

## Shared worship hosted by TMUC

Welcome to the second Sunday of summer online worship shared by The United Church of Canada faith communities of Spirit Path, The United Church in Meadowood, Transcona Memorial, Trinity and Westminster United Churches.

During this COVID time, we have all found new, innovative and creative ways to continue worshipping online when we could not gather in-person due to health regulations.

One of the fun aspects of this summer's shared worship, is that people of the varying faith communities get to experience the worship styles and formats that have been used by the other communities.

People have received Transcona Memorial's online weekly worship via a Friday email. The email sometimes contains congregational updates, and then the worship section.

The worship consists of print sections for people to read as well as several links to YouTube postings of music, reflections and Esther and Emmett – TMUC's puppet ministry.

So today we welcome everyone to share in TMUC's online worship experience.

We invite you to begin this week's worship by viewing the introductory video created by our five faith communities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= kNFEJ9QdWw>

Our five faith communities are grateful for the ways in which people have been sharing in ministry during this pandemic and have been caring about our communities through prayer and financial support. Please check your faith community's website for information on the ways in which donations can be made – whether through PAR, through [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org), e-transfers or mailed cheques. Thank you.

Even though we cannot be physically together in one place, let's continue to be communities at prayer together. On Sunday, please think about the gifts we have in our lives, and needs of our world, and then pray the Lord's prayer (you can pray silently, or out loud).

And, sometime, when you want to have a longer worship time, we are including some words and videos for your use.

As we share this week's worship service, we are called again to listen to words of reconciliation:

We are gathered for worship and work in Treaty One territory, which is the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dené peoples and the homeland of the Metis Nation. For thousands of years Indigenous Peoples walked this land and knew it to be the centre of their lives and their spirituality. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

Worship for Sunday, July 11, 2021

Introit: "Come All You People"

<https://youtu.be/kNmedZez-d8>

Come, Holy Spirit!  
Come to awaken our faith,  
to inspire our hope  
to embolden our love  
and to let Christ live in us!  
Come, Holy Spirit!

Our opening hymn is Make Me a Channel of Your Peace (From Westminster: soloist Rebecca Mcintosh; pianist Don Menzies)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKZ44RtHA44>

Esther and Emmett talk about gathering up a lot of stuff!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apZRR4SnPDA>

Noelle Bowles (Spirit Path) reads our scripture lesson from Ephesians 1:3-14

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2YJxX3qjYY>

Jeff Cook (TMUC) offers a reflection:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWC4fD-fzBk>

Members of TMUC's music team share the hymn "Holy Spirit, Come into Our Lives"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW1fu60pSpU>

Let us pray:

God, our faith awakens as You call to us.

You call us to move in rhythm with the movement of Your Spirit - Your reconciling-distributive-justice-making Spirit, Your grace, Your love, Your creating Presence...

You call us to accompany Jesus and to rediscover our home in the heart of our Creator, our home in the heart of Your love....

You call us into the wonder, the depth, the awe of Jesus...Jesus who embodies for us a soul grounded in God, who offers himself as a channel of Your healing, Your faithfulness, Your resurrection into new life...

You call us as Your beloved, as Your chosen...

Give us faith to walk with Jesus.

Give us courage to follow Christ's way of compassionate healing and non-violence.

Give us hope to seek reconciliation and new community.

Give us love to see Your presence in those we meet.

God, You call us to call out on behalf of Your world...

And so we call out to You in prayer...

We pray for wisdom and time to change our human practices, to affirm our place as creatures living in Your creation; as creatures living in relationship with the rest of creation.

May we have vision to relinquish lifestyles that weaken the ozone layer and deplete earth's resources and bring disease to earth's harmony and balance. May we embrace practices of right relations with all Your creation.

We pray for Canadians to embrace and live into healing and reconciliation throughout this country.

We pray for communities in British Columbia that are threatened by fires, and we pray for all the firefighters trying to extinguish the flames.

We pray for communities facing drought, hurricanes, floods or other ecological challenges.

We pray for the people of Haiti following the assassination of their President Jovenel Moise. We pray for peace in that country.

We pray for all people living in places of war and conflict. We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia.

We pray for all who live with physical, emotional, mental and spiritual disease. We pray for healing. We pray for access to medical treatment. We pray for supportive communities of family, friends and caregivers.

We pray for all who experience loneliness. We pray for all who feel isolated. We pray for them to know your grace and to experience the blessing of loving friends.

We pray that people globally have access to COVID vaccination and we pray for the global community to safely and wisely emerge from the restrictions with which we have lived during this pandemic.

We pray that all earth and heaven be gathered into Your love, and that we live with faith, hope, courage and love.

In Christ's name we pray. AMEN

Our closing hymn is "When Long Before Time"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9\\_m-6sgbyM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9_m-6sgbyM)

May God bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you.

May God grant you peace and joy.

Be in the peace of Christ, this day and always. Amen

And for those who cannot access the videos of Esther and Emmett or Jeff's reflection, here are the texts:

### **Esther and Emmett on 'Gather Lots of Stuff'**

Esther: Hi Emmett.

Emmett: Hi Esther (Emmett is holding a glass, which he sets down). I'll be right back (goes off screen; returns carrying some books, that he sets down). I'll be right back (goes off screen, comes back carrying a hat, that he sets down). I'll be right back (starts to leave...)

Esther: Emmett...what are you doing?

Emmett: I'm helping God!

Esther: Helping God!

Emmett: Hey, would you like to help me help God, because I don't think I can do this all by myself!

Esther: What are you doing?

Emmett: I am gathering together everything that is on earth!

Esther: You are gathering together everything on earth!

Emmett: Yep! Say, I can add this apple.

Esther: Everything on earth is a lot of stuff!

Emmett: Yeah...I may need a bigger table.

Esther: Emmett, I think that if you want to gather everything on earth, what you need is not a table. What you need is the earth itself! That's the only thing big enough to hold everything on earth!

Emmett: Esther, that makes sense. But if I have to travel all over the earth in order to gather everything all over the earth...hmmm...this may take longer that I thought it would!

Esther: So why do you think God wants you to gather together everything on earth?

Emmett: I think that because I read it in the Bible, in a letter written to the Effusions!

Esther: I think you mean the Ephesians – a letter written to church groups who lived in the city of Ephesus.

Emmett: Really! Well that makes sense. I thought the Effusions sounded like a rock band.

Esther: So, what did the letter to the Ephesians say about gathering things?

Emmett: It said that God had a plan to gather up all things in heaven and on earth.

Esther: So you have to gather everything on earth...and everything in 'heaven'!! How are you going to do that?

Emmett: I hadn't actually figured that part out yet. Maybe while I gather the stuff on earth, you could gather all the stuff in heaven!

Esther: Or...MAYBE...we could think about whether this passage from the Bible means something else than what you think it means.

Emmett: Oh no! This is that Jesus thing again, isn't it? Where Jesus says one thing but it means something else?

Esther: Yeah, I think it is.

Emmett: (sighs) Okay. What do you think it might mean?

Esther: Well, if I remember the passage correctly, it also says something about God having a plan for the "fullness of time."

Emmett: Yeah, it says that – the "fullness of time" – but that didn't make any sense to me so I just kinda skipped over that part. Sometimes it's easier to read the Bible when you skip over the tough parts!

Esther: Oh Emmett! What if the fullness of time means the time when time is full?

Emmett: Oh, yeah, that's much easier to understand..I don't know what that means either!

Esther: I think the 'fullness of time' means when time is full of what it is supposed to be full of – God's love! When the world is the way God wants it to be; when people treat each other the way God wants people to treat each other.

Emmett: That would be like how Jesus treated people. He shared food with them; and he told them that God loved them and cared about them; and he always seem

to have time to spend with anyone who wanted to see him; and he even thought it was great to have children running around him!

Esther: Yes. It's like when a family gets together for Christmas dinner or a birthday celebration – we sometimes say that the family has gathered to celebrate.

Emmett: Soooo...gathering all things on earth and in heaven...is like gathering God's family together?

Esther: I think so. Jesus shows us that God wants us to find ways to live together as friends, family, people who know that we are all God's children and all are loved.

Emmett: Hmm...say Esther, would you like to help me put all this stuff I've gathered back where I got it from?

Esther: Okay. I'll put back all the heaven stuff and you can put back all the earth stuff!

Emmett: Great...wait a minute...!

Esther: And then we can say 'Amen.'

Emmett: Amen!

### **Jeff's reflection:**

In the scripture reading we heard from Ephesians, the author tells people that God has chosen them, and destined them for adoption.

I want to consider that idea of being 'chosen'. I think it makes a difference whether we think we are chosen, or we think we are THE CHOSEN.

The word 'the' is a little word, but it can make a large difference.

For example, if you are 'a winner', you are including amongst the other winners. But if you are 'the' winner, then you are the only winner.

Similarly, there is a difference between being chosen and being 'the chosen'. If you are 'the chosen', it implies you have a special responsibility and perhaps special privileges. By implication, everyone else falls in the category of the unchosen.

Historically, The Chosen often are tempted to get everyone else to assimilate to their view of the world, their plan for the world, their management of the world.

But, 'being chosen,' - rather than being 'the chosen' - is a bit different. As a hockey fan, I've been watching the NHL playoffs and have heard the commentators sometimes say about a player, "He was chosen 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the 2017 draft, or he was chosen in the second round of the draft etc...."

They could say that for everyone who is playing, because every player was, at some point, chosen by a team.

I think that distinction can be helpful when we read today's words from the letter that the apostle Paul (or perhaps one of Paul's followers as scholars are undecided as to whether Paul was the actual author) wrote to church communities in the city of Ephesus in the first century.

Paul was writing to give them courage and faith for being an alternative community. Paul was writing to remind them of their identity as people chosen by God to be the presence of Christ in Ephesus.

He wrote to people living in Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the largest cities in Asia Minor. Originally a Greek city, it had come under the control of Rome in the year 129 BCE. Ephesus was impressive. It was located near one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis. It was the home of the 2000 square foot library of Celsus, third largest library in the Roman Empire. The city had a theatre seating over 20,000 that hosted both theatrical productions and gladiatorial contests.

There were also six Roman-created aqueducts constructed primarily to provide water for Roman baths in Ephesus. Aqueducts were an engineering feat, structures rising into the air, moving water great distances; visual proclamations of Rome's mastery not only of people, but of the earth and its water sources. Everything succumbed to the power of the Roman Empire.

Anyone living in Ephesus was inundated with ever-present evidence that this was Rome's world, ruled over by Caesar, by an Emperor who often was described as being either the son of God, or an adopted son of God.

But in Ephesus, were small communities whose loyalty was not to Caesar, the Son of God, but to Jesus, the Son of God; not to the Lord of the Empire, but to their Lord Jesus Christ. Their faith was not in the Father Caesar, but in the God and Father of Jesus Christ. (Note: many of the terms the early church used to refer to Jesus were terms that were typically used to refer to Caesar and were used to contrast Jesus to Caesar. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar isn't!)

Paul wrote to Christian communities existing amongst the prominence of Rome on display in Ephesus – if this was a contest in the gladiatorial theatre between the Christian communities and Rome, the smart money would be on Rome!

But remember, the Paul who introduced Jesus to communities throughout the Roman Empire, was the Paul who said God's wisdom is found in what appears to be foolish – in a crucified Saviour. Paul says, don't let the smart money tell you where to place your faith.

Because says Paul, you have been chosen – God has chosen you, God has adopted you – you think you know who you are -your family history, your parents, your siblings, your uncles and aunts...you know the family to which you belong...but know that you also belong to another family...God's family...God has chosen you. Moreover, don't be impressed when you hear that Caesar is God's adopted son, because God has adopted 'you' – as daughter, as son, as child of God.

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer, we are told that the voice of God named Jesus as God's Son, as God's beloved. Then Jesus began to gather a community, began to heal, began to tell stories/parables, began to invite others to gather around a table and share food, began to restore people's ability to walk and see, began to restore people to their communities; began to name others as daughters and sons of God, began to tell people that Jesus was the beloved because everyone was God's beloved. Jesus revealed he was not 'the chosen one' but he was the one chosen to tell us that we are all chosen! We are all chosen by

God. God has chosen us to be God's children, God's people, God's creation, God's beloved.

God has chosen us to gather all things in heaven and on earth. To gather everything into this deep love of God; to understand the world and to live in the world out of a faith that this is really God's world; to gospel the world, to good news the world...to reveal that we belong to and in God.

Those who are chosen by God in the Biblical stories are not chosen because they are the best, the brightest and the most promising. Those whom God chooses are quite human, quite flawed, quite given to acts both of courageous faith and of self-centered ambition. Peter walked on water...until he sank. Paul himself was first known to Christian communities as the enemy who was hunting them down.

They were chosen, not so much because of what they could accomplish, but because of what God might accomplish with them and through them.

They were somehow containers of God's spirit, carriers of God's presence, vessels of God's love, ...somehow, God was both with them and in them.

Jesus welcomed people into God's *chosen-ness*: fishers, tax collectors, the poor, the lame, the woman who debates theology with him beside a well, the ostracized, a centurion, Nicodemus the Pharisee, Mary and Martha, the children, the women, the men ...welcomed them as those chosen by God to share the good news that God chooses all of us, God adopts all of us, we are God's.

Paul wrote to communities in Ephesus to remind them not to be gathered into the Roman Empire, but be gathered into God's love, and then to gather the people of Ephesus into God's love.

We can read the letter to the Ephesians as words of encouragement and inspiration to first century faith communities and then we can allow the letter to 'read us' to invite us to ask, "If Paul were writing today to faith communities in Winnipeg – if Paul were writing to the faith communities participating in this summer series of shared online worship – if Paul were writing to Spirit Path, Trinity, Westminster, the United Church in Meadowood, and Transcona Memorial – what would Paul be saying to us?"

Let me suggest a couple of possibilities:

Today, Paul would remind us that we are chosen, but we are not 'the chosen.' Author Harvey Cox, formerly a professor at Harvard's Divinity School, participated in a number of interfaith dialogues and gatherings – Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews. Cox observed that such dialogues turned into debate and disagreement when they focused on the differing faiths beliefs, creeds, and doctrines. However, when he said they shared their personal experiences of God, Allah, the sacred, the transcendent or the spiritual, then they found commonalities of experience and of questions. We are chosen amongst all the chosen, so as followers of the way of Christ, we live our faith in the spirit of Christ, and we share our experiences of the sacred in Christ, and we listen to the experiences of other faith communities. Especially today in Canada we are reminded to listen to the spiritual experiences of Indigenous peoples, as we learn from and with one another, as we honour the sacredness in which we all live.

Barbara Brown Taylor, who taught a course called Religions of the World at Piedmont College in Georgia. She says that people should be taught that the Golden Rule includes honouring the neighbour's religion as they would have the neighbour honour theirs. Brown tells of a minister who, during a sermon, suggested to her congregation that Christianity was one way among many ways to God. After the service a man came up to her and asked, "If God isn't partial to Christianity, then what am I doing here?"

Brown goes on to comment, "I wish ordinary Christians took exams, so I could put that question on the final. As natural as it may be to want to play on the winning team, the wish to secure divine favoritism strikes me as the worst possible reason to practice any religion. If the man who asked that question could not think of a dozen better reasons to be a Christian than that, then what, indeed, was he doing there?"

Chosen not for divine favouritism but chosen for divine love and to express divine love in our living and our relationships.

Two: Paul would remind us that this faith grounded in Jesus the Christ will call us to an alternative way of life to the way of life that is grounded in practices of

domination, practices that think peace is found in the creation and accumulation of weapons of mass destruction; in practices of extracting and exploiting God's creation – God's water, soil, minerals - for human consumption and monetary profit. Our faith grounds us in an alternative practice of respect, non-violence, of sharing and blessing, and of practicing the sacred stewarding of God's sacred world.

Third: And Paul would remind us that in Christ we have inherited a way of living out our chosen-ness as people who follow the way of Jesus: who embody healing; as people who seek a sharing of resources so that all have enough and none have too much; as people who constantly expand our tables in order to welcome any and all to God's table; as people who ask God to give us the courage to forgive, and as people who see the sacred , the image of God, in everyone.

We are chosen to live the good news that we live in God's love, that God's love lives in us, and that we can choose to live in a world in which everyone has been chosen as a child of God.

So, whether we live in Ephesus or Winnipeg, or any other community we can name- wherever we are - let us be open to God's spirit in Christ; let us believe that we are chosen, that everyone is chosen; that we are companions of the beloved one of God who welcomes each of us as God's beloved; let us remember that we are children of the Creator, the Sacred, the reality we call God, and that we are called to share the love of God we experience in Jesus, the one we name the Christ.

Thanks be to God. AMEN