

August 23, 2020
St. Albert United Church

COMMUNITY WELCOME: <https://youtu.be/Lm4tOqq6pX0>

Tawow, Bienvenue, Welcome to St. Albert United Church on this Sunday as we gather through the wonder of virtual means. My name is Rev. Deborah Hoekstra, together with my colleague, Rev. Mervin Gallant, I serve in team ministry at St. Albert United Church.

As we come together, we acknowledge that we do so on the traditional lands of Treaty 6 First Nations and a significant trading community of the Métis Nation. Let us come before the Creator as we offer our prayers, hear holy story, and sing sacred songs.

St. Albert United Church is an affirming congregation where all are welcome to share fully in the life, work and ministry of the faith community regardless of age, race, gender expression, sexual orientation, belief, economic circumstance, ability or background. St. Albert United Church a place where EVERYONE has room to grow.

If you have a concern regarding someone who is ill, grieving or in need, or would like to chat please call either one of the ministers or the church office and someone will get back to you in a timely manner. Contact information is found on the church website and in the church newsletter.

We gather, cultivating space for everyone...

LIGHTING A CANDLE:

This candle as a reminder that the One whom we seek to be like. The Christ who is embodied in our actions of compassion, justice, acceptance; the teacher and guide one calls us to create a community rooted in equity, integrity and love on This candle dances with the presence of the Spirit, reminding us of the warmth of the community in which God calls us.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are many, yet one. Scattered, yet united.

Whatever your gift —

teaching, giving, encouraging;

truth-telling, justice-seeking, trailblazing;

quiet caring, feeding, organising;

challenging, subverting, provoking —

whatever your gift, you are needed.

You are wanted.

You matter to this Body,

and we cannot be who we are called to be without you.

So come, bringing your mind and your heart and your body and your spirit,

to love God with your whole self,

and to find yourself renewed and transformed.

Come, it is time to worship.

Written by Teri Peterson. Posted on revgalblogpals.org

GATHERING PRAYER:

Thank you for this day, Holy One.

A day of unknowns and surprises.

A day of plans and promises.

A day of loss and disappointments.

A day of brokenness and despair.

A day of dreams and hopes.

We give them all to you.

We trust in your Divine guidance as we weave our hearts into yours, our wills into yours, our very beings into one Church.

Today we are woven together.

One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One Church.

May all we do honour you.

Blessed be. Amen.

Written by Deborah Vaughn. Posted on revgalblogpals.org. Adapted.

OPENING HYMN: MV 24 “Breath of God, Breath of Peace”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HzDMjLLBok>

TIME FOR ALL AGES:

Animated Video Story: “Wellbeing For Children: Identity And Values”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om3INBWfoxY>

SONG: VU 365 “Jesus Loves Me” with American Sign Language

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJxrBmX8pGA>

We listen, attentive to the voice of Jesus

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

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Eric Barreto

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“But who do you say that I am?”

Though this question is posed to Jesus’ narrative audience, his disciples, it is a powerful query upon us as well today. Who do we say Jesus is? And the question is even more resonant if we embrace the fullness of what it means to “speak” or “say” in this context. It just may be that the lives we lead in light of our hopes in the Messiah are just as critical as that which we confess with words, no matter how true or elegant. That is, as we answer this life-altering question, the shape of our lives may be as important as the words our lips voice.

Questions of identity are at the center of the Gospels. In both narrative accounts and explicit identifications, the Gospels weave a number of portraits of Jesus. In doing so, however, the Gospel writers are not just interested in correctly defining who Jesus is but also in shaping a community molded in light of his actions and teachings. And so these questions of identity are not just a matter of definition but of formation, not just doctrine but discipleship.

A Reading from the Gospels:
Matthew 16:13-20

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,^[a] the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter,^[b] and on this rock^[c] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was^[d] the Messiah.^[e]

Israel Kamudzandu

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The Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans is both a countercultural and counter-political document.

It points to the global renaissance of a human family whose identity, frame of perception, and discipleship are based on God's act of reconciling with humanity, regardless of our vulnerability (Romans 1:18-5:11).

Romans 12:1-8 is a summary and reminder of Romans 1-11, in which the Apostle Paul is writing an apologetic of the presence, work, and callings of God on the entire human family. Readers are called to live a countercultural lifestyle, moving from the life of flesh to a life formed by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, writing to those under the Roman Empire, Paul persuades Christian communities living in the imperial center to live not according to the political ideologies of Rome, but rather to live out faith on the basis of what God did in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A READING FROM THE EPISTLES:

Romans 12:1-8

The New Life in Christ

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,^[a] by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual^[b] worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[d]

³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

HYMN: MV 18 “Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmdVXKCju8g>

POEM: “One But Many” by Susan Kassem Written in 2011

ONE GOD, MANY FACES.

ONE FAMILY, MANY RACES.

ONE TRUTH, MANY PATHS,

ONE HEART, MANY COMPLEXIONS.

ONE LIGHT, MANY REFLECTIONS.
ONE WORLD, MANY IMPERFECTIONS.
ONE.
WE ARE ALL ONE,
BUT MANY.

SILENT REFLECTION:

We take a few moments to reflect on all we have heard.

MESSAGE: “Who is Jesus for You, for Me, for Us?””

Last week’s Gospel Lesson about the Canaanite woman seeking healing for her daughter reminded us that we need to look at two things: First, we are wrestling with the wideness of God’s mercy and attempting to answer the question, “Who is included in God’s saving grace?” On the other hand, we are faced with the realization that Jesus doesn’t always behave the way we think he should.

A lot has happened between the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter in last week’s reading and today’s discourse with his disciples. Between that passage and this one, Jesus has fed four thousand men plus women and children and had plenty of leftovers. Following that remarkable gathering of people who were fed on food and inspiration, Jesus engaged in a spirited conversation with the Pharisees and other religious authorities about showing them a sign that he’s really sent from God. Of course, he had just given them a sign — he’d just fed a huge crowd of people out of nothing.

Then, after that, even his disciples don’t seem to understand who he is or what his mission is. It’s one of those times when Jesus must’ve felt like nobody understood him or his mission, despite him constantly talking about it.

Finally, Jesus directly asks his disciples, “Who do people out there say that I am?” Perhaps he starts with the crowds rather than the disciples because he knows it’ll be easier for them to talk about other people’s feelings and assumptions, rather than their own.

The reply comes, “Well, some say John the Baptist” — which could be a case of mistaken identity on behalf of the crowds, or it could be a case of “he’s back from the dead,” depending on whether they’d heard the news that John had been killed. But then there are also other, definitely “they think you’re back from the dead” cases. One response to Jesus’ question about who the crowds say he is comes in: “Some say Elijah, others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

Then Jesus asks his disciples pointedly about their own views of him: “Who do you say that I am?” A disciple who, up to that point, has been called Simon steps up and delivers: “You’re the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

And just like that, something extraordinary has happened and something hidden has been revealed. They finally said it out loud.

Anna Tew, a Lutheran pastor serving Our Savior's Lutheran Church in South Hadley, Massachusetts reminds us of those moments when we know something is true, but then when we hear ourselves say it, it becomes real for us. This was probably like that for Peter. All of a sudden, things shift dramatically, and one can see things in a way one never have before, all because someone said what they already knew out loud. Peter finds himself in a moment where everything stops for a moment, and where all the disciples look up and see the same thing.

In a few minutes, everything will be back to normal and Jesus will quickly tell them not to tell anyone that he’s the Messiah. But for a few shining moments, everything shifts, and Simon even gets a new name: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! ...I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and all of hell won’t be able to touch it.”

With Peter's confession, the story makes a dramatic shift towards the cross. In Matthew's account, the story remains important though perhaps not as central as Mark's version. It remains critical because the question of Jesus' identity drives so much of the story. For instance, questions of identity are precisely why Matthew begins with a complex, fascinating, structured genealogy.

Quoting Professor [Israel Kamudzandu](#) Genealogies are not just simple accounts of past ancestors. They are ways that we construct identity, ways in which we relate to our past. Jesus' identity is inextricably linked by Matthew's genealogy with Abraham and David, with exile and deliverance, with kings and extraordinarily faithful women. So also the birth narrative places Jesus in distinguished company. The threats over his young life, his family's exile into Egypt, and their eventual return resonates with Moses' own story. In short, for Matthew, identity is not just about who you are but who is around you, who is accompanying you, who has come before you.

The company Jesus keeps in this scene is thus instructive. When Jesus polls his disciples about public opinion, they recount that many think he is John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or another prophet risen anew. The crowds have gotten an important part of Jesus' identity exactly right. His ministry is not a diversion in the narratives of God's interactions with God's people. In many ways, Jesus is not a detour on God's plans. Instead, Jesus belongs in a long line of faithful servants of God, prophets willing to stake their lives for the sake of God's people.

We are the heirs of Peter and all those who built the church. The church's history is not a clean one — the church has done plenty of evil in Christ's name to all kinds of people. But every now and then, we find ourselves in a kind of path of clarity and vision. Every now and then, everything stops, and we see clearly not only who God is — a self-giving God of love, patience, and welcome — but who we are and who we are meant to be.

In every thoughtful gesture, in every supportive word, in every prophetic denunciation of injustice, in every meal cooked, in every day of work, we might just catch a glimpse of the power Jesus promised here.

In the end, a life of faithful service may be the best answer to that awe-inspiring question: Who do you say that I am?

SOLO: “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow” sung by Alison Krauss accompanied by The Cox Family

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GKNbmYOAow>

PRAYER FOR UNITY

God of creation

who called life into being

who is mindful of humankind in all its diversity

who embodies us with dignity,

granting different gifts and talents to shape life in this world

we ask for your Spirit to unite us

where we face lack of understanding and disunity

in our churches, in our communities, in our countries.

And in silence we lay before you the burdens of our hearts.

(Silence)

We ask for your Spirit to unite us

in the face of the conflicts, hatred and violation of life

experienced in so many regions of the earth

and in silence we bring to you the pain of the victims.

(Silence)

We ask for your Spirit to unite us
wherever fear prevents us from caring for our neighbour,
from meeting people of different ethnicities, cultures
and faith communities with respect
and in silence we bring to you the brokenness of human relationships.

(Silence)

God of all creation,
in Christ we are reconciled,
and so we ask for your uniting Spirit
to help us to overcome all our divisions
that we may live in peace.

~ posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website. <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Let us share the words Jesus taught his disciples as he encouraged them to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory
now and forever more. Amen.

SHARING OF GIFTS

It is very important that we remember to continue to share our gifts of time, connection, prayer, talent and resources with God's people. Please, consider continuing to support agencies and associations which have relied on your financial support prior to these changing world circumstances. We recognize that during these difficult times, personal finances may be severely diminished. However, please consider contributing financially as you are able to support St. Albert United Church's ministry. Expenses continue even with the suspension of services and operations.

Please check the church website for ways in which you can support ministry with time, talents and resources.

(www.stalbertunited.ca)

SHARING OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S WORK

Reach out in a variety of ways to your family, friends, and fellow congregation members—connect with and support each other.

Please check the church website for updates and information.

(www.stalbertunited.ca)

PRAYER:

I pray a blessing for each of you today,
And it doesn't feel like much.

Because what is a word against a virus?

What is a hope against racist systems?

What is a nudge of love against so much political vitriol?

What is an utterance of truth against all of the lies?

What is a shimmer of encouragement against the exhaustion?

It is so little.

But it is something.

It is what I have.

So it is what I offer for you.

It is what we offer for our people.

It is what our people offer for the world.

A breathed prayer,

A lived prayer
Of blessing:
May God's presence embrace us
And give us peace. Amen.

Written by Joanna Harader. Posted on revgalblogpals.org.

HYMN: VU 120 "O Jesus, I Have Promised"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svgHDdzP5xY>

BLESSING:
(inspired by Psalm 67)

God, mark us with grace and blessing!
Let our lives reflect your light and your goodness,
so that the way in which we live might bring others
to an awareness of your presence and your love.
Teach us to trust You with our whole heart,
and to praise You in every circumstance,
so that your grace and mercy might reach out through us
to the entire world. Amen.