an approximate idea on how many will be attending. Please indicate if you are planning to attend and how many from your “bubble” will also be attending To register please contact:

For Trinity: Contact Faye Mick-Johnston: phone or text 613-646-2777 or by email: fayemj777@hotmail.com

St. Andrews: Contact Audrey Cormack: phone or text @ 613-585-3498 or by email: a.cormack@nrtco.net

Service Times

December 13th and 20th - Trinity @ 9:30 a.m., St. Andrew's @ 11

Dec. 24th ~ St. Andrew's @ 6:30 p.m. Trinity @ 8:00 p.m.,

Dec. 27th and Jan 3rd ~ there will be no service at either church. Church will resume on January 10th at the following times:
St. Andrew's @ 9:30 pm. And Trinity ~ @ 11:00 a.m.,

Prayer List: Let us keep the following people in our prayers for healing at this time.

Elaine Hawthorne, Paige Atherton, Ezma Weedmark, Rob Marson, Murray Anderson, Bernie Lemke, Audrey Gutz, Lorna Stevenson, Ruby Bell, Freda Kinnear, Mervin Kinnear, Elaine Moore, Lola Byce, Bill Douma, Keith Johnson, Nora Bennett,
Please contact me if there is someone that you would like to add to our list for special prayers or you feel is in need of

a pastoral care visit. I would request that you please ask the person's permission before submitting their name to be put in the bulletin. *Rev. Kevin*