

Prelude: "Holy, Holy, Holy" [Annie Schulz]

Gathering Thoughts: [Doug Schulz]

As the month of May comes to a close, we welcome listeners and readers to this Grace Mennonite Church worship service and trust that our experience in worship and reflection on Scriptures will be a source of comfort and peace and an encouragement toward faithful compassionate living. Last week we acknowledged the experience of the earliest followers of Jesus as they received the Spirit he had promised them at Pentecost. Thus began the motivated work of Christians - Christ-ones – to live with God’s abiding and empowering Presence in the world for the sake of the kin-dom Jesus had proclaimed. That is our life-reality and life-work today.

This week’s worship celebrates Trinity Sunday. Our music and prayers will honour the truth that God’s Presence is experienced in a rich weave of expressions and connections. God is our powerful but perfectly loving Parent, and God’s nature is best reflected in the life and teaching of Jesus with whom we can identify through his life actions and teachings. And the ability to live faithful to Jesus and his way of being and doing in the world is made possible by the Holy Spirit, as I have already said, who fills our hearts and minds with vision and compassion for God’s kin-dom.

With these things in mind, we approach our worship time today. We thank our musicians and technicians for their faithful service. Today, David Brubacher will offer a reflection to introduce our new theme of the next several months: “Growing in God: Abiding”. In our world today, there are ‘storms’ raging in politics within and among nations, and much turmoil being faced by people – for some of us in this congregation, very immediate and difficult trials are upon us. Dave will lead us into reflecting on how we can abide in God’s peace as demonstrated to us in Jesus and made real by the work of the Spirit within us.

Our brief Call to Worship and later our Psalm will be read by Annie and me in chorus style. The Call to Worship is written by Roddy Hamilton.

Call to Worship: [Annie & Doug]

Annie: Let us shape a space for The Three:

Doug: the Spirit as breath of life

Annie: the Bread as food of heaven

Doug: the Love in relationship

Annie: Let us shape a space

Doug: that tangles all three

Annie: through our life and our worship

Doug: held in relationship and met here

Annie: Let us shape a space
Doug: for the many faces of God
Annie: woven together
Doug: and revealed in each of us

Annie: On this Trinity Sunday
Let us shape a space
Doug: to be found together
in worship

Prayer: [adapted from blogsite, “The Minor Keys”]

[Doug]

O, God, the words you speak
are the life and sustenance
of all that exists.

The life Jesus gives
is the re-creation and renewed birth
of all that is broken and worn.

The Spirit’s stirring in our souls
is the inspiration
for creativity, compassion, joy, and community.

Life-giving, life-restoring, life-fulfilling God;
may our whole lives be worship.
In all things, may we seek to connect with
and to reflect your love and your hope. Amen

Scripture:

Psalm 29

[Annie & Doug]

[Annie] 1 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy splendor.

[Doug] 3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord, over mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

[Annie] 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

[Doug] 7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness.
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
9 The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

[Annie] 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
11 May the Lord give strength to his people!
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Hymn: "O Worship Our God" [Voices Together #129]

*O worship our God in the beauty of holiness,
in the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.*

*Maker of the starlight beyond us, within us,
from silence, holy wonder, you birth creation's chorus,
oh, glory hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah,
with joy we come before you and glorify your name.*

*O worship our God in the beauty of holiness,
in the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.*

*Jesus, born of Mary, before us, beside us,
your humble love victorious has brought a great salvation,
oh, glory hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah,
with joy we come before you and glorify your name.*

*O worship our God in the beauty of holiness,
in the beauty of holiness, in the beauty of holiness.*

*Spirit, ever moving, around us, among us,
breathe mercy, flame with justice, making new your whole creation,
oh, glory hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah,
with joy we come before you and glorify your name.*

Prayers of the People: [Beth Woelk]

For our Prayers of the People today I invite you to join me in a prayer that contains echoes of St. Patrick's breastplate. The opening line of St. Patrick's famous prayer "*I bind myself today to the strong name of the Trinity...*" felt fitting and I hope brings a sense of comfort and belonging this Trinity Sunday. Let us lift our hearts together.

We bind ourselves, O God, today, to the strong name of the Trinity. And we name you: Three in One, One in Three; and claim our place in your community of love.

We are embraced, loving God,
embraced in the community that is the heart not just of our church,
but also in the community that is the very heart of who you are:

Three in One;
Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of life.
Within that great love, we are held and treasured.

And we know, as we pray, you have heard us before the words cross our lips. You ever and always hear our prayers. Hear our prayers this morning.

We pray for our hurting world. That war-makers will find peace. That the hungry will find food. That refugees will find shelter. That injustice will be answered with all that is right and good.

We pray for all who suffer. For those we love dearly. For those we barely know. For those whose suffering we have ignored. Be present in the healing touch of all hands that help the sick and suffering. And send your Spirit to comfort and protect all who need you.

We pray for all who struggle. For those who cannot see a way through broken relationships, difficult financial realities, emotional darkness, and deep, deep loneliness. May they find you even in the most hopeless places. And may we too be found in those places, bringing good news and hope to all who are longing for something new.

We pray for all who are joyful. We rejoice at the promise of new life evident all around us in the natural world – in our garden boxes, in nests of singing birds and in lawns that need mowing.

We celebrate our movement through milestones: births, graduations; new jobs; new relationships; the promise of something wonderful. We look back on the moments of blessing in our own lives and give you thanks for the opportunity to live lives that are full, rich and meaningful and for the opportunity to use our lives to reflect your vibrant love.

We bind ourselves, O God, today, to the strong name of the Trinity.
And we name you: Three in One, One in Three; and claim our place in your community of love.

Be with us, within us, behind us, before us.
May we be your comfort, your restoration, and your peace and wholeness in the world. Amen.

Hymn:

“Our Father”

[Lee Russell]

*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.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
for Thine is the kingdom and power and the glory forever and ever, Amen.*

Scripture:

John 3:1-17

[David Brubacher]

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” 9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Reflection:**“Abiding in Hope”****[David Brubacher]**

Spring and summer are primary growing seasons. Most of us have likely already done our planting. As usual, I am a little behind, but ahead than last year. A few days before I started to write this sermon, I planted some pole beans. They were seeds left over from last year and because we liked them, I decided to try them again, hoping they would grow.

As I held the seeds in my hand, I marveled at how perfect they appeared. I realized I was asking them to lose their perfect beauty, to die, and eventually sprout to provide food to eat. After planting the seeds, I built a framework for them to climb on, and of course, put up some fencing to keep the rabbits out. Then I watered my efforts and contented myself to wait. As of now there are some fledgling bean plants. But I wait and abide in hope.

Our worship from now until Advent, moves into the Christian season known as the Season after Pentecost, or Ordinary time. Seeing this time spans the primary growing and harvesting seasons, the Preaching Team decided to focus on the general theme, *Growing in God*. Just as there are phases in the growing season, there are also phases in our growing in God.

For the first part of the season, we are focusing on “abiding” as an early step for growing in God. Abiding is not a common word today. So, I went to the dictionary which offers words like enduring, persisting and remaining, as synonyms. The biblical image that comes to mind is Jesus’ words in John 15:4, ***“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.”*** These words became real to me several years ago when our neighbour cut the roots of a wild grape vine to replace the fence. Within hours the leaves started to wither and the vine died.

We begin this season of Ordinary Time, suggesting that a foundational step to growing in God is being connected to God and nurturing that connection. The growth process will require some waiting, some further trusting in God’s spirit to lead, and there will quite likely be some unexpected twists and turns. Its in the twists and turns that our abiding, staying connected to God, is essential. And of course, that is exactly what we do as we gather for worship as Grace, even though at a distance for now. The scriptures for today offer valuable insights for our ongoing abiding and growing in God.

Join me to pray. *In our worship this morning, O God, we have already been touched by your presence in song, reflection, and the reading of your word. As we gather around your word, make us mindful of the Holy Spirit here among us so that we might hear beyond my words, the words you have for us today. Speak to us now from the well of your grace that sustains us in the twists and turns of life. Amen.*

In the twists and turns of life, storms occur. Over the last year and some months, we have been weathering the storm known as COVID. Some of us have also been dealing with individual health issues, along with other concerns in life. Storms, in whatever form we experience them, are a part of life. There are storms, and there is weathering the storms as God gives strength. For many, prayer is the go-to resource for weathering life's storms. Over the last year I have heard countless testimonies from members of Grace to just that fact. After all, we are a community of faith.

Today is also Trinity Sunday, a day when we celebrate the One God, we know in three ways: Father-Creator; Saviour-Redeemer; Holy Spirit-Sustainer. This year, I have been reflecting on the Trinity through the eyes of my yearlong journey with the pandemic. I remember that God is the creator of all things and that God declared creation to be "good," indeed, "very good." I remember that Jesus is the redeemer who longs to restore that which is not good. I remember that the Holy Spirit is God's presence all around us enabling us to see things through the eyes of God's love for us. These three come together to create a triangle we know as the Trinity, providing security and strength in the realities of life.

In the scriptures read today, "storm" is a common image. The writer of Psalm 29 appears as a modern-day storm chaser describing a storm to talk about the presence and power of God. For Nicodemus, there was a spiritual or emotional storm raging within him as he snuck out to see Jesus in the middle of the night.

I envision the psalmist sitting on a hilltop overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. From there he sees storm winds swirling, gathering speed, and eventually crashing on the shores of Palestine before heading inland. There is thunder, trees break, and lightning sets fire. There is a clear and obvious power present in the storm.

In the poetic style of literature, it is clear this is not a weather report. The phrase, "**The voice of the Lord,**" used seven times, with seven being the number of perfection in Hebrew thought, identifies the Psalm as theology, describing the power and sovereign rule of God present even in the storms of life.

There was another storm brewing at the time. The Old Testament people were continually gripped with the temptation to worship the gods of the people among whom they had come to live. Baal was a predominant god, seen as the cloud rider, the lord of the storm, the one who brought rain to make the crops grow. Learning to worship only one God did not come easily for God's people, chosen as they were. They were steeped in the mindset that one worshipped many gods for fear of offending one that might have the power to bring evil or storms in life. In a time when people's lives literally depended on the rains to produce the food they needed, one can see the temptation to worship Baal. There were no foodbanks in those days.

The psalmist uses poetry to make the case that Yahweh God is the ultimate power in all creation. It is this God who sits enthroned over the flood and reigns as

king forever. It is in this God; they will find strength for the day and ultimately the peace they are tempted to seek in worshipping Baal.

But as we all know, it is difficult to find one's way through a storm when there are competing voices. During this pandemic there are those who would have us believe it is all a hoax. One only need talk to our daughters who work in hospitals to hear another story. Or receive a phone call, like I did recently, informing me that one of my closest teenage buddies had just died of Covid. We are grateful for signs that the Covid cases are declining again. Hope is on the horizon. But for now, we continue to abide in the arms of God's grace. We Abide in Hope.

While the situation was quite different, I imagine these were some of the same emotional dynamics that were brewing for Nicodemus that night he came to see Jesus. There were those who saw Jesus as the long-promised Messiah come to save the people of God. Others saw him as a troublemaker upsetting the uneasy peace and security that existed under the Roman Empire. Nicodemus was a person in a position of authority among the Jewish people, so he had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo that Jesus spoke against. But there was also something compelling about Jesus and his teaching that made him want to hear more. That night he decided to risk it and went to see Jesus.

We know this text well, largely for two often quoted references. The first, as it appears in other translations, are Jesus' words, ***"You must be born again."*** Second, is the verse, ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."*** Lately I have considered the need to understand these words through a new set of Spirit inspired lenses.

For some, ***"You must be born again,"*** forms a code that identifies those in the circle of God's chosen. But some of these same people turn and commit all manner of violence against those seen as the enemy of God. We need eyes of the Spirit to understand the way of Jesus.

That is why I much prefer the translation as read today, ***"No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."*** In this I hear that the way of God's peace in the world is not of human determination but comes in learning to see things through the eyes of God. That is no easy task. It was difficult for the people of the Old Testament to understand there was only one sovereign God. It was difficult for Nicodemus to understand that Jesus came to offer a different type of salvation than he had expected. I wonder, if like the people in our scriptures today, God might not also be inviting us to see things through spirit enabled eyes.

Many of us are asking, "When will the pandemic be over? When will things return to normal?" These questions reflect my yearnings. But I also live with an awareness that things might not return exactly as they were earlier. We will find ourselves in an

in between time. The past will be no more, and the future will be unclear. Some writers describe this as liminal time. It's a time when nothing is certain other than the promise that God is here with us. It is time of learning to simply "be" in the presence of God who created us, to rest in the peace of Jesus who redeems us and to trust in the power of Holy Spirit who sustains us. Within the security of the triune presence of God we Abide in Hope.

In conclusion I offer some insights by a student from Zimbabwe, Africa currently studying in Canada. The piece was posted on a Mennonite World Conference publication under the title, "*Five lessons from the pandemic.*" I was immediately struck by a different way of seeing things than that of many in the western world. I heard a way of resting more profoundly in God, a way of abiding in God so that we might have hope.

After I offer the five points, the musicians will sing, "*Spirit divine, attend our prayers.*"

Lessons from the pandemic

Cherish your loved ones and always tell them how much they mean to you.

Trust in the Lord

Accept God's divine will.

Self-sufficiency is a myth.

Human connection and interaction are of utmost importance.

Amen. We continue to abide in hope!

Hymn of Response: "Spirit Divine, Attend Our Prayers" [Voices United #385]

*Spirit divine, attend our prayers, and make this house your home;
descend with all your gracious powers: O come, great Spirit, come!*

*Come as the light: to us reveal our emptiness and woe;
and lead us in those paths of life where all the righteous go.*

*Come as the wind: sweep clean away what dead within us lies,
and search and freshen all our souls with living energies.*

*Spirit divine, attend our prayers: make a lost world your home;
Descend with all your gracious powers: O come, great Spirit, come!*

Benediction:

[Doug Schulz]

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Sending Hymn: “May the Face of God Shine on You”

[VT #844]

*May the face of God shine on you.
May the face of God shine on you,
with the words of promise whispered in your ear.
May the face of God shine on you.*

*May the peace of Jesus steady you.
May the peace of Jesus steady you
when the world is shaking and challenges come.
May the peace of Jesus steady you.*

*May the joy of the Spirit carry you.
May the joy of the Spirit carry you.
May the laughter pour washing over ev'ry day.
May the joy of the Spirit carry you.*