

SA, SL, TS and DSM United Churches

99th Anniversary of the UCC – June 9th, 2024

Prelude: – Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Good morning! Thank you for your support of all our services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca .

Thank you to Christie Coatsworth for our music this morning. Thank you to Tracey Major for putting together the Power Point slides.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

Introduction of Service:

People: We believe that our relationships with the Creator, the land, the people, the plants, and the animals are sacred.

Eric: Let us honour these sacred relationships as we gather together to worship God.

People: This service is one we share with churches across our denomination this day. We are one in the Spirit - we are one with each other.

Eric: Let us now join together, setting our intentions as we enter this Centennial year.

Call to Worship:

Eric: From deep soil comes bold and daring growth. From the seeds of our past will come fresh new growth.

Left: *We come today to marvel at what has been harvested and prepare for what will come.*

Right: *We come to celebrate where we are and where we have been. We come rejoicing with our ancestors in faith across generations:*

Eric: The Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, the Evangelical United Brethren, and Local Union Churches, and our full communion partners across this world:

Left: *The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea,*

Right: *The United Church of Christ (USA),*

Left: *The United Church of Christ in the Philippines,*

Right: *and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).*

All: We give thanks to God for the blessings of past, present, and future, and dare to plant these seeds of faith anew! **

Opening Hymn: VU 820 “Make a Joyful Noise”

Make a joyful noise all the earth!

Worship your God with gladness.

Make a joyful noise all the earth.

Come to this place with a song!

Know that your God has made you.
Know it's to God we belong.
And come to this place with joyfulness and praise.
Worship your God with a song!
Make a joyful noise all the earth!
Worship your God with gladness.
Make a joyful noise all the earth.
Come to this place with a song!

Enter these gates, thanks giving.
Enter these courts with praise.
Sing thanks to your God and bless the holy Name.
Worship your God with a song!
Make a joyful noise all the earth!
Worship your God with gladness.
Make a joyful noise all the earth.
Come to this place with a song!

Ages through endless ages,
seasons of endless years,
the love of our Maker ever shall endure.
Worship your God with a song!
Make a joyful noise all the earth!
Worship your God with gladness.
Make a joyful noise all the earth.
Come to this place with a song!

Eric: As we sung "Make a Joyful Noise," which is a paraphrase of Psalm 100, we have joined our voices with our spiritual ancestors, who sang another paraphrase of this psalm as an introtit to the Union service in 1925.

Opening Prayer:

Again and again, God, we come to this time and place with a song! Each day you give us a chance to begin anew: to drink deeply of your Spirit, to boldly follow in the Way of Jesus, and to dare to seek justice as we seek relationship with our neighbours and you. Again and again, God, you call us out of our old lives and into your new day. And so, as we celebrate the 99th anniversary of this United Church of yours, help us to reflect back with clarity upon all that deserves to be celebrated, all that deserves to be lamented, and all that deserves to be let go. We are not perfect, God, but we are yours, and we trust that you are with us every day. This day, and always, help us to be good grain that is planted and tended by your love, so that in the year to come we may flourish in this time and place. Amen.

Children's Story:

Children's Hymn: VU 227 "For the Fruit of All Creation"

For the fruit of all creation, thanks be to God.
For the gifts to every nation, thanks be to God.
For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safekeeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour, God's will is done.
In the help we give our neighbour, God's will is done.
In our worldwide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God.
For the good we all inherit, thanks be to God.
For the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all that love has found us, thanks be to God.

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 33:

Sing Praises to the Lord

You are the Lord's people. Obey him and celebrate! He deserves your praise.

Praise the Lord with harps! Use harps with ten strings to make music for him.

Sing a new song. Shout! Play beautiful music.

The Lord is truthful; he can be trusted.

He loves justice and fairness, and he is kind to everyone everywhere on earth.

The Lord made the heavens and everything in them by his word.

He scooped up the ocean and stored the water.

Everyone in this world should worship and honor the Lord!

As soon as he spoke the world was created; at his command, the earth was formed.

The Lord destroys the plans and spoils the schemes of the nations.

But what the Lord has planned will stand forever. His thoughts never change.

The Lord blesses each nation that worships only him. He blesses his chosen ones.

The Lord looks at the world from his throne in heaven, and he watches us all.

The Lord gave us each a mind, and nothing we do can be hidden from him.

Mighty armies alone cannot win wars for a king; great strength by itself cannot keep a soldier safe.

In war the strength of a horse cannot be trusted to take you to safety.

But the Lord watches over all who honor him and trust his kindness.

He protects them from death and starvation.

We depend on you, Lord, to help and protect us.

You make our hearts glad because we trust you, the only God.

Be kind and bless us! We depend on you.

Pray that our Lord will make us strong and give us peace. **

Scripture: John 12: 20 - 28

Some Greeks had gone to Jerusalem to worship during Passover. Philip from Bethsaida in Galilee was there too. So they went to him and said, "Sir, we would like to meet Jesus." Philip told Andrew. Then the two of them went to Jesus and told him. Jesus said: The time has come for the Son of Man to be given his glory. I tell you for certain that a grain of wheat that falls on the ground will never be more than one grain unless it dies. But if it dies, it will produce lots of wheat. If you love your life, you will lose it. If you give it up in this world, you will be given eternal life. If you serve me, you must go with me. My servants will be with me wherever I am. If you serve me, my Father will honor you. Now I am deeply troubled, and I don't know what to say. But I must not ask my Father to keep me from this time of suffering. In fact, I came into the world to suffer. So Father, bring glory to yourself. A voice from heaven then said, "I have already brought glory to myself, and I will do it again!" **

Message: "Planting Seeds for the Harvest"

Penny Nelson, one of the co-writers for this service, comes from a small family farm in Alberta. When she asked her dad, a third-generation wheat farmer, what he thought about Jesus saying: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24), his response was:

Farmers know that seeds are only viable for so long. If you don't plant those seeds within a certain time frame, the seeds actually die and you won't get any crop from them. So, there's no point in trying to save your seeds for posterity. If you hoard your seeds and never, ever plant them, they're worthless.

And the same is true with our churches. I see people in pews who are so afraid of the church dying that they can't see how their fear is actually killing the church. They aren't willing to take their money and try planting something new; they just hold onto their money, and their congregation dies because they didn't even try to plant hope with the resources they have. They aren't willing to try new things because they feel the life of their congregation is so frail, but if they aren't willing to let go of their fear of dying, they are just going to die anyway. And Jesus doesn't call his followers to die for the sake of dying. He calls his followers to let go of our resources for the sake of growing hope and life all around us.

On June 10, 1925, the Rev. Samuel Rose of Wesleyan Methodist College in Montreal preached on this text from John 12 for the inaugural worship service of The United Church of Canada. It may have seemed strange for the Rev. Rose to choose this text at the birth of the United Church, but he was prophetic in warning the new denomination that we are not called to live for the sake of our own gain, or

even for the sake of perpetuating our own existence. Instead, the church is called to use our resources—our time, our talents, and our treasures of money and property—towards furthering the spread of God’s love, hope, peace, and joy in this world.

As a denomination, we have been letting go and being reborn for a long time. This process of death and resurrection has been part of us from our beginnings. As we approach our 100th anniversary, it is a good time to reflect on what is being transformed in this moment and for this coming age. We trust that God is with us, even in the terrifying, life-changing moments of death and rebirth.

These words are from Rev. Rose’s Message given 99 years ago.

The Scripture just read has for some time seemed to me the most satisfactory statement of what one might call the philosophy of the Cross, which even the New Testament itself contains. In this passage, our Lord declares two tremendously important truths. First, that the way of the Cross was for him the only way of true self-realization and self-expression, that to refuse it would be to lose his life.

Second, that apart from the Cross, he could not fulfill the high purpose of His advent.

The first of these doctrines is taught in verses 24-25. “Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto eternal life.” Let us be daring enough to ask the question, If Jesus had refused the Cross, what would have followed? This, surely, amongst other things: He would never have arrived at the full measure of his own self-development, His name would not have descended to us as the name above all names to be held in everlasting remembrance, no gathering like the present would ever have occurred in the history of the race. It was because he chose the Cross—meaning by that phrase not simply nor chiefly a way of dying, but more emphatically a spirit, a purpose, a way of living—it was because he chose the Cross as His own highest, nay rather His only good, that He lives and reigns in heaven and upon earth today.

Jesus did not discover the law of the Cross, nor was he the first to practice it, though never before nor since has it been obeyed so perfectly and with such glorious consequences. The law is universal. The grain of wheat that does not die perishes. The life governed by the maxim “safety first” is a lost life. He who is

willing to accept salvation selfishly for himself alone has already become a castaway. You and I find ourselves as we seek not our own but the good of others. And this law is binding upon the Christian community as certainly as upon the individual believer. Only insofar as The United Church of Canada owes her birth to obedience to this law, only to that extent that she is loyal to it in the future, may she vindicate her right to live and grow. There is no prayer so fitting to this hour as the humble petition for pardon for whatever of vanity, or self-love, or self-will has mingled with loftier motives in bringing us together as denominations into this new fellowship. There is no sacramental oath so appropriate as the promise by divine grace, as individuals and as a Church, to follow Christ all the way, for, believe me, thus and thus alone shall we find the way of life.

We must admit that institutionalism runs too readily into selfishness, and comes too easily to think of itself as essential. Against this tendency, fatal to the realization of the highest good, may God preserve us! What an ideal for the United Church of Canada to set before herself, willing as a grain of wheat to die, if thus she may enter into a larger life; ready to be “lifted up,” that she may draw men [sic], not to herself, but to the Christ, who, loving the world, gave Himself for our salvation! Such was the Master’s free, unforced choice for Himself; and if to be a Christian is to be Christlike, there is no alternative choice for ourselves as individuals, or for the Church as a whole, if we are truly to bear His name.

Questions to Ponder:

What do we (as a congregation, as a region, as a denomination) need to celebrate and then let go of? What needs to die? What are the resources we have been given that we are hoarding?

What hopes and joys are we called to plant in this world today? How are we called to plant the seeds of the gospel in our time and place?

Reflection Hymn: VU 706 “Give Thanks for Life”

Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
mortal, we pass through beauty that decays,
yet sing to God our hope, our love, our praise,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Give thanks for those who made their life a light
caught from the Christ-flame, bursting through the night,

who touched the truth, who burned for what is right,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

And for our own, our living and our dead,
thanks for the love by which our life is fed,
a love not changed by time or death or dread,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Give thanks for hope, that like the wheat, the grain
lying in darkness does its life retain
in resurrection to grow green again,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We have planted the seeds of faith throughout the 99 years of being the United Church of Canada. As we give some of what we have been given, we can change the world. Let us share in faith.

Offertory: VU 544 “In Gratitude and Humble Trust”

In gratitude and humble trust
we bring our best today
to serve your cause and share your love
with all along life's way.
O God, who gave yourself to us
in Jesus Christ, your Son,
teach us to give ourselves each day
until life's work is done.

Offertory Prayer:

People: Gracious God, we believe that you are calling us forward into a new day. We believe that you have a future for Talbot Street, St. Luke's, St. Andrew's and DSM United Churches, and The United Church of Canada that is rooted in your abundant life, and we trust you with this future, even though it's beyond the horizon of our dreams.

So, we offer you the blessings you have already given us— our time, our talents, our finances, and our hopes— so that you might use them and transform them for the good of your whole world. May these gifts be a blessing to the people of the Talbot Street, St. Luke's, South Buxton and Tilbury communities, and beyond! All this we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen!

Chorus to Prayer: VU 400 “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

Pastoral Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 420 “Go to the World”

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!

Blessing:

Eric: As you leave this place, we invite you to care for and nurture the seeds that you have been given in today's service. Plant them in your mind. Water them in love. Share your blessings of these seeds each and every day. Blessed are we who live this life and give this life. We are not alone. God is with us! And we are a blessing, now and always.

Closing Chorus: VU 602 “Blest Be the Ties That Bind”

Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the unity of heart and mind
is like to that above.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth