

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

2024 05 05

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield

Announcements

Mission Moment Sydney Nkhata, a 27-year-old from Northern Malawi, is the chair of a youth network made up of 12 clubs. His management journey was significantly influenced by the “Every Youth Empowered” project, which provided valuable leadership training and is funded by PWS&D. Equipped with new skills, Sydney has become a mentor—guiding and nurturing club members. His efforts ensure that youth actively embrace and take ownership of the project, where they learn about sexual and reproductive health rights—turning it into an integral part of the community. As a result, girls and boys are more aware of the risks related to early pregnancies and transmission of diseases and are changing behaviours. Sydney’s story highlights the transformative power of leadership training and showcases his commitment to mentorship and community development.

The people of Knox Bayfield acknowledge with gratitude the territory upon which we live, work, play and worship. We live on the traditional lands of the Chippewa and Haudenosaunee, ‘People of the Longhouse,’ Anishinabewaki, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and Mississauga peoples within Treaty 29, of 1827. We are all treaty people. We make this acknowledgement, knowing it is incomplete and inadequate. May we listen, learn, and repent.

HYMN Praise God #306

CALL TO WORSHIP [responsive]

One: Come, all you people! Come from east and west, north and south!

All: We come across bridges, along streets. We come by car, bike, or foot!

One: Come! We are delighted that you are here!

All: We are here to sing, to pray, to greet, to wonder, to give thanks. Let us worship God!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Holy God, the power of your love is beyond comprehension, the breadth of your compassion without measure, the depths of your wisdom knows no bounds. In Jesus Christ, you meet us in the midst of life’s joys and challenges to show us what it means to love and be loved. We offer you our love and loyalty, and our prayers and praise. Through the power of your Spirit draw us close to you and close to each other as friends and followers of Christ, our Risen Lord.

Merciful God, we struggle to love others as you command. We seek our own security before the wellbeing of others. We fulfill our own desires rather than act for the common good. Forgive us we pray. Guide us to renew our commitment to live out your love. And all the people say, Amen

Assurance of Pardon

God's amazing love allows each of us to receive his grace and be at peace with God, with yourselves and with each other. May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn God is love: come heaven, adoring #314

To Hear The Word Of God

Prayer For Illumination and Scripture

God of truth and wisdom, Jesus confronted those who stood against him as your Truth. Send us your Holy Spirit to hear your truth again in his story. Inspire us with his courage and conviction so that we may love you more fully and serve you with wisdom. Amen.

Scripture

Historical	Acts 10:44–48	[B#130/W#135]
Psalms	Psalms 100	[B#552/W#611]
Epistle	1 John 5:1–6	[B#241/W#261]
Gospel	John 15:9–17	[B#109 /W#113]

May God bless our understanding of this, God's holy word. **The word of the Lord.**

O holy One, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

The readings this morning speak of love and relationships. The ways that we connect with one another – intentionally or inadvertently. How do we impact the lives of the people we do not know well? Do we take the time to smile when we encounter people – when we see them walking by on the street or when pay for our groceries at the checkout? Are we mindful of telling people we do know that they hold a meaningful place in our lives?

Jesus declares his love as he calls to people to be in relationship with him. In social media terms 'friend' has taken on a different meaning. It has become transactional, a superficial measure of connection that has little meaning. This passage speaks to a deeper meaning of friend. It brings to mind the kind people who have identified the shift from acquaintance to friendship with me. The meaningful impact of someone acknowledging a growing trust and companionship. The deeper connection of knowing that someone enjoys spending time with you. Considering this

deeper connection of friendship allows us to hear the declaration from Jesus in a different way. Think for a moment about the ways in which you can simply be with your friends, the people who understand you and love you for who you are. Our spiritual connection with the divine enables us to be fully present in our lives. To find our way, to step into the person that God intends us to be. To fulfill our role here, in this place, at this time. It can be difficult to discern when our lives are stressful. Often our culture encourages us to ignore spiritual signs, to compartmentalize our lives, and create barriers within our selves. It is helpful to set time aside for prayer and contemplation. Even just a few moments spent in prayer, seeking direction from God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote some years ago that "the first service that one owes to others in the (Christian) fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for (brothers and sisters in Christ) is listening to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our (brothers and sisters in Christ) when we learn to listen to (them). Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking"

When we consider the writings from the book of Acts we discover that it tells of God's grace moving through the Holy Spirit, nudging people of the church beyond their comfort zone. We entered this part of the story after significant events have occurred. Events where the Holy Spirit disrupts the status quo. You may remember how Jesus opened the disciples minds so they could better understand the Scriptures, and he told them to stay in the city until they had been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:44-49). The book of Acts is the story of how the disciples followed his instructions ... and how the Spirit empowered them.

Barriers were broken down. The familiar ways of living were turned upside down as the cultural and religious structures were challenged. They questioned the barriers that defined what was acceptable or not. The poet Carl Sandburg noted that the ugliest English word is, "Exclusive." Kenneth Carder wrote, "The ugliness of exclusive depends upon whether we are among the included or the excluded. Being an insider carries with it a sense of pride and security. Most of us, however, have been excluded often enough to agree that exclusive is an ugly word. When we are among the marginalized, the rejected, the pushed-aside or the left-out, it hurts!"

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There is a tendency through history for people to struggle with this question ... who is in and who is out. The early leaders in the church struggled with including gentiles. Then, Peter had a dream and concluded that "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

The bible tells us over and over that when we love, we know God. This circle of love is broken when we allow fear and indifference in our lives. A survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, Elie Wiesel was a Romanian-born writer, professor, political activist, Nobel laureate, and Holocaust survivor. He stated: "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. ... The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference."

Genuine love is a sign of God's presence in the world. The laws in Leviticus state we are not to lie or hate but to be honest with others. So, love involves caring for others, not only when it is easy ... particularly when it is difficult and complicated. Love is most effective when it is an action, fulfilling the need of connection with others. The needs of others, however, are not always what they seem or what is asked for. Jesus often responded to many by asking the person to clarify their intent and demonstrate their commitment to God.

When we love one another God lives in us, God abides in us. 'Abiding with' refers to a union with the divine, walking with God. There are many stories of people walking with God in the bible. Noah and Moses. The prophet Micah wrote, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

We seek God's presence, we listen for God's voice, we become attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, when tradition becomes rigid ...the Holy Spirit may have to put in extra effort to bring good news. Sometimes the Spirit has a hard time getting through our stubborn desire to stay the way we are. In the book of Acts, Peter continues to struggle with the teachings of Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit fell upon them all. The spirit interrupted Peter's preaching at a house in Ceasarea. They were travelling toward Jerusalem with the gospel message. Earlier Peter had a vision, there was a smorgasbord of restricted food. When a voice spoke to him, Peter was emphatic that he had never eaten anything considered profane or unclean... and then the heavenly voice repeated the message three times: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" ...

The Spirit interrupted the rhythm of Peter's plans to raise his awareness of God's plan. Peter developed insight into the teachings of Christ and about divine persistence. The vision helped Peter to better understand that the gospel message was for all people. Then, it happened again.

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During Peter's sermon in the house of Cornelius- the Holy Spirit interrupted him - again. The Spirit of God speaks through us and sometimes in spite of us.

Peter comes to Caesarea at the request of Cornelius -a Roman centurion. The centurion had a vision instructing him to send for Peter. At the same time Peter has a vision in which he is began to grasp an unnecessary exclusive boundary. When Peter spoke to the crowd gathered with Cornelius ... he told of his vision - that all people are included as God's people. This is a story about the Divine crashing through human boundaries.

Ours world is full of boundaries. No-trespassing signs warn people to stay out. A floating rope separates the deep and shallow ends of the swimming pool. Lines painted on a floor tell athletes when they are "out of bounds." Rivers, mountains, and other invisible borders separate one nation from another. Fenced yards and fenced borders define where people are allowed to go. Our Canadian borders are visible and invisible. I became intensely aware of borders and policies during my studies at Knox College. In the fall of 2014 I had the amazing opportunity to be part of a study tour in the Middle East. It was a remarkable experience. I became intensely aware of how little we hear about the living conditions in Palestine. They endure constant reminders of living in an illegally occupied state.

Whether we live in oppressive states with visible boundaries, or in places where boundaries are invisible, we learn who we are by how we identify with people...and those we do not identify with. Families, friends, the work we do, denominations and religions, associations, and nations ... all create boundaries that define how we live our lives.

The Holy Spirit transformed the early followers of Christ and continues to impact us now. Their perspective of who was "in" and who was "out" changed by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This story demonstrates that the Spirit is not bound by the limitations set by people. The Spirit is poured out on all and a new vision of God's creation is understood.

Discerning the movement of the Spirit in our lives can be challenging There can be good and sound reason to follow tradition. There are also good and sound reason for change, especially when traditional practices harm, exclude, and oppress. Jesus modelled the necessity of mindful change. He taught inclusion which went against the traditions of the church. Our faith within the reformed tradition is premised on the belief that we are a reformed church and always reforming. The passage reminds us that Peter and Cornelius did not cross over the traditional boundaries on their own. It was the Spirit who empowered them and encouraged them to see life differently. The Spirit broke down the barriers as they were encourage to experience God's grace.

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Imagine how the Spirit is at work in your lives and in your dreams. Imagine how the Spirit is at work within this congregation. The persistent Spirit who refuses to give up. Be attentive to the nudging of God ... be aware of the young who have visions and the old who dream dreams. May they be empowered to speak truth, to share their visions, and tell of their dreams. Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

Hymn We walk along the shoreline #753

THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD

Quote As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. Pope Francis

Doxology We give Thee but Thine own, What e'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.

Blessing of Gifts

May our offerings work to strengthen our loving efforts to neighbour and stranger. May our lives shine with hope as the beauty of spring unfolds and new hope stirs within us through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of Wisdom and Mercy, we turn to you in these quiet moments, and offer you our thanks for the love you share with us. We seek your blessing on our hopes for our lives.

This morning we give you thanks for the people who have shown us your face and taught us to follow you by the faithful example of their lives. We thank you for our life together in your church. May the light of Christ shine through our lives so that we reflect your light for the world. Christ of Compassion and Action, in you, we receive our call to live with purpose. From you, we learn how to love those around us. With you, we find strength to face each new day. So today we offer our prayers for those facing challenges and seek your guidance to respond to their cries.

We pray for those brought to mind by news headlines this week: for situations of violence and deprivation, danger and devastation.....

We pray for families going through difficult times, for all who are sick, for those who bear deep sorrow, for any who are lonely and in despair.

We pray for those struggling over important decisions and responsibilities, for those in leadership roles, and for those who care for the most vulnerable in our community:

We pray for ourselves and for each other, for the situations that challenge us,

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and the new possibilities that encourage us. Spirit of Christ, move with us into the week ahead. Remind us each day to live according to God's will and purpose.

Before we call, you answer, God. Before we speak, you know our voices. Hear our prayers.

Loving God, by your Spirit, surround us with strength and love. Equip us to offer support for those who are near to us. Draw near to those who must confront illness, loss, and changing circumstances. We are thankful for healing and we are thankful for the end of suffering.

God of compassion, we lift up families who travel the long journey of grief and your Spirit to linger with Brenda, Faye and family as they mourn John; and with friends and family as they mourn the loss of Marjorie. May their shared memories be a blessing. God of hope, we ask you to linger with all who are dealing with challenges: Renee & Jim; Judith & Gerry; Rob, Valerie, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; Courtney, Gayle & family. We lift up all who are on our hearts as they face immense challenges. O God of hope and new possibility, in Christ you opened the way into the future for us through the power of your redeeming love. Give us the courage we need to face our future, assured of your presence and power to sustain us. We offer all that we are and all that we hope for through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together as his people:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallow'ed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn All things bright and beautiful #435

To Go Forth In God's Name

Commissioning and Benediction

Go in love, with the peace of Christ within you, to witness to his love in truth and in action. May God's resurrecting love open the future for you, empowered by the Spirit, and embraced by the presence of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

Postlude Amen