

BEACHBURG PASTORAL CHARGE

Worship Service

June 27th, 2021

Welcome

Welcome to today's service. I am so excited for this coming week when on Wednesday we are afforded a little more freedom to get together with friends and family and for some of you, you may even have an appointment to pamper yourself with that long-awaited pedicure or haircut.

But on a week where we would normally celebrate Canada Day this year may be a little more subdued on account of the 751 unmarked graves at the Marieval Indian residential school in Saskatchewan.

I have had a number of you ask on what we, as the United Church, are doing or will be doing in response. The General Council office have informed us the Indigenous Ministries and Justice staff is currently reaching out to the communities affected by the 15 schools that the United Church operated to ensure that our denomination's response is firmly grounded in the principles of right relationship that we seek to live. This is ongoing work that will require our support and participation.

This is a time for The United Church of Canada to listen rather than prescribe. The pain in Indigenous communities and churches is immense. So let us to continue to hold Indigenous members of the United Church and their families and communities in prayers, as we light this candle in memory of those whose voices were silenced.

During the month of June and particularly National Aboriginal day that was celebrated this past Monday where we commemorated the history, heritage and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada, I begin today's service with a prayer to the Great Spirit dating from the late 19 century attributed to a member of the Algonquin nation known to us as Big Thunder (Bedagi)

Big Thunder (Bedagi), late 19th century Algonquin 1

"The Great Spirit is in all things, is in the air we breathe. The Great Spirit is our Father, but the Earth is our Mother. She nourishes us; that which we put into the

1 "Earth Prayers for The Great Spirit." *Welcome to Indigenous Peoples Literature*. Web. 14 June 2011.
<<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/greatspi.htm>>.

ground, She returns to us...."

Give us hearts to understand;

Never to take from creation's beauty more than we give;

never to destroy wantonly for the furtherance of greed;

Never to deny to give our hands for the building of earth's beauty;

never to take from her what we cannot use.

Give us hearts to understand

That to destroy earth's music is to create confusion;

that to wreck her appearance is to blind us to beauty;

That to callously pollute her fragrance is to make a house of stench;

that as we care for her, she will care for us.

We have forgotten who we are.

We have sought only our own security.

We have exploited simply for our own ends.

We have distorted our knowledge.

We have abused our power.

Great Spirit, whose dry lands thirst,

Help us to find the way to refresh your lands.

Great Spirit, whose waters are choked with debris and pollution,

help us to find the way to cleanse your waters.

Great Spirit, whose beautiful earth grows ugly with misuse,

help us to find the way to restore beauty to your handiwork.

Great Spirit, whose creatures are being destroyed,

help us to find a way to replenish them.

Great Spirit, whose gifts to us are being lost in selfishness and corruption,

help us to find the way to restore our humanity.

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,

whose breath gives life to the world, hear me;

I need your strength and wisdom. May I walk in Beauty.

Song. I was was hoping to video today in the beaty of nature but the rain has kept me in doors so Our opening song seems appropriate to start off this rainy week coming up with the old time favourite "Showers of Blessing" recorded by the band of Heather, Barry, Jean, Jim and Ruby.

Thank you band. I know that each of you and us are looking forward to letting our voices ring out as we get ever closer to gathering together once again

Scripture

Isaiah 61: 1-4 The Year of the Lord's Favour

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

Luke 8: 40-56 Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

⁴⁰ Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. ⁴¹ Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come to his house ⁴² because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.

⁴³ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. ⁴⁴ She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

⁴⁵ "Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you."

⁴⁶ But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me."

⁴⁷ Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

⁴⁹ While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher anymore."

⁵⁰ Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”

⁵¹ When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.”

⁵³ They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶ Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Meditation Where Two Stories Meet

Perhaps it was a day just like today when Jairus’ wife ran to the door to meet him and tell him the good news.

Although I think there was probably sunshine, and certainly gladness in the air, when she threw her arms around him and told him they were going to have their first child. The sadness of not having children would soon be over. Perhaps this child would be a son, to follow in his father’s footsteps as a leader in the synagogue. Perhaps it would be a daughter who would help her mother around the house, a girl with her mother’s ready smile and dancing eyes. Either possibility was exciting. Now, their home would really be a home. They began to count the days, and they began to dream.

That same year, on the other side of the village, another story was about to begin. In that story, however, a woman was about to step into her own private nightmare. It would become a sad and

tragic story, one that would seem to have no end. This woman discovered she had a problem that would not go away: haemorrhaging—bleeding—and it would not stop. Perhaps in a few days, she thought. Perhaps next month it would end, and then she would be all right. Perhaps some little thing was the matter that would right itself in the natural cycle of things. But the bleeding continued. The woman began to despair.

But for Jairus and his wife, this was a special time. Each week that passed brought them closer to the moment when they would become parents. Their good news was now no secret: they had told the whole world. Their joy was bubbling over.

“It’s a girl!” The midwife was calling out to anyone who would listen. They were delighted. Their oldest child would be a daughter. Yes, she already had her mother’s eyes.

The neighbours called. There were celebrations. Jairus passed on the news even at the synagogue, after the service. And in the service itself, after he had read the Scriptures as he always did, and taught from them, he had led in prayer to thank God for his love and all his blessings, and especially to thank him for a beautiful daughter.

But there was no joy for the woman with the haemorrhage. It had gone on for almost a year, now, without getting any better. The worst part was not the bleeding itself, but, rather, what the Law of Moses said about a woman in her condition. The Law said

that she was “unclean” until the bleeding stopped. So no one was allowed to touch her. Even her husband could not touch her. If she were to sit down somewhere, the place where she sat would become unclean, according to the Law, and no one could sit there after her. She had become a social outcast. She was untouchable.

Of course, she had not told people about her condition. Still, the word had gone around. The older people pitied her. The children made fun of her. The brightest sunshine brought no sunshine to her spirit. She was ill, and painfully alone.

But, she said to herself when it all began, there had to be someone who could help. Somewhere there had to be a doctor who would know what to do. Somewhere there had to be a cure.

And she was not poor. She had money. There had to be an answer, if she had the money to pay for it. Of course, there would be an answer, a cure. She would find it. She would search out the best doctors in the country. They would help her. Of course, they would.

She found doctors. Doctors who told her they understood her condition perfectly. Doctors who promised to help. Doctors who took her money eagerly. But the promises were for nought. The “cures” did not help. The illness worsened.

The years passed. Jairus’ little daughter was growing up. In no time at all she had gone from crawling across the rough dirt floor to pulling herself up and stumbling off on two legs, following her

mother around the house. Then there were the dolls made of sticks and rags, the hide-and-seek games along the back alleys, the races with the other children to the village square and back. The baby was now a girl—very much a girl—with her mother's smile, and—yes—her mother's dancing eyes.

Jairus and his wife were proud of her, and happy. They might have been perfectly happy, except for one thing: Their daughter had no brothers or sisters. No other children were born to them. As the years passed, they slowly realized that no others ever would be. Their little girl was to be their only child. But that thought only made them love her more.

The years passed also for the woman with the haemorrhage. Her sense of isolation deepened. Her family kept away from her. Her friends stayed their distance. And, she wanted to know, where was God in all of this? Where, indeed? The Law of Moses said that a woman in her condition, because she was “unclean,” could not enter the Temple or take part in any public religious ceremony. She could not even attend the synagogue to hear the Scriptures read and taught. She was totally, completely, alone.

Somewhere, there had to be a doctor who could cure her. There had to be. The years dragged on. Every now and again she would hear of another one, and would journey in hope to see him, praying that this would be the end of her suffering. Yes, they would take her money. Yes, they would offer her their cures. But nothing ever

changed. Nothing, ever.

Now Jairus' daughter was starting to look grown-up. She wasn't a little girl any more. She was twelve years old. Sometimes now Jairus would look out and see her talking with boys in front of the house. He could understand that: It was her mother's smile, and her mother's dancing eyes. He and his wife were proud of her. And they were happy. God had been good to them. They knew they had a lot to be thankful for.

But the woman with the haemorrhage had come to the point of despair. She had been suffering for twelve years. Her life had been a nightmare. She had been an attractive young woman when it had all begun. Now she looked old beyond her years, broken, defeated. She had lost all hope. She had given up. There was nothing left to live for. Her money was now gone, like her beauty, her youth, her friends, her family. Even her faith was gone—almost. Had God helped her? Had he answered her prayers? How could God love her and let this happen? Twelve years: Did that not prove that it was hopeless? Did that not prove that God did not love her? Did it not?

Then, one last rumour of hope. She would not believe it, at first. She knew about doctors, and wonder cures, and all. There was no one who could help her—she had learned that. She had gone to them all, to every one. To every one, except—to Jesus of Nazareth. No, she had never gone to him. But what could he do for her that

the others had not already done? What could he possibly do?

But there was this rumour.... People were saying that he could heal—with a word, a touch—blind people, deaf people, lame people.... Crazy people, even. Could it be? The thought would not leave her.

Now, there is a crowd passing her door. They are going to meet him. Will she go?

It is the first time in months that she has stepped outside. She is caressed by the warmth of the sunshine. In a moment she has disappeared into the surging the crowd.

“Jairus! You have to do something! Jairus! I think she’s dying! Oh, God, help us!”

Jairus’ daughter is sick—desperately sick. Something has come upon her suddenly, unexpectedly. Yesterday she was running in the street with her friends. Today she is listless on her bed, her body aflame with a fever. She is muttering nonsense, staring dull-eyed at the ceiling. The smile is gone. Her strength is gone. She is finding it hard to breathe. She must strain for every breath. She is slipping into a coma. Her life is draining away, like water poured out on the hot desert sand. She is dying.

The word is already out. Neighbours drift over in twos and threes to offer sympathy. Professional mourners, who cry and

weep for you—for a price—are there, too, just waiting. She is twelve years old—still a child—and she is dying. There is nothing to be done.

“Jairus! Do something!” Her mother is panicking. “Jairus! That teacher that is in town. I heard that he can heal people. Find him. Find him before it’s too late! Maybe he can do something. Run! She’s almost gone!”

Jesus is out in the street, walking slowly, not paying much attention to the sea of faces around him. Then one catches his attention. A man is pushing through the others, ignoring them, sobbing, trying to get as close as he can. He falls to his knees, begging for help. Jesus has to come with him. He has to. He has to come at once. The man pleads his case: His daughter is dying. His only daughter. His beautiful twelve-year-old daughter. The joy of his life—she is dying! Please, if Jesus will only come, he can surely save her! Please, please, please!

Jesus’ eyes meet the eyes of Jairus. Jesus smiles. Yes, he will come. Of course, he will come. Yes, he will help. Of course, he will. He has never turned anyone away. Not once.

The crowd is now more excited than ever. They are pushing and shoving, anxious to see what will happen. Then, unexpectedly, Jesus stops. They are confused. Jairus looks more upset. No one knows what is happening.

“Someone touched me!” says Jesus. “Who was it?”

The two stories have just come together. Twelve years of happiness has just collapsed for Jairus, and in despair he has sought out Jesus' help. Twelve years of agony has also brought the woman to despair, and she, too, is now reaching out to him. The two stories could not be more different. The people involved could not be more different. But in their deepest need they have both come, in the same moment, to the same Jesus, to ask for help.

They will not be disappointed.

You see, it does not matter who you are. It does not matter where you are coming from. It does not matter what has happened in the past. What matters is who you come to.

When you come to Jesus, you are coming to the only one who can undo the past, and put the broken pieces back together. When you come to Jesus, you are coming to the Lord of all creation, and the one who loves you. When you come to Jesus and ask him to help you, you are coming to the one who most certainly will.

“Who touched me?” Jesus is waiting for an answer. There is his answer—the frightened little woman who has thrown herself at his feet. She already knows what has happened. She knows that she was healed the moment she touched the hem of his garment. She felt it happen. Now she does not want to be the centre of attention. She wants to slip away, unnoticed.

But Jesus will not let her. He wants the crowd to know what has happened. He wants the crowd to know that this woman who was

once unclean is not unclean any more. He wants her to be able to hold her head high; to be able to go home, to the synagogue, to the Temple, and not be considered unclean by anyone. So the story must be told. And it is. The final word is one of gentle blessing: "My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

"Jairus, your daughter has died. Don't bother the Teacher any more." A messenger has just come from Jairus' house. The girl must have died as Jairus was running down the road. Now, of course, it is too late. Or is it?

"Don't be afraid." Jesus speaks first, before Jairus has a chance to be overcome with grief. "Don't be afraid; only believe, and she will be well." That will be the end of the story. The Lord of all creation has spoken.

The mourners are already surrounding the house, crying and wailing. Jesus tells them there is nothing to be sad about. They laugh at him. Still, they would gladly follow him inside to see what will happen. But he will not let them. Three disciples, and the girl's parents, will be the only witnesses.

There she is, on her bed. She is dead. But Jesus calls it "sleep," because he is the Lord. He takes her hand, and speaks the words that her mother might speak to her in the morning: "Get up, my child!"

She takes a breath—long, deep, full. She opens her eyes. They are dancing and beautiful, just as they always were. She smiles,

stands up, throws her arms around her parents. "Give her something to eat," says Jesus.

She will need it. She has a long life ahead of her. "Don't tell anyone what has happened," Jesus adds, as he steps out the door. He is gone.

I don't pretend to know the rest of the story—no one does—but sometimes I wonder. Sometimes I imagine what the end might be.

I imagine, for example, the following Sabbath in the synagogue, when Jairus stands up to read the Scriptures, as he always does. When he chooses a passage to read, I wonder if he reads that passage from the prophet Isaiah, the one that looks forward to the coming of Jesus: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" [Isaiah 61: 1,2]. I wonder if he might read that passage.

And who is that woman in the centre of the back row of the synagogue? Could it be the woman who was healed from the haemorrhage? Do you suppose she has come to thank God for what Jesus has done for her?

Yes, I believe that it is her. What do you think? Thanks be to God.

Our pastoral prayers today goes out to the Stevenson family especially Mark and Lisa on the passing of their mom Lorna a long-time member of our church family here at St Andrew's.

Lorna was a woman of deep faith so I would like to end today's service with a poem by Madeleine L'Engle based on the experience of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment. I think it speaks of what it might mean for us to be open to the touch of the Holy Spirit:

I saw him ahead of me in the crowd
and there was something in his glance
and in the way his hand rested briefly
on the matted head of a small boy
who was getting in everyone's way,
and I knew that if only I could get to him,
not to bother him, you understand,
not to interrupt, or to ask him for anything,
not even his attention,
just to get to him and touch him ...

I didn't think he'd mind, and he needn't even know.
I pushed through the crowd
and it seemed that they were deliberately
trying to keep me from him.

I stumbled and fell and someone stepped on my hand
and I cried out....and nobody heard.

I crawled to my feet and pushed on
and at last I was close,
so close that I could reach out
and touch with my fingers
the hem of his garment.

Have you ever been near
when lightening struck?

I was once, when I was very small
and a summer storm came without warning
and lightening split the tree
under which I was playing
and I was flung right across the courtyard.

That's how it was.

Only this time I was not the child
but the tree

and the lightening filled me.

He asked, Who touched me?
and people dragged me away, roughly,
and the men around him were angry at me.

Who touched me? he asked.

I said, "I did, Lord,"
so that he might have the lightening back

which I had taken from him when I touched
his garment's hem.

He looked at me and I knew then
that only he and I knew about the lightening.
He was tired and emptied
but he was not angry.

He looked at me
and the lightening returned to him again,
though not from me, and he smiled at me
and I knew that I was healed.

Then the crowd came between us
and he moved on, taking the lightening with him,
perhaps to strike again.

I leave you with a song entitled "Touch the Hem" written by
William McDowell and song by Trinity Anderson.

(<https://youtu.be/ebXwUCyhpWk>)

Have a Blessed week, until we meet again.