



# Église Unie Summerlea United Church

Sunday, May 24 2020 Dimanche, 24 mai

## THE 7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Welcome to Merging Waters Pastoral Charge joining us this Sunday*

**Prelude** "Courante" Handel

### Call to Worship

**Hymn** "Spirit Divine, Attend Our Prayers" VU 385

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

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

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

Come as the fire and purge our hearts  
like sacrificial flame;  
let our whole life an offering be  
to our Redeemer's name.

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

### Gathering Prayer

#### Scripture readings:

**John 17:1-11 Jesus Prays for His Disciples**

**Acts 1:6-14 The Seven Helpers/The Arrest of Stephen**

**Hymn** "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" VU 664

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful,  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?

Christ the Saviour is our refuge;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do our friends despise, forsake us?  
Are we tempted to despair?  
Jesus' strength will shield our weakness,  
and we'll find new courage there.

## Sermon Don't Just Stand There Looking Up

Summerlea U.C.  
Rev. Scott A. Patton  
May 24, 2020

John 17:1-11  
**Acts 1:6-14**

Prayer: Loving God, open our hearts and our minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the scriptures are read and your word is proclaimed, we may hear what you are saying to us today. And now, may the words of my mouth... Amen.

There are many wonderful memories I have of my late father, and even 37 years after his death, I still miss him a great deal. But he was human, just as we all are human, which means that some of what I remember has to do with that part of him that perhaps we could say was not quite as lovable as other aspects of his personality.

I'm talking about his patience, or really, his lack thereof. My grandfather used to tell me stories of how impatient his father was. My father used to tell me stories about how impatient my grandfather was (although, now that I think about it, it was really my mother who told me these stories about my father's father!!). And now, here I am telling you about how impatient my father was!

My great-grandfather was really impatient. My grandfather was really impatient. My father mostly tried to control it, but, deep down, he was really impatient. And guess what! I'm known for being really impatient too! (I'll bet you didn't see THAT coming, did you??)

Yes, I must confess, I'm one of the most impatient people I know. That's the only reason I talk about how impatient my forebears were, because I know that I am, too. I don't know whether it is possible for impatience to be passed on genetically as are other traits, which is too bad, because I'm not

sure if I can blame my ancestors for my impatience, but I would certainly like to.

Most of the time, I find ways to control and cope with my impatience. Occasionally, I just let it fly, and I rant and rave for a few minutes, and then I feel better. And I have to admit that driving is the worst. Don't even get me started on how annoyed I get when other drivers don't do what I want them to do!

But aside from occasional outbursts when things don't go the way I want them to, I can usually keep my impatience pretty much in check. And I think part of the reason for that is that I can easily imagine how impatient God must get with us sometimes – both US as individuals, and US as the church.

I take a great deal of comfort from knowing that God is infinitely patient, and that is a characteristic I admire in anyone (especially my partner Ron). But still, I can't help but wonder what God must think sometimes. I'm sure there are times when God laments the state of the world just as we lament it; times when God yearns for everything to be made right again in God's creation.

I'm sure there are also times when God laments that we ourselves, God's people, are so quick to pray "they kingdom come, on earth...", but so slow sometimes to help make that a reality. Maybe we've become complacent. Maybe we've begun to doubt that the little bit we're able to do will actually make a difference.

What we sometimes seem to easily forget is that we have been commissioned by Jesus himself to carry on with the work that he began when he was here on earth among us.

It also seems that there are times when we forget that we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit which can, if we allow it, fill us with energy and enthusiasm to do God's work and to be God's people in the world.

Perhaps we think we need to be super-human in order to do what we are being called to do. What we often seem to forget is that it was ordinary people just like you and me who were first called to be followers of the risen Christ, and who built the church that began with just a few individuals, then

grew into a few congregations, then grew into the church that spread throughout the world.

In fact, some of those people were much more ordinary than you and me!! But they had one thing that made a difference in their lives: the in-dwelling Holy Spirit that gave them the power and the motivation to carry out the work that was begun by Jesus.

It seems that this is what was uppermost in Jesus' mind as he was bringing his earthly ministry to a close and preparing his followers to continue the work of spreading the gospel.

Jesus prayed on their behalf, and as he said the words, "And now I am no longer in the world," he must have felt a sense of urgency about what little time he had left to prepare his followers for the time ahead when he would no longer be with them in person.

But Jesus promised that soon they would be given the gift of the Holy Spirit, and by this Spirit, Jesus would still be with them, although in an entirely different way. Jesus would indeed be with them in Spirit, but they would have to make their own decisions about how to carry on the work that was begun by Jesus. And they DID carry on that work; in fact, they took the message of God's kingdom farther than Jesus had taken it, although they never forgot that it all began with Jesus.

Rather like the opening performance of the opera *Turandot*, by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. In 1922, at the age of 64, Puccini was diagnosed with cancer. In spite of his illness, he continued to work at writing *Turandot*, which many people consider to be his best opera.

Close to the time of his death, Puccini wrote to his students, "If I don't finish *Turandot*, I want you to finish it for me."

In fact, he did not complete it, but immediately following his death in 1924, his students gathered together all the scores, studied them with great care, and completed the opera.

The opening performance took place in 1926. It was conducted by one of Puccini's students, Arturo Toscanini. Reaching the place in the score where Puccini had stopped writing, Toscanini put down his baton, turned to the audience and said to them, "Thus far the master wrote, and then he died."

No one moved and no one spoke for several minutes. Then, Toscanini picked up his baton, turned to the audience, smiled through his tears and spoke again, saying, "but his disciples have finished his work."

Today, even being separated from the person Jesus by more than 2,000 years, the Church is still being called upon to carry on the work that was begun by Jesus. We, in our time, have never had the luxury of having Jesus with us in person, but still he is there to lead us and guide us as we go about the work of being the church.

But the problem seems to be that some Christians have never quite gotten used to not having the person Jesus here with us. We have sometimes thought that we cannot make it on our own, and because of that, we sometimes tend to be like the disciples who stood gazing up into the sky as Jesus was taken up into heaven.

It is interesting to note this incident around which the Book of Acts begins. Biblical scholars today regard Luke as the author of BOTH the Gospel of Luke, as well as the Book of Acts. Luke's gospel ends with Jesus being taken up into heaven and reminds the reader that this was the final moment in Jesus' extraordinary life on earth.

But whereas Jesus' ascension in Luke's gospel points the way into the past, and the great things Jesus did during his lifetime, culminating in his ascension into heaven, the Book of Acts begins with a similar story of the ascension, but his time, it points toward the future, as the early, Spirit-filled Church was just beginning.

Luke's gospel is about the work and ministry Jesus did, accompanied by his disciples. The Book of Acts is about the work and ministry of Jesus' followers in the early days of the church, when Jesus was no longer physically present with them.

This was confirmed by the mysterious "two men in white robes" who spoke to the disciples immediately after the ascension. They said, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven." We can picture these disciples witnessing the spectacle of Jesus suddenly being taken up by a cloud into heaven. They likely stood with their mouths open, not sure whether they should believe what they had just seen, but also realizing that Jesus would no longer be with them in the same way as he had been.

It seems to me that some people have seemingly not progressed beyond this point. Faced with the awesome task of continuing in the footsteps of Jesus, it seems they have decided to look up into the sky instead, as if to catch some glimpse of Jesus, or to anticipate his return. And unfortunately, this is where some have stayed.

The problem is, however, that God and the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit, are among us here in this world, still carrying on the ministry in which Jesus participated during his earthly life. When we stand looking up toward heaven, we miss experiencing God in the only place where we CAN experience God in this life: in our world, and in our lives.

God IS INDEED present with us. Jesus DOES INDEED continue to call us to carry on the work of the church, which is the work of proclaiming the good news of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit WILL INDEED be the driving force behind all our actions if we open ourselves to that Spirit that seeks to live within each one of us.

But in order for us to find these things, we have to know where to look. And for the church, it is not looking aimlessly up into the sky waiting for Jesus' return that matters, but rather, looking into the world around us to see the work that God is doing among us, and responding when God's Spirit speaks to us and says, "don't just stand there, get on with the task of being the church."

This is something that was expressed very well in a poem by William Crowell Doane, called *The Preacher's Mistake*:

The parish priest of austerity  
Climbed up in a high church steeple  
To be nearer to God,  
So that he might hand  
God's word down to his people.

And now and again  
When he heard the creak  
Of the weathervane a-turning,  
He closed his eyes  
And said, "Of a truth  
From God I now am learning."

And in sermon script  
He daily wrote  
What he thought was sent from heaven,  
And he dropped this down  
On his people's heads  
Two times one day in seven.

In his age God said,  
"Come down and die!"  
And he cried out from the steeple,  
"Where art thou, Lord?"  
And the Lord replied,  
"Down here among my people."

As we bring the season of Easter to a close, and as we prepare to celebrate the Day of Pentecost next Sunday, may we know that the risen Christ calls us to be a church that responds to the call to live and preach the good news in all the world.

Let us not be a church that simply gazes heavenward, waiting for Christ to return someday. Rather, let us go out in the power of the Holy Spirit to carry on with the work and ministry that Jesus himself began among us – which is the work of bringing new life to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Offering and Prayer of Dedication

### Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer

Hymn "Go to the World"

VU 420

Go to the world! Go into all the earth.  
Go preach the cross where Christ renews life's worth,  
baptising as the sign of our rebirth.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Go to the world! Go into every place.  
Go live the Word of God's redeeming grace.  
Go seek God's presence in each time and space.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Go to the world! Go struggle, bless and pray;  
the nights of tears give way to joyous day.  
As servant Church, you follow Christ's own way.  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Go to the world! Go as the ones I send,  
for I am with you 'til the age shall end,  
when all the hosts of glory cry "Amen!"  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

### **Commissioning and Benediction**

**Postlude** Gigue En Rondeau II                      Jean-Philippe Rameau

### **Organ Hymns**



*Have a good week,*

*Rev Scott, John, Connie, & Colleen*