

A Worship Service for Faith Communities for May 30, 2021
Provided by the Faith Formation and Leadership Team of Region 15

Prelude

Welcome

Welcome to church on this Regional Annual Meeting Sunday. Today's service has been prepared by the Region 15 Faith Formation and Leadership Development Committee, in what we hope will be a project that continues in future years to provide communities of faith in the region with a service of worship to use when their ministry personnel are away for the regional annual meetings.

Today's service is modeled on the opening worship at the Region 15 meetings. The theme of this year's meeting is Beacons of Hope. You will see that theme reflected in the prayers, music, readings and reflections today.

Call to Worship

"In you, O God we take refuge". (Psalm 31:1)

**As we think of those around us both physically and virtually,
help us to find space to be grounded as we worship you, together.**

Let us have compassion to those suffering
and be the strength and guiding light to all who reach out.

We come, expectant of a sign, a beacon of hope.

Come, Let us Worship.

Hymn MV 28 "God of the Bible" (vs. 1 and 3)

Conversation with Children (See to "Worship Resources" below for a suggestion.)

Repeat-after-me prayer:

*Dear God,
Thank you for good times.
Thank you for hard times.
Thank you for using all times,
to create this beautiful life.
Thank you for the hope,
that you are always with us.
Amen.*

Hymn MV 28 "God of the Bible" (just chorus)

*Sing: "Fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise,
God always faithful, you do not change."*

A Covenant Prayer

(provided by the Region 15 Faith Stories and Community Covenants Committee)

Christ's body is composed of many parts. Christ has many ministries. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some bring honour, others bring reproach. Some are suitable to our natural inclinations and temporal interests; others are contrary to both. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us. (Continued>>)

To be said in the Communities of Faith (in unison):

**We the people of X Pastoral Charge / Incorporated Ministry / Community of Faith
renew our covenant of mutual responsibility with Region 15 of the United Church of Canada.
We will seek after God in all we say and think and do
and live in communion with God and each other.
We will search for what God wants through Prayer, in Scripture
and by fellowshiping with each other as we listen to God through many media.
We will celebrate God's Presence in worship, music, life passages, and Sacraments.
We will invite others to join us in our journey with God.
We will do all things for the glory of God and the good of God's World.
We give ourselves to God and rededicate ourselves
to live in covenant as the people of God and the Living Body of Christ.
To God be all glory, praise, honour and thanksgiving, now and forever, Amen.**

Suggested Scripture Readings

[Lamentations 3:19-24](#)

[Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 24](#)

[Romans 8:24-31](#)

[Matthew 11:25-28](#)

Hymn VU 703 "In the Bulb There is a Flower"

Reflection "Hope and Resilience" (See "**Worship Resources**" below for two options)

Hymn VU 409 "Morning Has Broken"

Minute for Mission (see "**Worship Resources**" below for suggested reading if you don't have one.)

Invitation to the Offering

Offering Prayers modified with thanks from Carol Penner <https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2011/10/faith-offering-prayer.html>

Leader: We don't always know how much money we have, or how much we will need;
in precarious economic times we are tempted to hoard our money for ourselves.
In this offering we can show our faith and hope, that God will supply all our needs.

Presentation Hymn MV 191 "What Can I Do"

Dedication Prayer (Unison)

**We walk by faith and hope,
we live by faith and hope,
we give by faith and hope.
God of great gifts, you have given us so much,
accept these gifts from our hands,
our faithful response to your abundant grace. Amen.**

Caring for Our Neighbours: A Pandemic Pastoral Prayer

Modified from a prayer submitted to re-worship.blogspot.com submitted by Reverend Brenda Torrie, First United Methodist Church in Newcastle, Wyoming

In these days of knowing, not knowing,
We, like the buds on the trees, are eager to burst forth into the world.
Hold us gently in place until we are certain in the ways of loving our neighbor.

Let us not toss ourselves and neighbor into thoughtless harm.
Let us recall that all life is sacred in your eyes,
from newborn children to those with lines of life lived etched upon their hands and faces,
and everyone in between including those whose immune systems are compromised.
All are your beloved, whose care we are blessed to bear.

And we seek blessing upon all
who have answered a call to care for us in our times of physical healing,
no matter our opinion, our ideology, our hardship, God.
All these, we hold in our care as neighbors.

Help us to hear that caring for one another is your command on our lives.
Open our ears to hear the tragedy in this time of coronavirus,
and not only our own anxiety and grief that may come on blustering words and tired rhetoric.
Instead, let us think on how we will make the world a better place.

Instead, let us think on what kindness, however small, we might offer someone.

Instead, let us remember that our life is not our own, but belongs to you.

Instead, let us dream how we might enter our communities to be a beacon of hope
for those living in disorder and to come alongside them while they find order;
alongside them while they reorder their lives.

Help us always, God, to remember our promise to you that we will care for our neighbor as ourselves, that
your son Jesus taught us. Let us lift these prayers and all the prayers of our hearts into one as we pray
together as Jesus also taught us:

The Prayer of Jesus (Use the one familiar to your community)

**Our Father/Mother/God,
Who is in Heaven, holy is Your name.
Your kingdom come, Your will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us from sin,
as we forgive them who sin against us.
Save us from a time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Hymn MV 135 “Called by Earth and Sky”

Commissioning and Benediction

Go out and be that beacon of hope within your communities.
Help those that need the strength of hope to carry on each day.
Be the beacon of light that can be a saving grace for each of us.
Shine bright and share the stories of hope that can sustain not only us
but all those around us as we move into each day.

And now, May the Love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit
be with you wherever you are in the week ahead.
Amen.

Postlude

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Conversation with Children - Let God do the Baking!

Modified from <https://www.creativebiblestudy.com/object-lesson-cake.html> © Copyright 2008 Susan Smart

Topic: When bad things happen, trust God.

Objects: Ingredients for a cake & an already baked cake or cupcakes...this could also be done with cookies or brownies!

Bible Verse: Romans 8:28 - *"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to God's good purpose."*

Key Takeaway: God can even use even the bad times in our lives for good.

Christian object lesson:

How many of you like to eat cake? Why? (Possible answers may include, it's sweet, tastes good, etc.)

Do any of you know what things go into a cake? [Give time for them to guess.]

Then all these things must be good - right?

Would you ever consider eating the ingredients of a cake separately?

A spoon of flour? A raw egg? A little oil?

How do you think they taste? (yucky!)

Of course, there is the sugar too - yum! :)

Show them the already baked cake or cupcakes or picture of it.

Life can be a lot like a baking! Separately there are some bitter times, some raw, hurtful times, and some dry, bland times.

Help them think of some "not-so-good" or tough times they have experienced or others may have experienced. Depending on the ages, it may be anything from a skinned knee to the loss of a loved one. Share something from your own life too. Remember your life is a wonderful living example for them!

But there are also the good times! Take a few minutes and have them think of some "good times" - birthday celebrations, new baby brother or sister, a vacation, a good meal, etc.

Some of the cake ingredients by themselves didn't taste very good, but when everything is mixed together we have a delicious cake to eat!

God is able to blend the good and the bad experiences in our lives together for our good. All together they create a life that is meaningful, useful, and tasty!

Romans 8:28 is a beautiful promise: *"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to God's good purpose."*

Depending on their ages, you can discuss more in detail how God has used some negative or tough times in your own life to bring about good. The Bible is also full of some great examples!

No - all things are not good, but in God's hands they can be mixed and blended along with the good into a beautiful creation. It's during the bad times that we see how BIG our God is. God loves each of us and God is in control; we can trust God!

Discuss how even though the ingredients do not taste good alone, they are all necessary for the cake to taste good in the end.

Repeat-after-me prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for good times.

Thank you for hard times.

Thank you for using all times,

to create this beautiful life.

Thank you for the hope,

that you are always with us. Amen.

Minute for Mission for May 30, 2021

“Outdoor Ministries” Published On: April 18, 2021

No children have died falling out of a tree, at least not in the 17 years statistics have been gathered. In fact, the leading cause of death of children is car accidents. While some parents fear letting their children play outside, the same parents think nothing of strapping their children into a car.

Over the last 35 years, attitudes have shifted. Increased screen time, along with fears about playground injuries and child abduction, mean that only a third of Canadian school-aged children get the exercise they need. As a result, childhood obesity, anxiety, and depression have soared.

Getting outside is good for our kids.

That’s why the United Church runs camps across the country. Today, your [Mission & Service](#) donations support approximately 25 United Church camps in Canada.

Overall, approximately 20,000 children attend a United Church camp each year. In COVID times, many of these camps have [pivoted to continue offering services](#) and encourage kids to get outside.

On Environment Sunday, we often focus on what we can do to reduce our personal footprint and to advocate for changes to social policies, particularly ones that impact climate change. Without a doubt, we need to do more to care for the world God made.

But Environment Sunday is also a good time to stop and appreciate how the created world takes care of us. As [Bill Darnell](#), one of the founders of Greenpeace says: “The environment doesn’t need us. It can get along without us. We need it.”

Let’s pause today and give thanks for all the ways the natural world sustains us, and especially our children. Specifically, we give thanks for the confidence, creativity, and imagination nature builds.

For the sense of responsibility it creates.

For the stimulation it provides.

For the mental and physical health it promotes. For the wonder it inspires.

And we give thanks for all of our camps.

And for you.

Thank you for supporting outdoor ministries through [Mission & Service](#). Your gifts help our children—and all of us—breathe more deeply.

Reflection Outlines

Written by Sharon M. Lohnes. Permission is given for use in worship for Sunday, May 30th 2021.

Option #1

Share stories of where your own congregation has seen “Beacons of Hope” during the past year of Covid restrictions. Some questions you might want to think about

- The passage from Lamentations begins with hopelessness and depression. Do you find yourself depressed and focusing on the negative more than normal?
- The passage continues with the words, “hope returns when I remember this one thing: The Lord’s unfailing love”. How do you remind yourself to “remember”? Where do you see examples of God’s love that have helped you refocus in this difficult time?
- The Psalms often lament the troubles of the writer, yet always end with words of hope and trust. How can we lament our current situation while still holding on to the hope that God will see us through into a better future?
- The passage from Romans reminds us that we do not hope for what we can already see or know. Our hope remains in the unknown. How do we hope for something that we cannot see or perhaps cannot even imagine?
- When has the Spirit come to offer you help?
- What good things have you seen come out of the difficulties we have experienced during the past year?
- In the Gospel reading Jesus promises rest to all who are “tired from carrying heavy loads”. What are the heavy loads that we are carrying during Covid?
- What will it take for us to lay down these loads and trust in God?
- What are the Beacons or the sign posts in your own life or in the life of your church, that point you towards hope?
- How can each of us become “Beacons of Hope” for others?

Scriptures: Lamentations 3:19-24
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16, 24
Romans 8:24-31
Gospel reading Matthew 11:25-28

Option #2

The following story offers a chance to think about what the Beacons of Hope in our own lives mean to us.

The Beacon

The story is told of an ancient culture that live high atop a rocky plateau. It was surrounded on all sides by steep cliffs and there was no path leading up or down. Yet despite their isolation, the people had all they needed; rich soil that grew abundant crops, fresh lakes that provided fish, forests that provided wood and wild animals and deep wells fed by fresh springs that provided plentiful water.

As long as anyone could remember, the entire purpose of their culture had been to keep *The Beacon* burning. They took great pride in insuring that it never went out, and in all of their history, there had never been a time when *The Beacon* had not shone brightly from the top of the plateau.

The people had always known that their work was important, because people from all over came to the foot of the cliffs to celebrate, to dance, and to sing songs of thanks for the light of the Beacon. From high above, the people heard the songs and knew that what they did, mattered.

But, as it always does, time past and things changed. Fewer and fewer people came to the foot of the cliff to offer their thanks for the light of *The Beacon*. Those who did come often seemed to come out of a sense of obligation rather than with joy and dancing. Where once the celebrations had gone on for days and days, now, when people did come, most stayed for only an hour or so and often seemed anxious to leave at the first opportunity.

The people of *The Beacon* began to feel unappreciated. Many became discouraged, wondering what they had done wrong that had caused the people to stop coming. Some even began to wonder why they were bothering to keep *The Beacon* burning at all if not one cared.

Grumbings began to grow across the plateau and finally a meeting was called to discuss the situation. Although there were many who argued that *The Beacon* should simply be allowed to die, others argued passionately that *The Beacon* still mattered. Finally, a decision was made. Four of the strongest, bravest members of the culture were selected to find a way down the cliffs and spread out in the four directions to find out if, in fact, *The Beacon* did still matter. Each was given a tiny ember from *The Beacon* to carry with them in case they might need it.

The first messenger travelled south, into the dense forests. As he travelled farther away from *The Beacon*, he found himself surrounded on all sides by tall trees, lush vegetation and thick undergrowth. Surly in a place such as this, *The Beacon* could not possibly matter. No one could even see it.

As night fell, the messenger wondered if he should simply turn around and head back with the sad news that, at least to the south, *The Beacon* did not matter. But just as he was debating doing this, he heard a faint whimper. As he listened, he realized it was a child. When he found the child, she was cold, frightened and all alone. Quickly, he took out the ember he carried with him and lit a fire to warm the cold child.

The two sat by the fire together, finding comfort in each other's presence. But then they heard a noise. A group of hunters approached. When they saw the child, they were overjoyed. They had been searching for her. Unfortunately, in their efforts to find the child, they too had become lost in the dense forest. Yet to the messenger's surprise, they seemed unperturbed. They chose one of their number, the most agile of them, and sent him to climb the tallest of the trees.

"Will he be able to see your village from there?" asked the messenger.

"Oh no" they replied. "The forest is far too thick. But from the tops of the tree, he will be able to see the light that burns far away, and when he sees that, he will know the way home."

As the hunter, now accompanied by the child, prepared to leave, they gathered up the embers from the fire the messenger has started and handed them back to him.

"No" said the messenger. "You keep them. You may find someone who else needs them. Take them with you." And then, with a smile, the messenger headed home.

The second messenger headed west across the rich farmland and open prairies. She travelled for many hours but saw no one. As darkness approached, she decided to stop for the night. She took out the ember she had brought with her and slowly coaxed it to life. As she warmed herself by the fire, she heard someone approaching.

“What are you doing out here all alone?” a voice asked from the darkness.

“I was just stopping to warm myself and prepare a meal” the messenger answered. “Would you like to join me?”

“Don’t mind if I do” the stranger replied. “It’s been a long time since I sat around a campfire and shared a meal. Would it be OK if I call my friend and invite him to join us? It’s been so long since I have seen him and I know how much he would love this.”

“Of course,” the messenger responded, “invite anyone you would like.”

It was amazing how quickly things changed. Soon the tiny fire was surrounded by people. Some came with camp chairs, some with food and drink, some with both. The prairie soon rang with song and laughter as people who had been too busy with their own concerns and worries, came together.

As the fire began to burn down and the gathered crowd began to disperse, the messenger had an idea. “Why don’t you each take a few of the embers from the fire to remind yourselves how important it is to share your time, your joy and your struggles with each other.”

As the last of the former strangers, now friend, departed, the messenger smiled. She knew they would not forget and perhaps the embers from *The Beacon* just might make a bigger difference in the lives of these people than she had ever imagined they could.

The third messenger headed north. He joined the crew of a ship heading out into the great sea whose shores lapped at the base of the cliff. They had not been travelling long when a great storm came up. The ship began to heave and it soon felt to the messenger that they were being tossed about like a toy on the mighty waves. Having never experienced life on the water, the messenger was terrified. He was amazed to see, however, how calm the majority of the crew remained, each one focusing on the task they had to perform, seeming almost unaware of the waves. “How can you be so calm?” the messenger cried out in terror.

The crew laughed. “See that Beacon, high on the cliffs? As long as we can keep that Beacon in our sights, we know exactly where we are. We know how far we are from shore and which way we need to head. Sure, the waves can be frightening, but if we trust the Beacon, we will find our way home.”

As the winds began to die down and the ship approached its mooring, the messenger realized with a huge sigh of gratitude, just how important *The Beacon* was.

The last messenger headed east, towards the large cities and busy streets. She marvelled at the huge building, the towering offices and the busy shops that lined her way. Such richness and prosperity were almost beyond her imagining. But she had a job to do. She tried to talk to the people hurrying along the busy sidewalks and ask them about *The Beacon*, but it seemed that few people wanted to talk to her.

As the day went on, she became more and more distressed. How could she return home and tell her people that no one seemed to even know that *The Beacon* existed? With a heavy heart she headed along the back streets of the city in the hope of finding anyone who would talk to her. As she approached a corner, she saw a man huddled in an alley shivering under a tattered blanket. He looked up and pleadingly asked, “Do you have anything to eat?”

The messenger was heartbroken. “I’m sorry,” she replied, “but I have nothing.” Then she remembered the ember she carried. “But maybe I can help you stay warm.” Searching around she found a few small sticks and a few discarded boards from a broken up wooden box. It took some time before she finally managed to get a small fire started.

As the man drew closer to the fire, he slowly stopped shivering and looked up. “Thank-you” he said with a smile. “There are so many of us living here on the streets that are cold and hungry and most people just ignore us. Your kindness has made such a difference to me.”

Gently the messenger bent down and took the man's hand. "Keep the ember," she whispered, "and share it with anyone who needs it. It will never die out if you care for it. And it will only grow stronger each time it is shared."

As the messenger turned to head home, she could not get the picture of this poor hungry stranger out of her mind. Her heart was heavy, but even in all the sorrow and sadness, there burned in her heart, like a small sheard of that glowing ember, a remnant of hope.

The Beacon did matter. The embers from *The Beacon* that the four messengers had taken with them would not die. They would continue to grow. Each time they were shared, new lives would be touched and new people would feel their warmth. It had always been that way, and it always would be. No matter what they rest of the world might seem to think, *The Beacon* did matter ... and it still does.