

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield on this 14th day of July.

Announcements

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: We come to you, O God, to thank you for what is good

All: We come to you, O God, to cry out for what is wrong

One: We come to you, O God, to ask for help and restoration

All: We come to you, O God, with aching hearts and glad souls. Let us worship God

Prayer of Adoration and Confession [**responsive**]

Gracious God, you are the Source of life and love in all creation. In a world marked by bitterness, you are compassion. In a culture marked by confusion, you are the truth that sets us free. Your strength is comfort when we are fearful. Your wisdom guides when we lose our way. We offer you all honour, praise, and worship, now and always for all that you are and all that you give, God, our Maker. We join our voices together in confession ...

Loving God, in a selfish world, you are generous to those in need. In the face of injustice, you speak as our conscience. You call for mercy and reconciliation, not vengeance. Forgive us when we follow the instincts of the world. Strengthen our resolve to live generously, in action and in attitude. Amen

Assurance of Pardon

Believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by God's generous grace. May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn Blessed Assurance #687

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

Tanakh*	2 Samuel 6:1–19	[B#280/W#311]
Psalms	Psalms 24	[B#502/W#553]
Epistle	Ephesians 1:3–14	[B#191/W#204]
Gospel	Mark 6:14–29	[B#40 /W#41]

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

Message

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.

I wonder what comes to mind for you when you hear of conflict. It is an unavoidable aspect of life if you watch the news, listen to the radio, watch headlines scroll across the screen, read books, and engage with other people.

Conflict ... the term can mean many things. Armed conflict in wars, crime, and self protection. Conflict occurs between nations, corporations, and in personal relationships. Political conflict can be civilized and productive or it can be unruly and polarizing. Internal conflict arises with moral and ethical challenges. In scripture and in life, conflict is a complex reality. It is difficult to engage in conflict especially without structure to guide us. Today we heard of two kings, David and Herod, and the conflict they encountered and created.

We began with the reading of King David’s fear and then his joy with the return of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was constructed during the time in the wilderness. It is thought that the Ark of the Covenant held the Ten Commandments. You may recall that the original tablets were broken by Moses, and the second tablets, which remained intact, were held in the Ark.¹ The Ark was carried through the desert and when they crossed into

¹ [Exodus 31:18, 32:19, 34:1]

the land of Canaan, the waters of the Jordan River miraculously split and the Ark led them through.

The Philistines captured the Ark from the Israelites. It was placed in the Philistine's temple of their god Dagon. It is said that they found their idol had fallen on its face the next day. After replacing the statue, they found it decapitated. Then the entire city was struck with a plague. The Philistines moved the Ark to other cities but wherever the Ark went, the Philistines suffered with the plague. After several months, they sent the Ark back to the Israelites along with expensive gifts.

The mystery of the Ark continues to be intriguing. You may recall it was a focal point in the 1981 film "Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark." The movie tells of the fictional archeologist's efforts to safeguard the Ark from falling into the hands of the Nazis. The ark was a concrete symbol of God's revelation to Moses. It points to the story of God delivering people from slavery. It tells of divine guidance into the promised land. It is a symbol of salvation, of God's presence, and a reminder that God leads us through the challenges of life.

Symbols, physical objects, and stories are powerful. They offer connection to a deeper awareness and provide structures that frame our perspectives. We see through certain perspectives. I'm thinking of a visit to the optometrist. When I look through the lens wheel and must determine whether the view is clear or not. Is this better or that.

Sometimes it is difficult to discern which view is better. Our readings today offer different perspectives. There is confrontation between political power and prophetic faith. There are expressions of joy with the Divine presence and acts of resistance and rejection

What symbols, physical objects, and stories help us to ... have eyes to see and ears to hear ... God's presence among and within us? What reminds us that our love of God creates the lens through which we experience the world? Stories. Stories from scripture, stories of our faith community, and our individual faith stories shape us. Our memories hold the narrative that help us to weather the stormy and difficult times. Memories that guide our viewpoints and decision making. Symbols and physical objects are integral aspects of memory. The cross, the communion table, the church, the bible, and the hymnals. Interacting with members of our congregation. Each provides a link that helps to shift us into a deeper awareness of the Divine. It is the proclamation of God-with-us. It is

knowing that God's Spirit is ever present – we need to pause, be attentive, and recognize that we are a part of the story – not the whole story.

I came across an illustration of the importance of story and our parts within creation. It goes something like this

- Three women died and arrived in Heaven at the same time to meet with St. Peter. He told them he had other matters to attend to and asked them to wait. Finally he returned and called one woman into his office. He apologized for making her wait so long. "Oh, I don't mind at all," the woman said. "I'm so thrilled just to be here in Heaven." St. Peter was delighted by her attitude. "Well, then, if you can just answer one question for me, we can finish processing your papers. Now tell me, how do you spell 'God'?" The woman spelled it and then she went into the celestial realm. St. Peter called in the next woman and also apologized to her. "It will be worth it, I'm sure," she answered. "I am willing to wait a thousand years to see God face to face." St. Peter was very pleased. He insists, though, on asking her one more question for the Record. "Tell me, dear lady, how do you spell 'God'?" The woman spelled it, then entered the Pearly Gates.

Finally, St. Peter called in the third woman. He also apologized to her, but she refused to accept his apology. "It was quite rude," she said angrily. "All my life on earth I had to wait in lines. Wait at the checkout counter, wait at the bus stop, wait for the kids to get home from school, wait for my coffee break. And now you expect me to wait to get into Heaven? Well, I just won't stand for it!" St. Peter said, "I'm so sorry. If you'll just answer one more question for our records, then you can go on in. Tell me, how do you spell 'Czechoslovakia'?"

Like this last woman, King Herod struggled to see beyond his own wants and needs. He chose to see and hear through the lens of self protection and self interest. The king chose to make an oath that he knew was the wrong. Douglas John Hall describes Herod as 'The puppet king knows enough about truth to recognize his own falseness'. Herod made a bad decision and stood by it even when he knew it would cause harm to others.

In his commentary, Matt Skinner shared, "The story of John's murder is dreadful throughout. The Bible includes a number of tales that take us inside the courtrooms of immoral, unprincipled, and self-absorbed leaders. There is no Esther or Daniel in this one, however—no one who can serve as a circuit breaker to prevent the ruler's stupidity from becoming deadly. Nor is there a humorous element that allows the story to function as

satire. This is a depiction of noxious people with little impulse control who hold positions of power. This passage also, as we learn at the end, tells a story of faithful resistance and courageous hope."

King Herod faced conflict with his desires. He wanted to listen and learn from the holy man John the Baptist. It was difficult because John kept reminding Herod that the king was subject to the law. In Herod's efforts to be seen as powerful he made dreadful decisions meant to impress his wife and step-daughter. He prioritized self interest and his desire for power and control. The passage can help us to wonder, where do we get lost in our priorities? Are you able to keep the important priorities in focus or ... do distractions pull you away from the primary focus? When promises and decisions are made in haste there can be devastating results. Empires have crumbled, businesses are destroyed, marriages ruined, and relationships damaged. Poor decisions can haunt for years, even generations. All of us experience pressures. And these pressures will influence the decisions made.

Brett Blair wrote, "When you find yourself in the middle of a difficult situation, one which requires you to make an important decision remember first that puzzling problems require conscientious consideration, and second, promises made in haste create great waste, and finally that the pressures of life can affect good judgment."

Part of our responsibility is to delve into issues seeking to understand. It is challenging to develop a deeper understanding if we are unable to take in new information. It is helpful to be curious, to ask questions, to re-consider viewpoints. It is necessary to do this within our moral structures premised in our faith and the ancient teachings. Tim Bowden, in his book *One Crowded Hour*, tells about an incident during the confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia. A group of Gurkhas from Nepal were asked if they would be willing to jump from transport planes into combat against the Indonesians if the need arose. The Gurkhas had the right to turn down the request because they had never been trained as paratroopers. "Now the Gurkhas usually agreed to anything, but on this occasion they provisionally rejected the plan. But the next day one of their NCOs sought out the British officer who made the request and said they had discussed the matter further and would be prepared to jump under certain conditions.

"What are they?" asked the British Officer.

"The Gurkhas told him they would jump if the land was marshy or reasonably soft with no rocky outcrops, because they were inexperienced in falling. The British officer considered

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

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We pray for courageous leaders in cities, countries and congregations who strive to serve with integrity and honesty in a world prone to self-interest. We pray for those who seek justice where it has been compromised. We lift up quiet and reliable leaders who persist in their efforts to be dependable and trustworthy in these unsettled times.

We pray for patient church members and community volunteers who work diligently to improve our life together. We pray for creative, impatient change-makers who encourage and challenge us to become bolder and more determined to righting wrongs and trying new strategies.

We pray for the troubled in mind or spirit, for the angry and unhappy, and for those who feel that every day is a struggle. Soothe their concerns and open their hearts to claim the hope and help you offer. Blessed are you, O God.

We remember before you the sick, the dying, and the bereaved who must try to put their lives back together again. We pray for those who seek better health, a fresh start, more stability or a glimpse of hope. Draw close to all who suffer. May they embrace your comfort to face whatever comes next.

Receive our prayers, both spoken and unspoken, and embrace us all in your love. Give us hearts to understand not only what you do on our behalf, but also what you call us to do on your behalf, for we are friends and followers of Jesus

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 Jim, Jane and family as they mourn Valerie. 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, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; David & Sharon; Courtney, Gayle & family; John, Brian, and family; David and family. O holy One, guide the caregivers and medical staff in their efforts to bring healing. 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

