

UCC East Worship Service - Summer 2020 - Service 2

Words of Welcome - Hello and thank you for choosing one of these services that have been put together for the use of churches in the Regions of United Church of Canada East. My name is Janet Sollows and I am President of Region 15. Also participating in this service are Rev. Catherine Stuart, Minister for Children, Youth and Young Adults for Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council, Regional Council 15 and First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council and David Hewitt, Regional Minister of Region 15.

We will open our worship with the introit "I Feel the Winds of God Today"
Voices United verse 1.

Introit: #625 I Feel the Winds of God

I feel the winds of God today;
Today my sail I lift,
Though heavy oft with drenching spray
And torn with many a rift;
Great pilot of my onward way,
You will not let me drift.
I feel the winds of God today;
Today my sail I lift.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:
Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."
As we light this candle, we are reminded that God's light shines in our world
at all times.

Call to Worship:
We like to think of calm, still waters
but sometimes the waters are rough.
Jesus holds his hand out to us
but we don't always want to get out of the boat.
We need to learn to take risks with our faith.
Let us worship the one who calls us to action.

Our Opening Hymn is VU#637 Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me

Jesus, Saviour, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea
Unknown waves before me roll, hiding rock and treacherous shoal,
Chart and compass come from thee,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

As a mother stills her child, thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boisterous waves obey thy will when thou biddest them "Be still."
Wondrous sovereign of the sea,
Jesus Saviour, pilot me.

When at last I near the shore, and the fearful breakers roar
'twixt me and the peaceful land, still supported by thy hand,
May I hear thee say to me,
"Fear not, I will pilot thee."

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we come before you full of praise and adoration for your creation - our world, our home. Thank you for being with us in good times and in difficult times. Help us to reach for your ever stretched-out hand for reassurance and guidance. Forgive us when our doubts cause us to falter in our faith. Give us courage to reach out to those around us, even if it means that we have to stretch a bit or move out of our comfort zone. As Christ's followers, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Jesus was there to stretch his hand out to Peter. Jesus is with us all the time, reaching out and ready to save us. Thanks be to God.

Story Time

Has anyone ever had a fight with your brother or sister? Or, maybe if you don't have a brother or sister, have you had a fight with your friend? Has anyone wished that something awful would happen to the person you were fighting with? It's not nice to admit it but I think most people have thought like that. One of today's Scripture readings is the story of Joseph and his

eleven brothers. If you've seen the musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat", this is the story it was based on! Joseph's 11 brothers were jealous of him because their father, Jacob, liked Joseph the best and because Joseph told them he had a dream that someday he would be king and they would bow down to him. That didn't go over well with the brothers! They began to have bad thoughts about Joseph and one day when they saw him coming down the road, they wanted to kill him. They decided not to kill him, but put him in a big hole where he couldn't get out. Then some people were passing by so they decided to sell him as a slave so they could get some money. All these bad thoughts were because they were jealous and even though they knew they were doing wrong; they could only think of themselves and not what was right. We need to remember that God wants us to get along with each other and work together. When we get jealous of someone, we need to remember that God does not need our envy. God would like us to help others and have good thoughts to replace the bad.

Scripture Readings:

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 37: 1-4, 12-28 read by Catherine Stuart,

This scripture tells the first part of the story of Joseph and his brothers. The first four verses talk about how much Jacob loved Joseph. The story picks up again at verse 12, in today's reading, and talks about how his brothers see an opportunity to get rid of Joseph. What we don't hear this morning is what happens between verses 4 and 12. Imagine an annoying younger brother always complaining to his father about his brothers. Then this little brother also tells them about a dream he had where they were bowing down to him. His brothers were very jealous of Joseph.

Psalm: Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b (VU pp. 828-829 Parts 1 and 2), read by Catherine Stuart

This psalm remembers the story of Joseph. It also speaks of trusting God.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 10: 5-15 read by David Hewitt

The epistle reading this morning is part of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is part of the section that talks about 'A New Life for God's People'. Paul says

that those who are acceptable to God can say the message is as near as their mouth or heart.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 14: 22-33 read by David Hewitt

This gospel reading immediately follows the story of feeding the five thousand. It begins with Jesus taking a little time for himself. If you remember, that's why he went across Lake Galilee in the first place. He was upset by the news of the death of John the Baptist and wanted some time alone. But... five thousand or so people showed up so towards the end of the event, he sent the disciples back across Lake Galilee and tried again!

Reflection:

A few years ago, the Worship Committee at my church met to discuss upcoming services while our minister was away. When the minutes came out, one particular Sunday said, "Walking on water with Janet Sollows." That's quite an expectation!

Walking on water is one of the miracles attributed to Jesus and follows the miracle of feeding the five thousand. The dictionary defines a miracle as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs" or "an unusual event, thing, or accomplishment." Our society tends to overuse the word. Miracles are everywhere. Marketers, in particular, love to use the word. A miracle is usually something that cannot be explained. So of course, there are always those who will try to analyze and rationalize the unexplained or the unexplainable. Some people will come up with a scientific explanation while others will look at it as an allegory or metaphor. Remember the feeding of the five thousand? Rather than just leave it as unexplained or something in which there was divine intervention into human affairs, many people explain the story by saying that once the five loaves and two fish were brought out, other people shared what they had and thus created an abundance of food with a lot left over. This is an attempt to rationalize something that seems impossible.

There are many theories about Jesus walking on water, too. The best one, I think, comes from Mark Twain. On one of his visits to the Holy Land, Mark Twain was accompanied by his wife. They were in Capernaum, the town where Jesus began his public ministry and spent much of his time. Capernaum is located on the Sea of Galilee. One moonlit night they were walking along the Sea of Galilee and decided to take a romantic boat ride.

Twain asked a man sitting in a boat how much he would charge to take them out on the water. Twain was dressed in his usual white suit, white shoes and a large white Texan hat. Assuming him to be a wealthy American the owner of the boat told the author, "\$25.00." Mark Twain thanked him and walked away. After a few steps, Twain said to his wife, "Now I know why Jesus walked!"

My father used to work with a man who said he was an atheist. He said, "I don't know how you Christians can believe that Jesus turned water into wine." My father replied, "To me, it doesn't matter if he did or not." The debate will rage on about whether Jesus actually walked on water, whether it was an illusion or whether it ever happened and is a story meant to teach us something. But whether he actually walked on water or not doesn't really matter. The value of the story is that there are lessons to be learned.

The disciples set off across Lake Galilee (sometimes referred to as the Sea of Galilee) when Jesus sent them away so he could be alone. Self-isolation was a thing back in Jesus' time too! Lake Galilee is located in the lower portion of the Jordan Valley in a mountain range that rises to 4,000 feet above sea level. The lake itself is 700 feet below the Mediterranean Sea. One of the more noteworthy aspects of this body of water is that is greatly susceptible to sudden and extremely violent storms. These storms are caused by the cold air rushing down from the mountains surrounding it, colliding with the warm moist air rising off the surface of the water itself. Many of the disciples were fishermen and were well-accustomed to stormy conditions. Jesus appeared to them just before dawn. The disciples did not recognize Jesus and thought he was a ghost. Jesus reassured them with the words we hear so often throughout the Bible, "Do not be afraid!" There are times in our lives when we will experience storms. These times will be rough. It certainly feels lately like we've experienced storms with Covid-19 and many other things going on in this part of Canada and the world. This is reminiscent of the words of God to Isaiah in Isaiah 43:2: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you". Jesus will be there for us but will we always recognize him? Jesus may not come at the time we think He should come. He knows when we need Him the most. Jesus had waited until the boat was as far from land as possible, when all their hope was gone. Remember that they set sail the night before, but Jesus didn't appear until just before dawn. In essence, Jesus was testing the disciples' faith. Why did Jesus walk

on the water? To show His disciples that the very thing they feared, the raging, seething sea was merely a set of steps for Him to come to them. Often, we fear the difficult experiences of life such as illness, loss of loved ones, and financial hardships only to discover that these experiences can bring Jesus closer to us or us closer to Jesus. Will you recognize Jesus when he comes to help you? Will you be ready to accept the help?

The second lesson we can learn from this story comes from Peter's experience. Peter asked for and accepted Jesus' invitation to come to him. We need to remember that Peter got out of the boat and also walked on water. However, once he realized where he was, how high the waves were and how strong the wind was, he started to sink and called to Jesus to save him. Jesus reached down and pulled him up. He said, "You of little faith." Peter had his eyes on Jesus and was going towards him. However, the waves and the wind were wild and distracting. We are told that it was when Peter took his eyes off Jesus that he began to sink. When we are caught in our own storms and recognize that Jesus is with us, it is important to focus on his presence and not let our difficult circumstances overcome us. When we feel overwhelmed, if we call out to Jesus, he will reach out to us and raise us above our seemingly impossible surroundings. I read an article once that stated that the real miracle in this story is not the fact that Jesus walked on water but rather that Jesus was able to lift Peter out of the water with only a few fingers. If Jesus offers you his hand in a troubled time in your life, will you accept the peace that he brings or will you let the circumstances overcome you?

Finally, we have looked at the characters of Jesus and of Peter in this story but there are others. What about the disciples? They didn't get out of the boat. These were the people that were closest to Jesus and yet they did not recognize them. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid" and they witnessed Peter walking on the water towards Jesus and Jesus reaching to save Peter from the waters. Yet, no one else would leave the boat. It was Helen Keller who said, "Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing at all." Those words would ring true no matter who said them, but coming from someone who lived a life like Helen Keller, they merit special consideration. Born blind, deaf and unable to speak, she somehow found a way out of the darkness and into the world around her. Millions of people have drawn inspiration from her example. Listen to her words a second time: "Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing at all."

When you bring this observation over into the religious realm we could say: ***The life of faith is inherently a life of risk.*** Think of the Bible stories and take a look at the women and men who did great things for God. Almost without exception, they were risk-takers who weren't afraid to lay it all on the line for God. In today's gospel reading, only Peter experienced a close, life-saving encounter with Jesus on a first hand basis. Only Peter wanted more than just sitting idly by in the boat. Peter met the storm head on, fought the waves and the wind and felt the awesome experience of touching the very hand of Christ because he was the only one willing to get out of the boat and rush to Jesus' side. It was only Peter who wasn't content to stay where he was, in his comfortable seat. Peter wanted more and Peter had the courage to step out of the boat. The materials I read for today's readings ask, "What motivates you in your relationship with God?" What would motivate you to reach out beyond your comfort zone and risk in order to serve God? What does stepping out of the boat mean for you and your congregation? The United Church of Canada recently experiencing a restructuring. It meant leaving behind the familiar and tradition structures and creating something new. Have you been complaining or have you been working constructively with others to make the new structure work? Have you been looking to find the positives in this new experience? God calls us in our personal lives and in our congregational and wider church life to get out of our pews and into the community and the world. How do we accept this mission? Or is it more comfortable to sit back and discuss it, maybe form a committee to look at it, etc. etc.

I am a regular attender at the United Church's Berwick Camp in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia. The guest preacher a few years ago was Dr. Barbara Lundblad. She encouraged us to conspire. She said that the word 'conspire' has a negative connotation but it literally means 'breathe together'. She challenged us to find someone who we don't understand or know and conspire with them. She reminded us that we alone cannot solve world problems but if we conspire with people, breathe together with them, understand them and work with them, steps can be taken towards solutions of big problems. Maybe these steps could be as miraculous as walking on water. Whatever risks we take, we know that Jesus will be there and if we falter, he'll be there to pull us out of the stormy water. In the end, Jesus will be there in the boat with us, and all will be calm.

Let us pray:

Dear God, grant that we might be great risk-takers for the work that needs to be done in your world. Shake us loose from the security of staying in the boat. Help us to walk on the waters of faith because we believe that Jesus will hold us up. Amen.

Hymn: MV#138 My Love Colours Outside the Lines

My love colours outside the lines,
Exploring paths that few could ever find;
And takes me into places where I've never been before,
And opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

My Lord colours outside the lines,
Turns wounds to blessings, water into wine;
And takes me into places where I've never been before
And opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

We'll never walk on water if we're not prepared to drown,
Body and soul need a soaking from time to time.
And we'll never move the gravestones if we're not prepared to die,
And realize there are worlds outside the lines.

My soul longs to colour outside the lines,
Tear back the curtains, sun, come in and shine;
I want to walk beyond the boundaries where I've never been before,
Throw open doors to worlds outside the lines.

We'll never walk on water if we're not prepared to drown,
Body and soul need a soaking from time to time.
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This is the time in our church service where we typically pass the offering plate. I encourage you to continue to support your local church and the Mission and Service of the United Church of Canada during this time of not meeting together. Churches are accepting donations through Pre-Authorized Remittance, e-transfers, cheques or through Canada Helps. At this time, we give thanks for all the monetary gifts plus the gifts of time and talents. Let us pray:

Bless all our gifts, O God, and use them for your work here on earth. Use our talents to be your hands and feet. Help us to see need and respond in an appropriate manner. Give us courage to risk and reach out. Amen.

We continue now in prayer as we pray the Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer.

(This prayer is based on a prayer by Richard J. Einerson in Prayers of the People- Pastoral Prayers for Worship & Personal Devotion (Author House, Bloomington, IN ©2006)

Let us pray:

Eternal One, we thank you that we can pause and worship today. We thank you for the freedom we have to worship.

Be to us a powerful, healing presence when our fears and anxieties become overwhelming. Like Peter when he was sinking, we too sometimes feel we are sinking and overwhelmed by life. We look at the storm around us, and sometimes the storm within us, and our fears intensify. Be the source of our strength when we are weak. Be a solid rock beneath our feet when we wander and when we falter and slip. Be our shield and wrap your protective arms around us when we face danger and cause the wind and the storms of life within to be calmed.

Be with those whose walk is lonely. Be with those who are in danger daily. Be with the hungry and the destitute and the homeless. Give us the grace and the vision to craft a new world where all of your children eat at a table of plenty, where all are sheltered, and where peace and love and justice abound.

Be with all those who are sick, recovering or shut-in. We also pray for families experiencing the loss of a loved one. May good memories sustain and comfort them through their grief.

We will now pray as Jesus taught us to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed 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 that trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Our Closing Hymn is VU#675 Will Your Anchor Hold?

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife,
when the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift or firm remain?

Refrain:

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
fastened to the rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.

It will surely hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers tell that the reef is near,
though the tempest rave and the wild winds blow,
not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow.

It will surely hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill our latest breath,
on the rising tide it can never fail
while our hopes abide within the veil.

When our eyes behold, through the gathering night,
the city of gold, our harbor bright,
we shall anchor fast by the heavenly shore,
with the storms all past forever more.

Sending Forth:

Now it is time to respond to God's call. We go forward knowing that God will be with us in calm times and during the stormy periods of our lives. Let us go forth into the unknown, aware that Jesus is with us with an outstretched hand, ready to save us. So, we go with confidence to do the work we are called to do. May God bless us; may Jesus protect us and may the Holy Spirit go with us today and every day. Amen.