

Sermon November 3rd, 2024

We Grieve! We Hope!

As we commemorate All Saints Day...

on this Sunday morning,

we grieve the death of Christians,

of believers,

who came before us.

For Jesus our teacher,

our saviour...

who suffered crucifixion...

for proclaiming the gospel,

challenging the authorities,

and revealing the kingdom of God...

to the vulnerable peoples...

in his community.

For the early believers...

who faced persecution and death...

for carrying forward Jesus' teachings.

For the many saints...

that faced suffering and death...

over the centuries...

for attempting to reform their communities.

For our family members...

who have passed away...

who mentored us in the faith.

The reason many of us are here today.

For our Redeemer family members...

who have passed away...

who brought so much life and joy...

to our congregation.

Most recently, Leigh and Bob,

but many others over the years...

who now sit with us only in memory.

We grieve the loss,

the pain of death.

We grieve the injustice of death.

We grieve the cost...

that comes with bearing our crosses...

for the sake of the gospel.

We grieve for the many saints...

that have suffered and died,

because of their courage...

to proclaim the gospel...

when their communities struggled...

to listen to it.

In our gospel this morning,

we see that Jesus too grieves...

when we experience death.

Jesus too is angered...

by the pain and injustice of death.

When Jesus sees...

how overwhelming death is...

to Martha, Mary, and her companions,

Jesus can no longer hold back the tears.

Jesus weeps.

Jesus weeps with Mary,

with her companions,

with Martha,

with all of us...

as we grieve.

Jesus weeps.

The Son of God weeps with us.

As we commemorate All Saints Day...

on this Sunday morning,

we grieve,

and we also remember...

and celebrate our ancestors.

Those who lived out their faith...

with dedication and love.

Those who set the example...

for us to follow.

Those who motivated us...

to dedicate our lives to the church,

to Jesus' teachings.

From Paul, Peter, Mary Magdalene, Priscilla,

Lydia, Phoebe, John, James,

to the Reformers,

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Melanchthon.

From our devoted grandparent or parent...

or aunty or uncle...

or friend...

to Leigh, Bob,

and many others...

who touched our lives...

with their dedication and faithful love...

for our church.

We remember and give thanks...

for their example.

As we commemorate All Saints Day...

on this Sunday morning,

we grieve, remember, celebrate,

and find hope in the Word of God...

that reassures us...

that the pain and injustice of death...

will not have the final say in our lives.

That there will be a day...

when we will weep no more.

Where God will dry every tear from our eyes.

Where death will be no more.

Where division will be no more.

Where life will be everlasting.

Where all people will come together...

at the table...

to join in the great feast of celebration.

Isaiah, as the people are suffering in exile,

grieving the many losses...

they have experienced,

prophesies this vision...

as stated above...

to give the people hope...

amid their grief.

To reassure them...

that God will wipe away every tear...

from their faces.

That they will reunite with all those...

they have been separated from.

That they will return from exile.

Death will not have the final say in their lives,

in their community.

John, as the early believers...

are suffering persecution and death...

for proclaiming the good news,

as he himself is imprisoned on an island,

shares this vision as stated above...

to give the battered and bruised...

Christian community hope...

that God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

That death will be no more.

That grief will be no more.

That God will come and dwell among them.

That a new creation,

new life is born.

Jesus, as Martha and Mary are grieving...

the death of their brother Lazarus,

is so moved by his anger...

towards the pain and injustice of death,

that he acts on their behalf.

Jesus intercedes...

and raises Lazarus from the dead.

Reassuring us...

that even in death...

we will be given new life.

This is the hope we carry with us...

whenever we grieve the death...

of a beloved child of God.

That Lazarus' death...

doesn't have the last say.

Jesus does,

and what Jesus says to us,

is that we will not perish...

but have eternal life.

All our loved ones...

who have gone before us,

who sit with us now...

only in memory,

are dwelling with Christ...

in God's heavenly kingdom.

Their tears have been wiped away.

They are suffering no more.

God is dwelling among them.

They are sitting at the table...

enjoying the great feast of celebration.

And when our day comes,

we will reunite with them.

But until this day comes,

we carry the hope of the resurrection,

of new life,

with us...

when we are trying to live out our calling...

as the church in this broken grieving world.

We cling to the belief...

that through the Holy Spirit...

we are empowered as Christ's hands and feet...

to reveal to people...

where God's kingdom is at work in the here and now,

in this world.

To reveal where God is wiping away our tears.

To reveal where God is healing us from our grieving pain.

To reveal where God is uniting us.

To reveal where God is present among us.

To reveal where God is breathing new life into us.

To reveal where we are living out our identity...

as God's saints. **Amen.**

Sermon November 10th, 2024

Remembrance and Peace!

Many of us across the country...

will gather tomorrow...

to remember those...

who have lost their lives...

or their livelihood...

through physical and/or mental wounds...

from participating in wars...

past and present.

We will grieve our inability...

to get a long with each other,

our inability to appreciate our diversity...

and work towards common ground.

We will grieve the many acts of violence,

hostility,

and even complacency...

that arise from our inability...

to get along with each other.

And as much as Remembrance Day...

can become a glorification of the victors,

and a shaming of the losers of war.

Deep within our hearts...

we know that there are no winners in war.

We all lose a part of ourselves...

when we find ourselves...

in a time of war.

The intergenerational trauma...

that still impacts us...

from the Two World Wars...

of the twentieth century...

is proof of this.

Then there are many of us...

who share a rich diversity of ancestry,

finding ourselves...

having one foot on one side of the war,

and the other foot...

on the other side of the war.

My ancestry is British and German.

In the Second World War...

my great grandfather on my mother's side...

fought in the British Royal Airforce.

While my grandfather on my father's side...

spent his time on the Bismark...

fighting for the German Navy.

Well, until the Bismark sank.

Then he spent the remainder of the War...

in a prison camp...

just east of Medicine Hat Alberta.

So, when a Remembrance Day ceremony...

does become this glorification of the victors,

I feel so conflicted.

Fortunately,

Remembrance Day in its essence...

isn't about glorifying war...

or glorifying the victors.

It is a time for us...

to remember that peace is possible.

It is a time for us...

to remember...

that the guns can and will go silent...

as they did on November 11th, 1918, at 11:00am.

It is a time for us...

to remember...

that we can reconcile our differences,

or even come to appreciate our differences...

in a world...

where at times...

this does seem impossible...

for us to imagine.

Remembrance Day is a day...

where we are to embrace the vision of peace on earth...

as we do on Christmas morning.

Remembrance Day...

is where we show appreciation...

for those who have worked hard...

to try and establish this vision of peace.

Like the many soldiers of our Canadian armed forces...

who have found themselves...

helping the UN...

in peace keeping missions...

around the world.

In our reading of Micah this morning...

we see that Micah's prophecy...

to a people suffering in exile...

gives them hope...

that their oppressors...

will no longer oppress them.

Instead of fighting one another,

nations will come together.

Nations will work together...

as their swords and spears...

will be turned into ploughshares...

and pruning hooks,

tools they used at the time...

for tending the ground...

and pruning the trees...

that bore their food.

Likewise,

Paul in his words to the Judean and Gentile churches...

amid their conflicts with one another...

reasserts that Jesus has come to unite them.

To gather them together as one body.

They are not meant to live in a state of division...

with one another.

In Christ Jesus...

there is no Jew or Gentile.

No male or female.

No slave or free.

They are all one in Christ Jesus.

When I hear Paul's words...

as he tries to gather...

the Judean and Gentile churches together as one,

I think of my parents coming together.

My father German,

and my mother British.

Bringing together their two families...

who just twenty-five years earlier...

had been fighting against each other...

in a war.

Bringing our family together as one.

This is the original intention of Remembrance Day.

To give us hope...

that peace is possible,

that unity is possible.

This is the intention of both Micah and Paul's words.

To give us hope...

that peace is possible,

that unity is possible.

Even in a world that seems so divided.

In our gospel,

Jesus has one invitation for us to accept,

love one another as Jesus loves us.

When we love one another...

as Jesus loves us...

then our divisions are transformed into unity.

Then our weapons are transformed...

into ploughshares and pruning hooks.

Then our power struggle with one another is transformed...

into working together...

for the sake of our planet.

Then our violence and complacency are transformed...

into peace and care...

for one another.

As we gather this morning,

as we gather tomorrow,

may we hear this invitation...

to strive for peace and care...

for one another.

Not only on this day of remembrance,

but everyday...

in every relationship...

we find ourselves in. **Amen.**

Sermon November 17th, 2024

The Unfortunate Side Effects of Change Don't Outweigh the Benefits of Change

Jesus has come into the world...

to reform his faith community,

to challenge the leadership,

the people,

to see their traditions...

in a new way,

as they adapt to what it means...

to be people of God...

living under the Roman Empire.

As they adapt to what it means...

to be people of God...

living through a violent revolution.

As well, Jesus has come into the world...

to reform the larger society,

in which he lives.

To challenge the Empire's hierarchical system.

To challenge the Empire's mistreatment...

of the vulnerable people...

living within the Empire.

To challenge the Empire's motto:

that through violence...

they can create peace.

Jesus challenges the Empire...

by revealing the Kingdom of God...

to Judeans, Samaritans, and Gentiles,

throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Jerusalem,

teaching them to live by the Kingdom of God's motto.

Through non-violence...

we will create peace.

To challenge the hierarchical system...

by teaching the people...

to be servants to one another.

To challenge the Empire's mistreatment...

of the vulnerable people...

by teaching his followers...

to care for these people.

To help them get access...

to what they need.

To speak out for their right...

to be treated fairly and justly.

Jesus comes into our world...

to flip our world upside down.

So, to breathe new life into our world.

To change our world in a way...

that God envisions our world to be.

In our gospel this morning,

as the disciples are admiring...

the beautiful architecture of the Temple.

As they are holding on to...

the theological significance of the Temple.

Jesus bluntly says...

that with these changes...

Jesus is encouraging them to make...

comes pain,

comes death,

comes grief.

Or in other words,

pain, death, grief...

are unfortunate side effects of change.

Due to the violence...

the Roman Empire keeps perpetuating,

the Temple as they know it...

will be no more.

They will need to revision...

what their faith looks like...

without the presence of the Temple.

Though this story doesn't go into detail here,

I wouldn't be surprised...

to see the disciples grieve...

the thought...

that the Temple...

that has been so central to their faith...

will be no more.

Jesus goes on to say...

that Jesus' suggested reforms...

in both his religious community,

as well as the wider Roman community...

will not be taken lightly.

These changes will lead to push back...

from the principalities and powers...

that oppose God's ways.

There will be great conflict.

There will be power struggles.

Before new life can be born...

there is pain, death, grief.

And though this is hard for us to hear,

we get it.

We all have experienced significant change...

in our lives.

Whether it is moving to a new place...

or recovering from an addiction.

Whether it is getting married...

or having a child.

Whether it is going through a life crisis...

that leads to a fundamental shift...

in our beliefs...

or being part of a faith community...

that is about to take a big step...

into the unknown future...

as we deal with the sale of our building.

Whether it is going through...

the breakup of a significant relationship...

or dealing with the death of a loved one.

Whether we experience a job loss...

or a change in career.

We all have experienced significant change...

in our lives.

And as our worlds are flipped upside down...

from these changes,

in solidarity with the disciples,

we feel the pain...

that comes when we find ourselves...

standing in these unknown places.

Saying goodbye to what we have known.

To what has brought us comfort.

To what has given our lives meaning.

Change is hard.

It comes with pain.

With death.

With grief.

But like our modern doctor's discernment...

with medications that we need to take,

Jesus sees that the benefits of this change...

outweigh the unfortunate side effects...

that come with this change.

So, after hearing about all the side effects...

that come with change,

kind of like a pharmaceutical commercial...

talking about the latest wonder drug...

that comes with a list of...

ten or fifteen side effects.

Where you are ready to turn the channel...

or at least think

“why would I even try this drug.”

Jesus then uses the image of labour pains...

to explain the pain that comes from change,

to show us...

that after all the pain,

all the energy a woman expels...

to give birth to the new life of their baby,

there is a moment of complete joy...

when that child rests on their chest.

There is hope that love prevails.

That the future is bright.

With new life comes opportunities.

Comes love.

Comes joy.

Comes hope for a better future.

For example when someone is in recovery from addiction...

they have to say goodbye to friends,

to people who once were...

a significant presence in their lives.

They have to say goodbye to the substance...

that at times...

masked their pain.

But, in recovery...

they have opportunities to make new friendships...

that are healthier for their overall wellbeing.

They have opportunities...

to reconnect with friendships lost...

due to the addiction.

They have opportunities...

to live their lives in a new way...

where the future is bright.

Where love prevails.

Where they experience joy.

As we start thinking about our future at Redeemer...

without the building...

we too grieve,

we too feel pain.

But, with new life comes opportunities.

Comes hope that love will prevail.

Comes joy.

Comes a future with so much potential.

As we rethink what it means...

to be the church in our community.

Yes.

Change is painful.

But it leads to great healing and redemption stories...

where people,

where communities...

experience the opportunities,

hope,

joy,

and bright future...

new life brings to their lives. **Amen.**

Sermon November 24th, 2024

Christ the “King” Sunday

I don’t know where you are at...

with the whole “Christ the King” narrative,

but since I first realized...

that this Sunday is Christ the King Sunday,

many years ago,

I have struggled to feel any kind of connection...

to this image...

of Christ as our King.

Now, I do recognize Christ’s authority and reign...

in our lives,

and in our world.

As Christians,

Christ is a central figure to us,

whose teachings...

shape...

what we say...

and what we do.

But the image of Christ...

as our King...

is hard for me to grasp.

Maybe, because I have never lived under a monarch,

and though we are part of the commonwealth,

like many Canadians,

I have never really spent a lot of time...

keeping up on the Royal Family...

or seeing our need...

to still be part of the commonwealth.

Though Prince Harry's story intrigues me.

And yet,

all three authors of our biblical texts this morning...

refers to Jesus as their King.

Probably, because their original audience...

lives under a monarch.

So, this image made a lot of sense...

to the early Christians...

who were struggling...

living under the Roman Emperor's power.

Now besides the whole...

I don't live under a monarch reason,

there are a couple of other reasons...

why I struggle to connect Jesus...

to this image as King.

First, Jesus doesn't reflect any...

of the stereotypical characteristics of a king.

The ones we learned about in our history books...

or from movies like "Braveheart" or "Robin Hood"...

or television series like "Game of Thrones."

Jesus does not exalt himself before others.

Instead, Jesus humbles himself before others.

Declaring that he came to serve us,

not to be served.

Jesus does not care about power and greed.

Jesus constantly talks about the challenges...

money brings to our lives...

when it is the only source...

we depend on...

for life.

And the whole cross narrative...

puts a stop to any notion...

Jesus wanted power or authority...

over others.

Jesus doesn't act out violently...

to get his way.

Jesus believes in non-violence...

to implement change in his community.

“Simon Peter put that sword away.”

Jesus says right before his arrest.

Jesus cares for the vulnerable people in his society.

Speaking out against those...

who treat these people unfairly.

He doesn't create the very systems...

that lead to these people...

being vulnerable in the first place.

Jesus lives in direct opposition...

to what we know to be...

the way a King lives their lives.

At least stereotypically.

And if I give it more thought,

maybe there is a point to this.

Maybe Jesus is giving the people hope...

that even though their image of a king...

is distorted...

by their history with kings,

both local,

and foreign,

that Jesus can reform...

what it means to be a king.

Transforming someone...

from being focused on their own power...

and reputation...

to someone who genuinely cares for the people.

And puts their needs ahead of his own.

Reforming people's image of a king.

I can see the appeal there...

for the early Christian communities...

that lived under a monarch.

But there is another reason...

I really struggle with this image...

of Jesus as King.

And that is what Constantine did to this image...

in the fourth century and beyond.

Since Constantine made Christianity...

the religion of the State...

the church leadership at times...

has abused this image of Christ our king.

Smearing over the original purpose...

for why Jesus used this image.

For the Constantine church,

Jesus the king became the victor,

the conqueror,

flexing his power over the vulnerable people...

he came to conquer.

During historical events like the Crusades,

Christians would march around...

with crosses hung high...

as they violently mutilated their enemies...

with the sword.

The very weapon...

Jesus told Simon Peter...

to put away.

The church became an organization...

with great power and influence on society,

and often,

let this get to their heads.

Ignoring the be humble invitation...

Jesus drives home...

again and again...

in our gospels.

The motto to be in service for others...

became the motto...

to force others...

to be in service for us.

For example, the slave trade.

The Constantine Church,

the church we grew up in,

is also responsible for the colonization...

of many lands across the world...

in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

Leading to the pain and suffering...

of Indigenous people...

whose land and lives...

were altered in significant ways...

due to this colonization.

Again, after this analysis,

you may agree or disagree with me,

but I think we need to seriously consider...

decolonizing Christ the King Sunday.

Maybe we can do this...

by reconnecting with the image of Jesus...

the early Christian community painted for us,

so to tear down the Constantine Church image of Jesus...

that tried to erase the Jesus...

who humbled himself before others.

Who cared for the vulnerable people.

Who promoted non-violence.

Who came to serve us...

not to be served.

Maybe we need to find a different word...

to explain Jesus' authority and reign...

in our lives...

and in our world,

since it is so far removed...

from the King image,

we have become accustomed...

to knowing.

Maybe we need to spend more time...

focusing on Jesus' characteristics...

that we hear about...

in the gospels we reflect on,

then on his title.

Maybe we need to use this Sunday...

as an opportunity...

to intentionally work towards Truth and Reconciliation,

decolonizing the parts of our church...

that still wreak...

of Constantine's power and influence.

Maybe, just maybe,

then we will reconnect with Jesus' authority and reign...

in our lives...

in a new way...

that will move us to be the humble,

non-violent,

gracious,

hospitable,

caring,

servants...

Jesus invites us to be. **Amen.**

Sermon December 1st, 2024

God's Justice Prevails!

When listening to Jesus' bold proclamation...

about the state of the world...

in which he lives,

and seeing how similar this is...

to the state of the world we are living in.

We can see that his proclamation...

continues to speak boldly to us today.

As we hear the groaning cries of God's creation...

amid a rapidly changing climate.

Where many companies...

are still exploiting the planet for profit.

As we see the gap between the rich and poor...

continue to widen.

Leading to more people in our country...

being unable to access the food they need.

As division and polarization take centre stage...

in our politics.

Leading to conflict and violence.

As people continue to speak and act in ways...

that discriminate and devalue people...

because of race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation,

status, age, differently ableness,

and then hide behind these words and actions...

by calling it free speech.

As the violence of war/civil unrest...

continues to ravish the Middle East,

the Ukraine, the Sudan, Myanmar, and Haiti.

As we turn on the news...

even for just a few minutes...

and get bogged down...

by all the injustice...

we are witnessing in our world today.

We can see that Jesus' proclamation...

continues to speak boldly to us today.

As another Advent season is upon us,

we are encouraged...

amid all the injustice we are witnessing,

to re-focus our attention...

on the hope...

that we hear in our gospel this morning.

That all this injustice we are experiencing...

is temporary.

That this is a sign...

that our redemption from this suffering...

is near.

That the planet's redemption...

from its suffering...

is near.

That Jesus will come again...

to make everything right.

This is the hope of the gospel.

This is the hope of the baby Jesus...

that comes into our world...

in first century Judea/Galilee.

That God is a just God...

who has sent Jesus into the world...

to execute this justice.

We see this throughout Jesus' story...

as he speaks out for those...

who are being treated unjustly.

Challenging the authorities...

to rule justly, fairly.

Bringing justice to many...

who have experienced injustice.

This is the hope the prophet Jeremiah...

is proclaiming to God's people...

as they live in exile.

God will send someone into their community...

to execute God's justice.

To restore them from exile.

So that everyone...

can be treated fairly...

and feel safe.

This is the hope...

the prophets proclaim to their people...

as they face their own injustices.

According to the disciples,

Jesus fulfills this prophecy...

while God's people...

are suffering under Roman rule.

Then as we hear from Paul,

Jesus commissions the church...

to continue this work...

to execute God's justice...

wherever possible.

To continue to speak out...

for those who are being treated unfairly.

To continue to work with other organizations...

to break down the systems...

that continue to perpetuate this injustice.

To work towards peace and harmony with others.

To advocate for peace wherever possible.

To be generous.

To do what we can...

to heal the planet.

To help break down the barriers...

that prevent people...

from getting access to food.

There are a lot of things we can say and do...

to reflect God's justice in our world...

as we await Jesus' return...

to inaugurate the day...

when all will experience God's justice.

Where everyone will be treated fairly...

and feel safe.

We can still be a beacon of light...

for our world...

giving people hope...

that God is at work in us...

breathing God's justice and love...

to all those...

who have experienced...

or are experiencing...

injustice and hate.

That though when the summer arrives...

the whole planet will experience this justice...

in its fullness.

There are moments...

where this justice...

touches our lives...

and our world...

in the here and now.

Today, we find ourselves...

standing amid the Advent season,

again patiently hoping...

that all the injustice we are seeing...

in the world...

will be no more.

That Jesus will fulfill his promise and return.

Breathing God's peace on the Middle East,

Russia-Ukraine,

the Sudan,

Myanmar,

and Haiti conflicts.

Bringing God's just love...

to all those...

who have been treated unfairly.

As we await,

we again hear Jesus' invitation to be alert,

to keep watch,

to keep living out our calling as Christ's disciples,

revealing where we see God's justice and love...

at work in the here and now.

As Martin Luther says in response to the question:

If the world ended tomorrow...

what would you do?

He responded,

"I would plant a tree."

And so,

we hope in Jesus' return,

not passively,

but actively,

continuing to do what he taught us to do...

until this day comes.

Seeing social justice...

as a central role for us...

in our identity as followers of Christ.

Not something we do on the side.

Revealing where God's justice and love...

is at work...

in the world...

in the here and now.

Giving people hope in this Advent proclamation...

that there will be a day...

when the whole creation...

will experience God's just love.

Amen.

Sermon December 15th, 2024

John Prepares Our Hearts to Love!

Christmas is only ten days away.

That means many of us...

are hard at work...

preparing our homes...

for the many family members and friends...

that will be visiting us...

over the Christmas season.

From cleaning the house...

from top to bottom.

Getting into those grungy corners...

we spend most of the year...

trying to avoid.

To decorating the house with beautiful lights,

garland,

wreathes,

décor,

Christmas tree(s)...

and the many other little trinkets...

we have collected...

over the years.

From dealing with tendinitis in our wrists...

and elbows...

due to all the clicking of the mouse...

we have been doing...

as we frantically shop online...

for all the Christmas presents,

we need to get.

To those of us who avoid the online frenzy,

fighting through the crowds of the stores...

to make sure we get...

that present...

our grandchild has been asking for...

since last Christmas.

From gathering all the food we need...

for Christmas Dinner.

To seeking out...

who will help us...

prepare this delicious feast.

Christmas is only ten days away now.

We are in preparation mode...

as we get ready to celebrate...

another Christmas season...

with loved ones.

As we get ready to celebrate...

the birth of the messiah.

As we get ready to give thanks to God...

for all God has given us...

on Christmas morn...

and beyond.

Likewise, the prophets are sent into Israel,

into Judah,

to invite God's people...

to prepare their hearts and minds...

for the day...

when God will save the outcast,

the oppressed,

and change their shame into praise.

Where God will deal with their oppressors.

Revealing God's justice and love...

to the nations.

The prophets invite God's people...

into a time of retrospection and repentance...

for the injustices...

their community has...

and continues to do.

Whether it is mistreating those...

living in poverty...

by allowing their greed...

to blind them...

from caring for those...

living in poverty.

Or being complacent...

when the authorities in their community...

oppress those...

living in poverty.

Or mistreating others...

because they stand out...

from the larger community in some way.

And they can't seem to handle that very well,

so they speak and act in ways...

that hurt these people.

Sounds familiar?

We too, continue to struggle...

with a lot of these issues...

in our society.

And so, the prophets message...

speaks to us as well.

Inviting us to prepare our hearts and minds...

for a time...

when God's righteousness,

justice,

and love...

are revealed to us...

in its fullness.

The hope and promise we hear...

throughout the Advent season.

The prophets invite us to repent.

To no longer turn a blind eye...

to the injustice...

that is happening in our world.

So, to live out...

God's justice and love...

wherever we see this injustice happening.

So, to reveal...

where we see God's justice and love...

healing and redeeming people...

in the here and now.

In our gospel this morning,

John is sent into our world...

to invite us into a time of repentance,

a time of retrospection,

so we can see...

that even though Christmas...

is a time to celebrate.

Even though Advent is a time...

to hope in Jesus' coming again...

to make everything right.

It is also a time...

where we need to care for those in need.

It is a time...

where we need to be aware...

of the unfairness...

many people struggle with...

in our community,

and advocate for these people...

to experience fairness and justice.

It is a time...

where we need to prepare our hearts to listen,

and to love people without judgment.

It is a time...

where we need to ponder one of the major reasons...

for why God sends Jesus into our world.

To live out God's justice and love.

Giving people hope for a better future.

So, that all people...

can experience the hope of Advent...

and the joy of the coming Christmas season.

So, that all people can experience...

the hope of a redeemed world.

So, that all people can experience...

the unconditional love of a saviour...

that comes to us on Christmas morn.

Through repentance,

through seeing...

where we have perpetuated injustice...

in our community,

and changing how we do things,

our hearts are ready to accept the kind of world...

the messiah is going to invite us into.

A world where everyone is treated fairly.

A world where God's justice is accessible to everyone.

A world where hospitality reigns.

Where everyone gathers...

around the table of celebration...

to enjoy the great feast,

enjoy the sharing of gifts, enjoy each other.

This is the hope of Advent,

and the joy of Christmas.

To see that on Christmas morning,

Jesus breaks into our world, and reveals to us...

where God's justice is impacting our communities...

in the here and now...

through God's called people.

As well, to envision a time...

where Jesus will come again...

to make everything right.

To inaugurate God's justice and love for all. **Amen.**

Sermon Blue Christmas

God's Comforting Light

As we begin the seven-day march to Christmas,

we hear songs of joy and good tidings...

playing on the radio...

at nauseam.

We see smiling faces in the streets...

as they get excited to wrap...

and then unwrap Christmas presents.

Bake and eat gingerbread cookies.

And reconnect with family and friends...

over the Christmas season.

We see colourful Christmas displays...

throughout the city.

We see children playing in the snow.

Overjoyed at two weeks away...

from their classrooms...

and school responsibilities.

Yes. Indeed.

The Christmas Spirit is out in full force.

And for most of us,

most of the time,

this is what we look forward to.

But a while back...

a singer by the name of Elvis Presly...

performed a song called "Blue Christmas,"

that became very popular,

because for some people,

Christmas can be a difficult time of year.

In fact,

I wouldn't be surprised...

if every person known to humanity,

who celebrates Christmas,

has experienced at least one Blue Christmas...

in their lifetime.

Whether we are grieving the death of a loved one.

Or we are estranged from a parent...

or a child...

or a grandchild.

Whether we are struggling with a mental illness...

like depression.

Especially at this time of year...

where the darkness breaks into the day too early...

and leaves too late the next morning.

Or we are lonely...

and have a hard time seeing...

all the happy people...

uniting with their loved ones...

over the Christmas season.

While we sit alone at home...

heating up our turkey Hungry Man tv dinner.

Or sitting at a Denny's...

ordering their Christmas special.

Whether we are struggling...

to put food on the table this Christmas...

due to inflation.

Or we lost our job...

and can't afford to put presents under the tree...

for our children.

There are a lot of different reasons...

that can lead us...

to feel like this Christmas...

is a blue Christmas.

Not everyone in our lives,

and in our community...

is experiencing the hope and joy...

of this Advent and Christmas season.

Similarly, in Isaiah,

God's people are feeling the weight...

from their oppressors.

The darkness overwhelms them.

They too need to be comforted...

by the God who loves them.

They need someone like Isaiah,

to show them where God's light...

is shining amid their darkness.

In response to their blue Christmas excursion,

Isaiah helps God's people...

see where God is there...

with arms wide open...

comforting them from their suffering.

Listening to their cries.

Encouraging them to see...

where the light is shining amid their darkness.

Where God is at work...

healing and redeeming them...

as they await liberation from exile.

Likewise, the people living under Roman occupation...

are hurting.

They are tired of being treated unfairly...

by the Empire.

By those the Empire has appointed...

as their rulers.

They too are longing to see...

the light breaking into their darkness.

So, on Christmas morn,

Jesus breaks into the world,

bringing with him...

an invitation for them...

and us...

to hand over these heavy burdens.

To accept Jesus' offer...

to lighten their and our load.

According to John,

Jesus is our light...

that breaks into our darkness...

giving us hope for better days.

And those who proclaim Jesus...

point us to the light.

Helping us see where Jesus is...

healing and redeeming us...

amid our darkness.

This evening,

we come together...

for our annual Blue Christmas service...

where our purpose is...

to be a support for one another...

as we try and navigate through the darkness.

Hoping to hear a message...

that will help us see...

the light shining in the darkness.

Kind of like feeling the warmth of a fire...

crackling on a cold blizzardy winter day.

We need something or someone...

to help us see...

that in whatever we are going through,

Jesus' light can and will break into our darkness...

and give us hope for better days.

Whether it is the lit candles in this sanctuary.

Or that friend...

who will do everything in their power...

to help us feel less lonely.

Whether it is a movie we watch...

or book we read...

that gives us hope...

that reconciliation is still possible...

with those we are estranged from.

Or the comfort of the voice of a grandchild...

whose phone call...

warms our heart...

when the winter feels extra cold...

from the loss of our spouse.

Whether it is the kindness of a stranger...

that allows us to put food on our table...

this Christmas.

Or a toy drive...

that allows us to put presents under our tree this year.

Whether it is someone caring enough...

to help us find a warm place to stay.

Or someone who cares enough...

to walk with us...

as we deal with our mental illness...

during this Christmas season.

Whatever it is or whomever it is,

the Christmas season invites us...

to look where God's light...

may be shining in the midst of our darkness.

And when we struggle to see that light,

to feel reassured,

that God is there with arms wide open,

holding us tight.

Taking on our heavy burdens.

Giving us comfort and rest. **Amen.**

December 22nd, 2024, Sermon

Anticipation! One of the Best Parts of Being Human! Maybe!

As the Christmas Season knocks on our doors,

we are filled with anticipation...

of what is to come.

What will it be like...

to reconnect with family...

we haven't seen for a while?

What kind of gifts will we receive?

Will the people we purchased gifts for...

enjoy them?

Will the Christmas dinner...

taste as good as it always does...

or even better?

Will the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service...

leave us feeling all kinds of wonderful?

Will we have a white Christmas this year?

As Christmas knocks on our doors,

we are filled with anticipation...

of what is to come.

Excited.

But also, a little anxious.

What if I can't get along with Uncle Dave...

or my sister Beatrice...

again this year?

What if I don't like one...

or more of the gifts I receive?

What if the people don't like the gifts...

I have given them?

What if the turkey gets burned?

Or someone forgets to make...

a delicious cake or pie...

for dessert?

What if this new pastor of ours...

changes things up on Christmas Eve?

What if we have to experience another Christmas...

without snow?

As Christmas knocks on our doors,

we are filled with anticipation...

of what is to come.

Excited.

And a little anxious.

Similarly,

outside the Christmas season,
in our everyday lives,
we feel anticipation of what is to come.

From getting to know someone...

who we met only a moment ago.

To starting a new job or career.

From saving up for that thing...

you always wanted to get...

hoping that when you get that thing...

that it will be as good as you imagine.

To getting ready to go on that dream vacation...

that you have spent years working towards.

From wondering if that movie is as good...

as everyone says it is.

To seeing if that new menu item...

at your favourite restaurant...

is as delicious as the reviews say it is.

In our every day lives,

we feel anticipation...

for what is to come.

As we come to the end of another Advent Season,

we anticipate Jesus coming again...

into our world...

to finish what he started...

two thousand years ago.

To make everything right.

To heal and restore God's whole creation.

We are excited to suffer no more.

To see the joy of this new world...

being fulfilled.

And a little anxious...

of the uncertainty...

of what this new world will look like.

Of what this change will bring to our lives.

We are comfortable with the status quo.

Even when we find ourselves...

in an unhealthy environment.

It is hard to change,

even when that change is good for us.

In Micah,

the people anticipate a day...

when they will no longer find themselves in a war.

When they will be at peace...

with one another.

Working together...

to make this world a better place.

As they anticipate this day,

they feel hope and joy...

for what is possible in a world...

where everyone lives in harmony and peace...

with one another.

As well,

they too feel anxious of the uncertainties,

and unknowingness of this new world.

Of how these changes will impact their lives.

In Hebrews,

the early church is wrestling with persecution,
with division,
with understanding their new identity...
as believers in Christ's way.

Many of them anticipate the return of Jesus...
in their lifetime...
to liberate them from these sufferings.

To bring in the new Jerusalem.

To create a safe place...

for them to be who they are.

To unite them.

This is the hope and joy...

many early believers carry with them...

as they continue to follow Christ...

despite the persecution, division,

and identity struggle...

they go through.

As well,

they too feel anxious of the uncertainty...

and unknowingness...

that comes with these changes.

Of how these changes will impact their lives.

In our gospel,

the child in Elizabeth's belly...

jumps for joy...

in the presence of the child in Mary's belly.

Reflecting the anticipation of the coming Messiah...

that a lot of people are feeling...

during these challenging times...

where they experience oppression and violence...

from the Empire.

Mary then breaks out in song,

sharing her anticipation with the community.

Her anticipation for a better world...

where people will be treated fairly.

Where the Roman occupation will be no more.

Where their oppressors...

will no longer oppress them.

Where God's justice and peace will reign.

Mary anticipates the hope and joy...

that this child,

this messiah in her belly...

will bring to the lives of many.

And it is this anticipation,

that inspires Mary to sing.

To long for the whole world to sing with her.

As we anticipate the hope and joy...

that Jesus brings to our lives...

as we walk through Advent into Christmas.

As we anticipate the many possibilities...

that are possible...

with the coming of Jesus.

As we anticipate the hope...

that our lives,

our communities,

our world...

will be better,

will be healthier...

through Jesus.

We feel excited for Jesus' coming.

On Christmas morning. In the eschaton.

In everyday we await the coming of this joyous day. **Amen.**

Sermon Christmas Eve 2024

Christmas: A Time of Coming Together!

The snow is glistening.

The air is crisp.

The lights are shining brightly...

across our city.

On houses.

On trees.

On garland.

If we listen really closely,

we may even be able to hear sleigh bells ringing.

And carolers singing.

Christmas is upon us once again.

And as we enjoy this Christmas season,

we are invited to turn our attention...

to one of the parts of the Christmas season...

that many of us value each year.

Coming together with friends and family.

We travel from near and far...

to come together...

to be with family and friends...

over the Christmas season.

We travel through snowstorms.

Ice storms.

Cold spells.

We will spend four hours on a plane...

with a crying baby on our lap.

We will tolerate almost any condition...

or circumstance...

to come together.

To come together...

to share in a delicious meal.

Can you smell the Turkey...

roasting in the oven?

Can you taste the warm apple pie?

Are you looking at your watches right now...

hoping the pastor will wrap things up quickly...

so you can get to enjoying...

some delicious Christmas treats?

To come together to exchange gifts.

To see the look on our loved one's faces...

as they unwrap the presents...

we give them this year.

To enjoy the gifts,

we receive.

The presents under the tree,

as well as the wonderful people...

who give our lives such meaning.

To come together with others...

to help support organizations...

either financially...

or through volunteer efforts...

so that every person...

has access to a warm meal...

this Christmas season.

So that every child...

receives a gift...

this Christmas season.

To come together to sing carols,

to light candles,

to hear the first Christmas story.

To come together...

to reconnect with our church family,

as many of us live elsewhere now.

To come together...

to experience the warmth of nostalgia...

that this Christmas Eve tradition brings.

In the first Christmas story...

that we listen to this evening,

the Angels proclaim to us...

that a saviour is born in Bethlehem,

and that this saviour...

will bring everlasting peace and harmony...

to our planet.

Will gather us together...

as one creation.

We see the significance of this message...

of this coming together...

being played out...

throughout the Christmas story.

From the Angels coming together...

with poor shepherds...

in a field...

to celebrate the birth of the messiah.

To the manger scene...

where a carpenter,
shepherds,
a teenage girl,
a messianic baby (royalty),
and animals...
come together...
with all their diversity...
to witness this birth.

In our own remaking of the nativity...

where we like to add those Magi...
that we hear about on Epiphany...
into the Christmas Eve scene,
brings even more diversity...
to the Christmas story.

People from a land far away...
who come with wealth...
joining those who live in poverty...
to drive home the point...
that the saviour is here...
to gather us together as one.
No matter where we come from...
or who we are...
or how much money we have,
we are welcome at the manger,
at the cradle of Christ.
We are invited to come together...
with all our diversity...
to experience the Christmas joy...

of living together...

in peace and harmony.

In a world where we are so polarized...

from one another.

Where war is rampant across our globe.

Where we hyperfocus on what divides us.

Where we are hurting...

from relationship break downs...

within family and friend groups.

This story is one...

we really need to hear this evening.

This Christmas story...

where people come together from all walks of life...

with the same hope...

that maybe,

just maybe,

one day we can all live in peace and harmony...

with one another.

And so,

as we come together with friends and family...

over the Christmas season.

As we break bread together.

As we share in God's generosity together.

As we stand side by side this evening...

singing carols.

As we light candles...

and join in singing our favorite hymn...

Silent Night.

May we feel comfort, hope, and joy...

in this coming together this evening.

In this Christmas message...

that reminds us...

that Jesus has come into our world...

to bring peace and harmony to all creation.

And in Jesus' invitation to us...

to live out this hospitality,

grace,

love,

care,

and generosity...

towards our neighbours,

so we bear witness to...

this peace and harmony...

shining brightly in our world...

in this Christmas season.

In everyday of the year.

Amen.

Sermon Christmas Day

Jesus Is Our Light

In the first chapter of John's gospel,

John uses the images of...

Word and light...

in several verses...

to talk about who Jesus is,

and what Jesus' purpose is.

In this morning's homily,

I want to draw our attention...

particularly to the image of light.

If we think about it.

Light is a really good metaphor...

to talk about Jesus...

because, as we use light in a diversity of ways...

to meet our needs,

Jesus too reaches us in a diversity of ways...

to meet our needs.

For example,

we use light to help us navigate...

where we are going...

when we find ourselves...

in a dark space.

We use the light of the stars...

to help us find our way...

when we are lost in the darkness of night.

We use the light from our lanterns...

or flashlights...

or candles...

when trying to navigate through the house...

during a power outage.

We use the light from our lamps...

to help us see...

where we are going...

in our house...

when evening sets in.

The light guides our way...

as we walk through the darkness.

Similarly, Jesus helps us navigate...

through all the challenges we face.

Through all the metaphorical darkness...

we find ourselves standing in.

When we are struggling to see...

where to go next.

We are invited to dwell on the Word.

To read our bibles.

To pray.

To come to worship.

To listen for Christ's voice and guidance.

To see that through these practices of our faith...

that Jesus is there with his teachings,

with his love,

to help guide us.

To help us see his radiant light shining amid the darkness.

To give us hope...

that this light will overcome the darkness...

we often find ourselves in.

We use light to keep us warm,

to comfort us.

We light a fire on a cold winter day...

to stay warm.

We have a night light on in the hallway...

to keep us safe,

to keep us from tripping over something...

when we need to get up in the middle of the night.

We often have night lights on in the bedrooms as well.

To comfort our children, our grandchildren...

who are afraid of the dark.

Similarly,

when we find ourselves struggling...

in that metaphorical darkness.

Jesus comforts us in a variety of ways.

From pointing us to a story in Scripture...

that really speaks to our situation...

and reassures us of his presence,

and healing power.

To inviting a sibling in Christ,

or a stranger,

or a friend,

or family member,

or professional to stand with us.

To hold our hand.

To hold us in their arms when we feel weak.

To share words and wisdom...

that give us a feeling of peace and comfort.

A feeling that though we find ourselves...

suffering through a cold winter day,

Jesus,

the light,

the fire,

is warming us up.

Keeping us safe.

When I was in seminary in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

back in the early 2000's,

I supply preached at churches...

in central and northern Saskatchewan...

throughout the winter season.

I remember one Sunday morning,

a snowstorm settled in over...

the central and northern parts of Saskatchewan.

I had about a two-hour drive north of Saskatoon...

to get to the church...

I was supplying at.

I remember how dark it was...

as I tried to see the road ahead of me.

My headlights and even beamers...

were struggling to navigate me...

through the storm.

I was so worried...

I would hit a deer or moose,

but I don't think either of them...

would have dared to be out in this storm.

I was white knuckling it.

Praying to God...

to get me their safely.

As I was driving,

I noticed a light in the distance.

I couldn't quite make it out at first.

But as I kept driving...

the light became brighter and brighter.

I started to focus in on this light...

forgetting temporarily...

that I was even driving in a storm.

I can't explain it.

But I felt a sudden sense of peace and comfort,

and that this light was guiding me...

to where I needed to go.

When I finally got close enough...

to make out this light,

it was this humungous lit up cross...

that was just off the highway.

I don't know what the motivation was...

to build this cross.

But I thought I couldn't be the only one...

who felt comfort and guidance...

during a winter storm...

from this light.

From this cross.

There are other ways...

that light meets our needs...

that I will leave for another homily.

But for John...

he uses this image...

to give the people suffering under Roman Occupation hope...

that Jesus is a light...

shining in the midst of their darkness.

Jesus is the hope for the future of Israel.

For the future of the whole world.

Jesus the light will shine in their darkness,

and their darkness will not overcome it.

They will be liberated, healed, and redeemed,

from their oppressors through Jesus.

As we listen to John in our context,

we too believe...

that Jesus is our guiding light...

that helps us see...

where God is at work...

healing and redeeming the world.

As well Jesus our light,

helps us live the way...

God envisions us to live.

So, that we can be active participants...

in this healing and redeeming work.

So, that we can feel comforted...

that no matter how overwhelming...

the darkness is in our lives...

and in our world,

that Jesus is present,

the light is shining...

in the midst of the darkness.

This is the joy we celebrate on Christmas morning.

That in the breaking of the dawn,

we stand at the manger,

in awe,

of what lies before us.

A child that shines a bright light...

for all the world to see.

Giving us all hope...

that the darkness we face in our lives and in our world,

will not overcome it.

The light will prevail.

The Christ child will prevail. **Amen.**

Sermon January 12th, 2025

Celebrating Baptism

If you were to take out the old photo album...

that your parents passed down to you,

you may come across a couple of pictures...

of you as a little baby...

in a white gown...

in one of your parent's arms,

or godparents' arms,

right beside the font,

in which you were baptized.

Most of us are baptized at an age...

where only those photos...

give us a glimpse of what that day was like.

We don't often remember things...

that happen to us as a baby.

But if I ask you...

if you have ever witnessed a baptism...

in your time as a Christian,

most,

if not all of you,

will probably say...

“we have witnessed many baptisms...

in our lifetime pastor.

Right here in this church.

At that font.”

With that being said,

when we witness another’s baptism...

we are invited to remember our own baptism.

Or at least envision...

what it might have looked like.

Since the baptismal sacrament...

for the most part...

is similar among most churches.

What our grandparents experienced in their baptism,

our parents experienced,

and what our parents experienced in their baptism,

we experienced,

and what we experienced in our baptism,

our children experienced.

And what our children experienced in their baptism,

our grandchildren experienced.

Sadly, the number of baptisms we witness today...

in the church...

is far fewer...

than the baptisms we witnessed growing up.

But, if we can think back on the last time...

we witnessed a child being baptized,

we will remember...

that we celebrated.

I don't know what the tradition is here,

but in other churches I have served in,

we often celebrated with the family afterwards...

with a cake.

But before this could unfold,

right after the service,

the family wanted to take a million pictures...

of the day's event.

Then after the cake,

there would be an invite...

to the family's house...

to continue to celebrate this joyous day.

It was an all-day party.

And why not,

when a child...

or even an adult is baptized...

in our church,

we welcome them into our church family.

What a joyous occasion indeed.

And there is so much more to celebrate...

and give thanks for...

in our reception of the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is where we hear God promise...

that God will be present with us always...

through the Holy Spirit.

Baptism is where God declares us...

a child of God...

as we are marked by the cross of Christ forever.

Baptism is where through the cleansing waters,

through the scripture verses shared,

God forgives, heals, and redeems us,

past, present, and future.

Baptism is where our faith journey really begins.

Baptism is where God empowers us...

through the Holy Spirit...

to live out our faith in the world.

The sacrament of Baptism...

is a joyous celebration in the life of the church.

For most of us.

In the early church,

there is one baptism...

that people struggle to celebrate.

Struggle to get out the party supplies for.

Struggle to grab out the cake mix for.

And that is Jesus' baptism.

For a lot of people at this time...

they hear the words of John the Baptist...

who states that this baptism's central purpose...

is to be an act of repentance.

If Jesus is the Messiah,
the Son of God,
why did he have to undergo...
a ritual of repentance.

The different leaders in the church...
had to find a way to explain Jesus' reason...
for receiving this baptism.

Because the people couldn't understand why,
and felt confused,
and even a little embarrassed...
at this belief...

that the Messiah,
the Son of God,
had to be baptized.

With that being said,

all four gospel writers do talk about this blessed event,
and why not.

What God does in Jesus' baptism...
is worth celebrating.

In the moment Jesus is baptized,

we see the heavens open up...
and the Holy Spirit in bodily form...
coming down upon him,
initiating the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

A ministry that will come...
with excitement and anticipation...
as the Messiah reveals to us...
a new way of being community.

The kingdom of God as Jesus calls it.

A place where Jesus reveals to us...

God's hospitality, grace, generosity,

love, healing, and redemption.

In this moment Jesus is baptized,

the voice of God affirms Jesus...

as a child of God.

And affirms the ministry...

Jesus is about to live out in the world.

"You are my son with whom I am well pleased."

What a moment to celebrate.

Jesus a child of God,

the Son of God,

now inviting us into a new way of being community.

Where we are welcome...

with all our imperfections.

Where we are healed from our shame.

Where we are redeemed from our suffering.

Where we are supported and enabled...

to continue this new way of being community...

through God's generosity and unconditional love.

And so,

as we reflect on Jesus' baptism...

in Luke's gospel this morning,

as we remember the many baptisms...

we witnessed in this church.

May we remember our own baptism...

where we are marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Where God declares us children of God.

Where we are empowered...

through the Holy Spirit...

to continue in this new way of being community.

Amen.

Sermon January 19th, 2025

Unity: The New but also Old Way of Being Christian!

In our gospel this morning,

Jesus performs a miracle...

that serves two purposes.

First, evaluating this miracle from a literal lens,

Jesus saves the hosts...

of this small-town wedding...

from being shamed by their community.

In first century, Galilee,

there is a lot of pressure...

on the hosts of a wedding...

to make sure the guests are satisfied.

When the hosts run out of wine...

this becomes a crisis,

because if the wine runs out,
then the party is over way too early.

And if you have ever been...

to a small-town wedding.

Everyone shows up.

So, if Jesus doesn't step in here...

their neighbours will shame them...

for neglecting to provide hospitality...

to their guests.

And we can see by reading the gospels,

that Jesus knows all too well...

the importance of being hospitable.

So, I am not surprised...

that after his initial response...

to his mother,

that he steps in to save this wedding.

Highlighting once again...

the significance of being a hospitable community.

Second, looking at this story through a figurative lens,

Jesus is making a statement about his ministry.

Jesus has come to turn water into wine.

To invite us...

into a new way of being community.

And not just any community.

A community that is enriched...

with kindness, hospitality, and love.

A community comparable to a fine wine.

A community where division...

is replaced by unity.

So that we can live together...

in peace and harmony.

Isn't that a 70s song?

Now, if we look at...

what living under Roman occupation...

is like in first century,

we see that people are divided.

People are categorized...

in different social groupings...

where they are taught...

not to mingle with one another.

There are the many different rebellions...

going on all over Rome...

to try and bring down the Empire.

With every leader...

who leads these rebellions,

having different intentions.

Within Judaism,

there is tension between the Essenes,

the Nazoreans,

the Sadducees,

and the Pharisees.

Then throw in the Samaritans,

the Gentiles.

And this gives you a picture...

of what the early church has to deal with...

as the Nazoreans,

Samaritans,

and Gentiles...

transition into Christianity together.

A lot of diversity,

which unfortunately,

leads to a lot of division.

So, in this miracle Jesus performs...

is both a challenge to us...

and a hope for us...

that the community Jesus...

wants to establish...

is one...

that focuses on hospitality,

on appreciating one another's diversity,

and on unity...

between the different social groupings.

In the church in Corinth,

Paul addresses this very issue of division,

as Christians from different social groupings...

and ethnicities...

try to come together...

to become one community.

Paul reassures the people...

that everyone are recipients of the Holy Spirit,

and it is this Spirit that unifies us.

That brings us together.

At the same time,

we all come with a diversity of gifts.

Or in other words,

we are all puzzle pieces...

in this great big puzzle...

called the church.

Paul encourages us...

to appreciate each other's diverse gifts,

and not think...

that one gift is more necessary than another.

We need all the puzzle pieces...

to be the picture...

Christ paints us to be.

In today's world,

the divisions,

our inability to appreciate the diversity of others,

is growing.

In the world.

In Canada.

In our families.

In our churches.

We are so divided today...

that many people fear...

this could lead...

to another global conflict.

More than ever,

this story of Jesus' miracle...

of turning water into wine...

needs to be heard...

in our context.

More than ever,

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth...

needs to be heard in our context.

Jesus came into our world...

to teach us...

how important being hospitable to others is...

to our well being as a community.

When we appreciate people...

for who they are...

with all the diversity they bring...

to our community,

then we create an environment...

where people feel safe,

loved,

accepted,

and appreciated...

for the diverse gifts they bring.

Then we create an environment...

where we can live in peace and harmony...

with one another.

When hearing about Jesus' ministry...

we see that Jesus came into our world...

to transform violence into peace,

hate into love,

division into unity.

Paul reiterates this message to us,

to the early Christians...

throughout the Gentile world.

Paul challenges the early Christians...

to stir clear of violent revolutions...

that are taking place.

Non-violence is Jesus' way.

And that is what Paul encourages us to do.

Challenge the Empire in non-violent ways.

Paul teaches us how to love each other...

even when we face disagreement...

over issues in the church.

Even when we are challenged...

by the diversity...

that is present in our community.

Paul spends most of his time...

writing letters...

to try and bring unity to the church.

To get people to see...

that through Christ Jesus,

through the Holy Spirit,

we are one people.

This week is the week of Christianity Unity.

Throughout history...

the church has struggled...

to be an example of what Jesus,

what Paul is...

encouraging us to be,

a unified body...

that lives first and foremost...

as a hospitable community...

not a hostile one.

At times we have created obstacles...

for people from social groupings...

to be part of our community.

At times we have joined in...

with the violence...

when we have faced opposition.

At times we have chose division over unity...

when dealing with contentious issues.

At times we have focused...

on the stories of hostility...

in the Bible,

instead of the stories of God's redeeming love.

At times we have ignored Jesus' invitation...

to join him in a new age,
a new way of being community.

Challenging the violence,
hate, division, and hostility...

that is so prevalent in our world.

The week of Christian Unity reminds us...

that we need to reconnect with Jesus,
with Paul's words this morning.

We need to be an example.

To be followers of Christ.

To walk together...

as we face the violence, hate, division, and hostility...

that is so prevalent in our world.

Trying to live the new way...

Jesus invites us to live.

To challenge violence with non-violence.

To challenge hate with love.

To challenge division with expressions of unity.

To challenge hostility with hospitality.

To show people...

that the resurrection of Jesus...

is more than a statement about the afterlife.

It is about resurrecting...

what God envisions us to be as God's creation.

A creation where everyone and everything...

lives in harmony and peace...

with one another.

Amen.

Sermon January 26th, 2025

Jesus Values You!

Do you feel valued...

by the people in your life?

By your friends.

By your parents.

By your children.

By your teachers.

By your employers.

By your political leaders.

By your siblings in Christ.

Do you feel valued...

by the people in your life?

Do you feel...

like you matter to them?

For Jesus,

one of the core parts of his ministry...

is to see value...

in everyone he meets.

The tax collector.

The sinner.

The street worker.

The woman who commits adultery.

The Samaritan woman at the well.

The Gentile woman whose daughter is sick.

The Roman official...

whose daughter has died.

Mary Magdalene.

Mary of Bethany.

Simon Peter...

who denies him three times.

The mentally ill man on the shore...

who broke away from his chains.

Those living in poverty.

Those who are blind.

Those who are living in the prison system.

According to Jesus,

everyone has value.

And Jesus does all he can...

to let the people know...

that they are valued.

I ask again.

Do you feel valued?

Do you feel like you matter...

to the people in your life?

Unfortunately,

as much as we try to live out this example...

Jesus sets for us.

Sometimes we struggle to value,

to appreciate,

the people we meet.

The people we invite into our lives.

And sometimes...

the people in our lives...

say or do things...

where we feel like we don't matter.

We don't have value.

For example,

you share something really personal...

about yourself...

to your friends,

and they struggle to understand...

this part of yourself.

So, they make fun of you for it,

or they walk away.

In this moment of rejection,

you struggle to see that you have value.

That you matter.

Sometimes we are that friend...

who can't understand,

who choose to walk away...

or make light of it.

Hurting our friend.

Devaluing our friend.

Or, no matter how many A's you get in school,

or how many promotions you get at work,

it is never enough for your parents.

Just once...

you wish you could hear them say,

“how proud they are of you.”

That you matter to them.

That they value you.

Sometimes we are that parent...

who expect too much from our child.

Who can't come to say...

how proud we are of them.

Hurting our child.

Devaluing them.

Or your child is super critical...

of everything you say or do,

reminding you steady...

of how they wish...

they had other parents.

Telling you often...

how you messed up their life.

Or you are aging...

and you need to go into a long-term care facility,

and once you have settled in there,

your child's visits become less and less.

You start to question your value.

Feeling like you no longer matter.

Sometimes, we are that child...

who constantly reminds our parents...

of the mistakes they made.

Sometimes, we are that child...

who expects too much from our parents.

Who doesn't make more time...

to go and visit with them...

as they transition to long-term care.

Sometimes we can say and do things...

that leave our parents...

questioning their value.

Wondering if they even matter to us anymore.

Or your teacher tells you...

that you will amount to very little.

Or your employer gets on you...

for every little thing.

Or your political leader...

talks down to you.

Ignoring your needs.

Or your sibling in Christ...

boasts about how much...

they do for the church,

and constantly reminds you...

of how little you do.

Leading you to feel like...

you don't have value in your faith community.

That you don't really matter.

Sometimes we are that sibling in Christ.

Sometimes we are that politician...

or employer...

or teacher.

Humanity is broken.

Wounded from all the stuff we do to each other.

We are not always the best parts of ourselves.

Sometimes we say and do things...

that devalue others.

Sometimes we are the ones...

who feel devalued...

by what others say and do.

In our gospel this morning,

Jesus talks about a place...

where everyone feels valued.

Even those in our society...

who are often forgotten.

Devalued.

Treated like they don't matter.

Jesus has come to value them.

To value us.

To show us...

that in God's eyes...

we all are valued.

We all matter.

And what we find most often...

when we feel valued.

When we feel like we matter to people.

When we feel like we matter to God.

We are empowered through this feeling...

to go out into the world...

and live out...

what Jesus invites us to live out today.

We are empowered to say and do things...

to the people we meet...

to show them...

that they are valued.

That they do matter to us.

That they matter to God.

Amen.

Sermon February 2nd, 2025

Ritual Can Be Meaningful to One's Life

When February 2nd lands on a Sunday,

the ground hog,

after not seeing their shadow,

and most Christians,

take a pause...

from the regular lectionary year readings...

for this Fourth Sunday after Epiphany...

and commemorate the day...

Mary and Joseph...

take Jesus to the Temple...

to present him to Simeon...

for the ritual of dedication.

A ritual that identifies Jesus as a child of God.

A ritual where the High Priest...

offers a blessing of God on Jesus,

and his loved ones.

A ritual that acts as a sign...

that God will be forever present...

in the life of Jesus.

A ritual that every child...

that grows up in Judaism...

at this time...

goes through.

With the exception...

that in Jesus' experience of this ritual,

a prophet by the name of Anna...

declares Jesus the Messiah.

Now, one reason why I think...

Luke chooses...

to share this unique story of Jesus with us...

besides identifying Jesus as the Messiah,

is to show us...

that Mary and Joseph...

raised Jesus with the intention...

to teach him...

to see the value...

that the rituals of his faith...

bring to his life.

Of course, some argue...

that Jesus is anti-ritual...

or that he says some things...

that may support this idea...

that he is averse to ritual.

But I argue...

that Jesus' problem...

isn't with the ritual itself.

Jesus' problem is with...

how the rituals are being abused...

by the leadership of the day.

Used to exclude others.

Used to create a barrier...

between the general population and God.

Losing their original purpose,

which is to identify us as children of God,

drawing us closer to God.

And Judaism isn't the only faith tradition...

that has rituals...

that physically show us...

that we are God's,

that God walks with us,

blessing us along the way,

drawing us closer to God.

In every religious tradition,

people practice rituals...

that reassure them...

that they do belong to God,

and that God,

this ultimate reality,

is forever present in their lives...

interacting with them...

every step along their journey.

In every religious tradition,

people practice rituals...

that help them draw closer to God,

to this ultimate reality.

As much as people are walking away from organized religion.

I don't think it is the rituals...

they are walking away from.

It is the power structures in place...

that have sometimes used these rituals...

in a way...

that have caused harm...

that they are walking away from.

Just look at all the rituals we practice in our homes,

in our communities,

at the hockey rink.

How many of us today...

had to check in...

to see if Wiar-ton Willie...

had seen his shadow?

Ground Hog Day has become a ritual...

that many of us participate in...

that gives us hope...

that the winter season may be over soon.

That spring will come early.

When we practice these rituals in our homes,

in our communities,

in our faith community,

we see how meaningful they are to our lives.

Within Christianity,

we have some very important rituals we practice...

that help us see...

that we are children of God,

that reassure us of God's presence in our lives,

and that draw us closer to God.

For example, baptism,

is a ritual...

where through water and the word...

we are identified as children of God.

We are reassured of God's presence in our lives.

And through this promise...

we feel closer to God.

Communion is a ritual...

where through bread and wine...

we are reassured...

that God is a gracious God...

who forgives us of our shortcomings.

Who doesn't abandon us...

or punish us...

when we fall short.

Instead, identifies us...

as one of God's children,

walking with us...

through our brokenness...

into the new life...

we are promised...

through Jesus.

Empowering us to keep trying...

to be Jesus' hands and feet...

in our community.

Drawing us closer to God.

Communion is also a ritual...

that connects us with one another,

reminding us...

that we are not alone...

as we carry out our faith in the world.

Communion draws us closer to one another.

Confession is a ritual...

that helps us let go...

of all those things...

that make it harder for us...

to love as Jesus loves.

Again, drawing us closer to God,

and to one another.

Worship is a ritual...

that identifies us as children of God,

that reassures us of God's continual presence in our lives...

and draws us closer to God.

As we sing and listen to God's word.

As we pray,

communicating with God.

As we take part in Communion.

All these rituals we take part in,

are meaningful to us...

as they identify us...

as children of God.

As they reassure us...

that God is always present,

interacting in our lives...

in a variety of ways.

As they draw us closer to God,

reminding us...

that we are not alone in this world.

Or in other words,

these rituals help us feel a sense of belonging...

when the world tells us we don't.

These rituals help us feel...

like we are still loved...

even when we don't always get it right.

These rituals help us hope in a better world...

when the one we find ourselves in...

seems to be falling apart.

Today is the presentation of our Lord.

Today we see how meaningful it is to Mary,

Joseph,

and Jesus...

to take part in this ritual...

that identifies Jesus as a child of God,

as the Son of God,

as the Messiah.

This ritual...

that reassures them...

God is present,

even as they face oppression from the Roman Empire.

This ritual that draws them closer to God,

and God's purpose for God's people. **Amen.**

Sermon February 9th, 2025

God Works In and Through Us in Not Our Best Moments!

Growing up,

I always thought of my pastor...

as the perfect example to follow.

Someone who had things all figured out.

They could do no wrong in my eyes.

Well. Almost.

Of course,

the sermon wasn't always their best.

Sometimes you could tell...

they didn't bring their A game...

that Sunday.

But I believed...

that pastors were genuinely...

well-behaved children growing up,

and then entered the seminary...

because of their goodness.

When I started to feel the call to ministry,

I was like,

I am none of those things...

I listed above.

I grew up in a broken home.

I did a lot of things I wasn't proud of...

as I was practically raising myself.

Without getting into the nitty gritty details,

let's just say,

I had a lot of rough edges.

In my childhood,

the idea of me being a pastor...

would have been the last thing on my mind.

My friends would have laughed so hard...

that the earth would shake.

And though I had made a lot of strides...

in my young adulthood...

through therapy and self-help books.

I still carried the wounds of my past with me,

and didn't think I was worthy enough...

to be a pastor.

So, I ignored the call to ministry.

I kept comparing myself...

to the image of pastor...

I had in my head.

There is no way this is for real.

God would never call me...

to be a pastor in God's church.

No way.

After a few months...

I thought this feeling would just go away.

But it didn't.

I kept feeling this call to ministry.

So, I decided to talk my Dad...

into going on a road trip with me...

to the Seminary in Saskatoon.

I thought I could walk in there...

and talk to someone.

Figure out if I am just fooling myself,

or if God really is nudging me...

to go to seminary...

to train to become a pastor.

So, we travelled to Saskatoon...

and walked up those steps...

to the seminary doors.

We went to open the doors,

in the middle of summer, and “surprisingly”

they were unlocked.

My dad started to walk in,

and then looked back...

and saw me at the door.

I froze.

I wouldn't go in.

For some reason,

I still doubted myself,

and thought,

because of my past,

there was no way...

God wanted me to be a pastor...

in God's church.

My Dad tried to get me to walk in...

for a good fifteen minutes.

I wouldn't go in.

So, we went home to Edmonton.

My dad was pretty understanding...

despite driving all that way for nothing.

So, I thought, okay,

I have made up my mind.

I am not going to become a pastor.

Time to focus on getting back...

on the psychologist track.

At the time,

I was in my final year of my undergrad...

ready to take my exams...

to get into graduate school.

Well, you think that feeling would have stopped.

No.

It kept at me...

until I finally decided to go to a seminary open house...

the following year.

After that experience...

my path was clear.

I was called to go into the ministry.

Yes.

I am imperfect.

But for some reason...

God wants to use my redemption story...

to reach others.

Now, listening to our readings this morning,

I am amazed...

I struggled so much with my call.

Like God...

ONLY picks worthy people...

to do God's work in the world.

Isaiah when hearing the call to prophecy,

says he is unworthy.

And needs to have burning coals...

touching his lips...

to cleanse him.

I have to be honest...

this wasn't included in my ordination rite.

Peter the disciple...

who gets handed the keys...

to the church...

says when Jesus invites him...

to come and follow...

that he is unworthy.

Paul the apostle says...

when sharing his call story...

that he is unworthy.

And he isn't exaggerating here.

He persecuted Christians.

What I started to figure out...

on my call journey...

is that Jesus doesn't go looking...

for the most righteous people...

to follow him.

Jesus calls the sinners,

the imperfect,

those in need of grace.

Because in Jesus's whole ministry...

we see that...

it is in these encounters...

with those who are hurting,

who are wounded,

who need grace...

where we see Jesus' redemptive love at work...

in the world.

Transforming the world...

into what God envisions.

And besides,

seeing how Jesus brings out the best in people...

who don't always have it all together...

is life giving.

It gives us all hope...

that even when we are at our worst...

it is possible to say or do something great.

Something redeemable.

Something that changes the life...

of someone else for the better.

In my profession,

sometimes it is in my off days,

where I didn't mean to say or do something,

or neglected to say something...

when I thought I should,

that ended up having...

the greatest positive impact on someone.

In these moments,

we really see Jesus' gracious redeemable love...

breathe new life into the people we engage with,

as well as with us.

Have you ever felt unworthy?

Like you were incapable...

of being there for someone...

who was hurting,

because of your wounds,

your misgivings,

your imperfections.

Have you ever felt unworthy...

to do something in the church,

because you feel you are not equipped,

or that you are not as good as someone else...

who has been doing it for many years?

Have you ever felt unworthy...

to get that job,

or get into that school,

or to be friends with that person...

who looks like they have it all together?

God is a gracious God,

who works in and through our unworthiness,

our imperfections,

to inspire people,

to inspire us,

with God's great redemption story.

A story that reassures us...

that God values us.

God sees us as worthy...

even when we can't see this in ourselves.

God doesn't see our brokenness...

as a reason to exclude us,
but instead,
sees it as an opportunity to reveal...

God's redeeming love to us...

and the world.

It is this amazing grace...

that gives Isaiah the ability...

to be a prophet...

to his people...

in a disheartening time.

Giving them hope...

that better days are ahead.

It is this amazing grace...

that gives Peter the ability...

to drop his nets...

and come and follow Jesus.

Healing and preaching in Jesus' name.

Leading the church...

during times of persecution and division.

It is this amazing grace...

that gives Paul the ability...

to walk away from everything...

he has known...

and live out the calling...

to be a leader in the early church...

bringing the good news...

to gentiles around the world.

It is this amazing grace...

that allowed me to accept the call to ministry,

and to touch the lives of many...

through the ministries I have participated in...

over the past sixteen years...

in the three different communities I was called to.

It is this amazing grace...

that allows any one of us...

to do the work we do in the church.

So, to show the world how wonderful and amazing...

God's gracious redeeming love is...

in transforming this world into the world...

God envisions for us.

A world where everyone lives together...

in peace and harmony with one another. **Amen.**

Sermon February 16th, 2025

Jesus Invites Us into God's Work to Create a Just and Equitable Society!

In our gospel this morning,

we see that Jesus isn't afraid...

to name the injustice...

he is witnessing in his community.

Despite the threats of violence,

he often hears...

from those...

who oppose what he is saying and doing...

on behalf of those...

who are being treated unjustly.

Jesus sees...

that so many people in his community...

are living in poverty.

Weeping.

Hungry.

Thirsty.

Unhoused.

Struggling to survive.

Jesus sees that...

so many people are being persecuted,

abused,

taken advantage of...

by those in positions of authority...

in the Empire.

Jesus sees that...

so many people...

are wrongfully being thrown into prison.

Jesus sees that...

so many people are suffering.

Longing for things to be different.

On the other side of the coin,

Jesus sees that...

there are people...

who are living off the exploitation of others.

People who carry a large portion of the wealth...

in the Empire...

due to wrongful tax practices...

and the privilege their status grants them.

People who look down...

at those living in poverty.

Blaming and shaming them.

Punishing them.

Lording their own status over them.

The reality in Jesus' time...

is that there are a lot more poor people...

then rich people...

living in his community.

There are a lot more people suffering...

then people who are living the good life.

And those people...

who are living the good life...

for the most part...

are doing so,

at the cost of the suffering...

of the majority.

Jesus isn't afraid...

to call this injustice out.

And even though opponents of Jesus...

lurk within the crowds.

The majority of people he speaks with...

are people facing these injustices.

With this in mind,

Jesus stands before the crowd...

and talks about the kingdom of God,

and how this kingdom...

that Jesus invites us to live out...

is in stark contrast...

to the kingdom/empire they are living in.

Jesus talks about how those...

who are living in poverty...

will no longer go hungry.

They will no longer be thirsty.

They will no longer mourn injustice.

Justice will be served.

The authorities will no longer...

treat them unjustly.

Those living in poverty...

will laugh...

after years of tears.

The good times are coming.

The messiah has arrived.

And has come...

to breathe God's justice into the world.

Changing their fortunes around.

On the other side of the coin,

those who have exploited others...

will no longer be in a position to do so.

Those who laugh now...

will mourn...

what they have lost...

when their wealth is being fairly distributed...

across the community.

There will be accountability...

for those who have treated others unjustly.

Of course,

we can easily get into an...

all rich people are bad,

and all poor people...

should be elevated...

type of thinking.

But I think we miss the point of Jesus' message...

when we start generalizing too much.

Instead,

Jesus is trying to uplift the poor (the majority of his audience)...

by saying...

that he has come to change the world...

so that everyone is treated fairly.

That the poor will no longer have to suffer...

at the hands of those who exploit them.

At the same time,

Jesus is hoping...

that those who have received their wealth honestly...

will see this wealth...

as a gift from God...

and will be moved to share this wealth...

with those in need.

You can have money...

and do good with it.

It is just harder according to Jesus,

because it can be too easy...

to start looking inward on ourselves,

when we have wealth.

And forget about our dependence on God,

and our calling as God's children...

to care for one another.

To share of our wealth with others.

Instead, we end up hoarding our wealth...

or only dispersing it...

to those...

that we have chosen...

to be in our in-club.

As the church,

as followers of Jesus,

we are invited to be active participants...

in this call to justice.

What this means for us,

is that we need to name the injustice...

we are witnessing in our community.

Like, how the gap between the rich and the poor...
is widening.

As more people are struggling to stay afloat,
and less people are wealthy.

Like,

how there are so many government policies...

that allow wealthy people...

to exploit those...

who are struggling to get by.

Like,

how there are so many countries...

that continue to create barriers for women,

children, indigenous people,

people of color, black people,

people who identify in the lgbtqia2+ community,

people who are differently abled,

whether physically or mentally or both.

As the church,

we are called to use our positions of privilege...

to advocate for people living in poverty.

Challenging our governments to change policies...

that continue to create barriers for many people.

As the church,

we are called to share of the gifts...

we have been given...

to help care for those...

living in poverty.

To help show them that they are valued.

I think of our partnership...

with Saint Andrews Memorial Anglican Church,

in hosting a breakfast...

where people...

who have trouble accessing food...

can come and enjoy a warm meal.

Or the reverse Advent calendar,

our donations to Anova...

at the beginning of the school year,

the sock drive,

our donations to the food bank,

our participation in the annual pride parade in July,

our recognition and participation in orange shirt day.

These are all examples...

of how we are being active participants...

in trying to create a more equitable place...

for people to live.

As the church,

we are called to challenge people...

to think differently...

about people...

who live in poverty.

To challenge the view...

that people who live in poverty are lazy,

are taking advantage of the system,

are deserving of their circumstances.

When we think in these ways...

it allows us to rationalize...

our unwillingness to share our gifts with others.

It allow us to rationalize...

our marginalization of people living in poverty.

Instead,

we are called to do more...

to promote education around mental health...

to help people not stigmatize or marginalize people...

who struggle with addiction...

and other mental illnesses.

To be empowered...

to create programs and ministries...

that offer support for people...

who are struggling with mental illness.

Hoping to break down...

some of the social barriers they face...

that make them more vulnerable to poverty.

Likewise,

to promote education...

about social barriers...

that other people

(like some of the social groups I listed above) face...

that make them more vulnerable to poverty.

And how we can help them...

overcome these barriers.

Or work with them and the authorities...

to break down these barriers

As we see in Luke's gospel,

Jesus comes into the world,

to breathe God's justice and fairness into it.

To break down the barriers...

that keep people...

from getting what they need.

As the church,

we all have a role to play...

in revealing...

where we see this justice and fairness...

at work in the world.

As well,

being active participants in this work.

So, to transform our community...

into the kind of community...

Jesus envisions for us to be. **Amen.**

Sermon February 23rd, 2025

The Unity of the Church

In the gospels,

Jesus ministers to people...

from different ethnicities,

different economic statuses,

different age demographics,

different social groups,

showing us...

that one of the core purposes of his ministry...

is to bring us together as one.

To heal our divisions.

To break down barriers...

that cause division in our communities.

To promote unity among God's children.

Among all God's creatures.

Paul, Peter, James, and John,

carries on this core purpose...

in their ministry...

as they write letters...

to address issues...

that were dividing their communities.

Calling the churches back...

to being a unified body.

Reminding them of how important unity is...

for the life of the church.

Resurrecting the vision...

God has had for the world...

since its origin.

To live in peace and harmony...

with one another.

Of course,

as we see in the history of the church,

unity isn't always so easy to live out.

For example,

the people in the communities...

the apostles minister to...

are wrestling with a lot of contentious issues.

James is dealing with a community...

that is arguing over...

where people should sit...

in the sanctuary.

Some believe the people living in poverty...

and the people with wealth,
in the church,
should sit apart from each other.

With the wealthy people...

getting the best seats,

right near the level,

while the poor people...

get to be in the nosebleed section.

James is of course...

challenging this view.

Arguing that everyone...

should be treated equal in the church.

According to the book of Acts,

Paul and the other Christian leaders...

wrestle with two of the most contentious issues...

of their time...

as Gentiles start entering the fold.

Should circumcision be a requirement...

for membership in the church...

or is baptism enough?

And what can we eat?

Do we continue to stick to the dietary laws...

set out by Moses?

Or has Peter's vision...

challenging us to not worry so much...

about these food restrictions.

Especially if it leads us...

to act in inhospitable ways.

Be the way we go.

Lots of contentious issues in the early church,

that make Jesus' vision of unity...

a hard one to keep alive.

And I would like to say...

that this was just an early church problem,

and they eventually figured it all out.

But I can't.

Over the centuries,

we continued to find issues...

to argue about.

In some cases,

these issues became so contentious...

that it led to great division in the church.

One example of this...

is during the Reformation,
where a lot of contentious issues surfaced,
and became too difficult at the time...
for the leaders to find common ground around,
which then led to a major split,
and the birth of the protestant church.

Issues like do we really need the sanctuary...

to be so decorated...
with statues and other fixtures?
Does one need to be old enough...
to commit to Christ...
before receiving the waters of baptism?
Is communion a memorial...

where the elements remain bread and wine,

a symbol of Christ,

or is communion a sacrament...

where the elements...

are the real presence of Christ?

Should priests and nuns...

have to take the vow of celibacy?

Why does the church...

need a practice like indulgences...

when God's forgiveness is free?

Then fast forward to the last fifty years...

in the church's history,

and we have argued...

and divided over contentious issues...

around women's ordination,

same sex blessings,

pluralism,

and restructuring...

to deal with the changes we are facing...

trying to be the church...

in the 21st century.

Unfortunately,

there are examples in the church's history...

where we struggle to live out this vision of unity...

Jesus has in mind for us.

With that being said,

we continue to proclaim...

and try to live out this vision of unity,

because it is a core vision...

that is expressed through Jesus' ministry,

and the ministry of the early believers.

And we see in the examples...

where we have been able to come together,

all the wonderful work...

we are able to do in Jesus' name.

This Sunday we,

the worship team,

chose to commemorate Christian unity...

in our order of service,

using a resource...

that is put together every year...

by the World Council of Churches.

An organization that's purpose...
is to continue promoting this vision of unity.
Inviting churches to come together,
to focus on what we share in common.
So, we can work together...
in these areas of ministry...
to reveal God's love to the world.

Though politically motivated...

to some degree...
by the emperor,
the council of Nicaea...
came together with this same purpose.
To find common ground on their beliefs,
creating a confessional statement...

to help direct the church...

in their ministries together.

There are times in our history...

when we come together...

and do amazing things in Jesus' name.

As Christians...

we do share common values...

that help us put our differences aside...

and work towards doing good in our community.

Our readings this morning...

talk about four common values.

First, we are human like Thomas.

We all carry with us doubts, fears, questions.

None of us have all the answers.

When we come to the dialogue table...

with this humility,

this humanity,

we open our ears and listen.

Learning from each other.

Second, we love God with all our heart...

and all our soul.

Everyone in the church loves God...

and is motivated by this love...

to do good in the world.

Sometimes we disagree...

on what that looks like,

but at the root,

is the same belief,

to love God with all our heart...

and all our soul.

And this love can draw us together...

in incredible ways,

so we can reveal God's love...

to the people we minister to.

Third,

we are motivated by our faith...

to want to pass it down to our children,

our grandchildren,

our great grandchildren.

And we are saddened...

when we are unable to do this.

As we deal with a church...

where our youngest generations are missing,

this is a common motivation...

we all are feeling.

How do we make the church relevant...

to our grandchildren and great grandchildren?

Fourth,

we all believe in the power...

the story of the resurrection has...

for our lives.

Especially when we are facing suffering.

The belief that our circumstances can change,

that we can experience new life...

when we feel down and out...

can be very empowering.

It definitely was for the early believers...

who after witnessing the crucifixion...

felt all but lost.

But then from this story of Jesus...

rising from the dead...

felt empowered to carry on the ministry...

even in the face of persecution.

What I have found working...

in ecumenical and interfaith circles,

is that we have a lot more in common than we think.

Jesus' vision for us to be a unified church is possible...

even when it can feel like...we are more divided than ever.

May we continue to hope in this vision...

and live this out wherever we can. **Amen.**