

Prelude: Annie Schulz

Gathering Thoughts: David Brubacher

Welcome to our worship at Grace Mennonite Church for Sunday, June 21. It's a special day. We welcome Beth Woelk as candidate for the Associate Pastor position. Laur Steven will offer a further introduction of Beth just before she presents the meditation. I am honoured to have walked with Beth in her discernment leading to this day. As I anticipate retirement, I take comfort to see God continues to call people to hear the call to ministry.

Today is also Father's Day. I remember my father who died nine years ago. He was not a perfect father, but he was a good father. I give thanks to God for his impact on my life and for his encouragement along the way.

Our worship today continues to explore the theme, Horizons of Hope. By faith we acknowledge that God walks with us in all times – in the ups and downs of life. Sometimes when we are down, we feel vulnerable. God meets us in our vulnerability. While we have been socialized to think of vulnerability as weakness, it becomes a strength when we "let go and let God," as it has been said. As we worship, let us anticipate meeting God on the horizon of life and there find hope. Worship today is again a team effort. Joining Annie Schulz with the music are Cathy McCabe, Julie Plunkett, Diana Lantin and Ester Funk. Ted Kopp is our sound technician. After Laur Steven Introduces her, Beth Woelk will deliver her candidating message. And I am Pastor David Brubacher.

Call to Worship & Prayer: *Adapted from Vanderbilt Worship Resources*

Leader: Come, let us worship God, the creator of all.

People: **We look to you, O God, for courage and wisdom in these days.**

Leader: In Jesus Christ we are set free from sin and death.

People: **Humbly, we risk faith in serving you.**

Leader: You give us the Holy Spirit as a sign of your power among us.

All: ***As we walk with you, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, may we find the life for which we have been created and called.***

Holy God, as you stand among us, sharpen our vision for the future. Enable us to see more clearly the horizon where you meet us in hope. Where we feel fragile, help us to find strength in you for today and for days to come. May our sense of uncertainty be a place where others feel free to join us on our journey with you. By your grace, may the number of those who share in your promises grow among us. To you, gracious God, we lift our praise. Amen.

Hymn: ***Praise, my soul, the King of heaven!*** HWB #65

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven! To his feet thy
tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who, like me, his praise should sing? Praise him, praise him,
praise him, praise him, praise the everlasting King.*

*Praise him for his grace and favor to all people
in distress. Praise him, still the same forever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless. Praise him, praise,
praise him, praise him, glorious in his faithfulness.*

*Father-like he tends and spares us; well our feeble
frame he knows In his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes. Praise him, praise,
praise him, praise him, widely as his mercy goes.*

*Angels, help us to adore him, ye behold him
face to face. Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space, praise him, praise him,
praise him, praise him, grace with us the God of grace.*

Scripture: **Psalm 86:1-10**

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.

Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.

In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

Prayers of the People: *Adapted from Vanderbilt Worship Resources*

Lord God, we are humbled as we come before you today. More than anyone, including ourselves, you know us to the depth of our being. Yet you call us to be your hands and feet in the world. In our weakness, you come to us in strength. The scriptures, and the witness of your people, are living proof of your enabling presence in our midst.

Today, we are particularly grateful for this living community of faith – Grace Mennonite Church. There is a long history of being a witness to your presence in the north end of St. Catharines, and of sending people to the far corners of the world to serve you. But as our world is changing, so is our sense of being your people. Thank you for the gifts you have given Beth Woelk, and her sense of call to consider joining her gifts in ministry and leadership with the shifting vision of our congregation. Beyond this day, as Beth and the congregation discern your guidance, grant us the fullness and wisdom of your Holy Spirit.

Holy God, in all that we know of you, you demonstrate that you are a friend of those in need. Your Son Jesus came to untie our burdens and heal our spirits. And so we come to you today lifting up the prayers of our hearts for those burdened by the continuing impact of COVID-19 (pause), for those who continue to wait on you for healing and medical procedures (pause), for those needing a supportive and mentoring presence as they navigate life (pause). In all these ways, and more, we embrace your healing presence in our midst.

And so, we continue with grateful hearts for the vision you hold before us in the prayer Jesus taught us, 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 who 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, for ever and ever.” AMEN

Hymn: *O Lord, hear my prayer* HWB #348

*O Lord, hear my prayer. O Lord, hear my prayer.
When I call, answer me. O Lord, hear my Prayer.
O Lord, hear my prayer. Come and listen to me.*

Announcement by Ted Kopp

Today you will be hearing a little about, and from, Beth Woelk, our candidate for the position of Associate Pastor. We hope that you have all taken some time, as well, to review the attachments that were included with last week's service which provided an outline of the process undertaken by the Pastoral Transition team and an overview of the job description.

We, as a Church Council are asking the congregation, after listening and reading Beth's message, to respond to the following motion put forward by the Church Council, based on the recommendation of the Pastoral Transition Team. We are also asking that you respond either by email to the church office or by leaving a message by phone with the church office. We are also asking that you respond no later than Tuesday, June 23rd. This would allow us to compile the votes and to announce the results of the motion during next week's service.

The motion is as follows:

The Grace Mennonite Church Council, based on the recommendation of the Pastoral Transition Team, is presenting Beth Woelk to the congregation for the position of Associate Pastor: Pastoral Care / Spiritual Formation.

We are asking the members of the congregation to indicate either '**YES**' you are in favour of accepting Beth Woelke as Associate Pastor or '**NO**' you do not.

Again, the congregation is being asked to respond via email – gracemennonite@bellnet.com - or telephone – 905-935-6112 - no later than Tuesday, June 23rd.

Scripture: Matthew 10:24-39

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Introduction of Beth Woelk: Laur Steven

Today I have the distinct pleasure of introducing our candidate for Associate Pastor, Beth Woelk, to the Grace Mennonite Church congregation. Beth is well known to Dave Brubacher and to Doug and Annie Schulz and may well be known to other members of the Grace community. You may remember that Beth preached at Grace on two occasions, specifically on March 18, 2018 and March 3, 2019. You may recall that this past Advent and Christmas season Beth and her two teenage daughters attended Grace a number of times.

As members of the Pastoral Transition Team, Bob Dell, Margaret Heinrichs, Carla Isaak, Ted Kopp and I got to know a good deal more about Beth as we considered her appropriateness to the needs of Grace. We at Grace are an aging family, and we have an ongoing and increasing need for traditional pastoral care. But we are also a spiritually alive group of people who are prepared to walk with the Holy Spirit into new challenges. As our team read and discussed the package of materials that Beth supplied to us through MCEC’s Regional Minister Al Rempel, we came to believe that Beth Woelk could meet Grace’s needs for both pastoral care and spiritual formation. When we interviewed her on June 5th our feelings were confirmed.

Beth lives in St. Catharines with her husband Eric and daughters Selah and Karis. Their family works and plays alongside the 15 mile creek, canoeing it in the summer and skating on it in the winter. Beth loves hiking local trails, exploring new

landscapes when travelling, tending her vegetable garden and gathering friends and family around her table for a meal.

Beth grew up as a pastor's daughter in the Mennonite Brethren Church and was baptized at the age of 14. She was encouraged into leadership roles and felt a call to ministry from a young age. She married Eric in 1996 and was welcomed into the General Conference Mennonite family where she found refreshment for her soul in the more spacious and inclusive theology and praxis she encountered. She and her family have learned, grown and served together in Mennonite faith communities since then.

Most notably was their life-giving and life-changing participation in Quest Christian Community, an MCEC church plant here in St. Catharines from 2008 - 2018. As an early part of the leadership team, Beth's lay ministry roles included pastoral care, planning, leading and teaching for worship times, organizing shared meals, writing educational and liturgical resources and facilitating spiritual formation groups. She is grateful for the resources, training and mentorship provided through MCEC, MC Canada and Common Word during this time.

As Quest was discerning its future and eventually its end, Beth met regularly with Pastor Dave over the course of 18 months to process what was happening both in the community and in her heart. These meetings, along with a season of prayerful discernment affirmed a call to step into full time ministry and resulted in a change in vocation after 17 years as a Speech Language Pathologist. Beth completed a 2-year Spiritual Direction training program and is now a member of Mennonite Spiritual Directors of Eastern Canada. She offers 1:1 and Group Spiritual Direction and Retreat Facilitation.

Beth Woelk's work in pastoral care and spiritual formation flows out of the deep wellspring of God's love for all. She feels that we are here to be formed over our lifetimes into a community of the beloved. A community who is invited and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love ourselves, one another, all of creation and God as God loves us. Foundational to her faith, life and ministry is Jesus' invitation to transformational living. To follow the way of Jesus is to embark on a path of continual death and rebirth, dying to old ways of being and being born into a new identity, one centered in God and bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Beth will speak to us today about “Hope-filled Faith, Stories and Community: Strength in Uncertain Times.”

Reflection: ***Hope-filled Faith, Stories and Community:
Strength in Uncertain Times***
 Beth Woelk (Associate Pastor Candidate)

Good morning! It is good to be together this morning. I would have loved to have been able to gather in person, to see your faces and shake your hands, but I am thankful for the technology that allows us to gather our hearts together across time and geography.

Today’s gospel text that Pastor Dave read for us earlier from Matthew contains one of the more challenging and disturbing accounts of Jesus’ words. This passage comes in the midst of an almost chapter-long address in which Jesus gives his disciples instructions as he sends them out to carry on his work. Matthew writes these words down for a community who has kinship with the apostles who gave up everything to follow Jesus. This little community of early Christians almost a generation or so later is listening for how God is sending them in their own turn. It’s a time of uncertainty and they’re undoubtedly wrestling with how much they may have to give up, and what the risks are. Perhaps they’ve already paid a price for being disciples of this Jesus, especially if their family ties have been strained or broken by their commitment. This was a time and culture when family identity and connections protected you from the many dangers of living under the thumb of the Roman Empire and these Jesus followers were fearing life and death threats. In the midst of this fearful atmosphere when family offered safety and security, Jesus says things like “*Don’t think that I’ve come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword...I have come to set man against his father, a daughter against her mother.*” Puzzling words, especially for those of us who are deeply committed to our families and to peace. How do we make sense of this somewhat distressing text?

Theologian Barbara Brown Taylor calls it a “burr” in Matthew’s Gospel. She says “it’s one of those passages I wish he had never written down.” In her book *God in Pain: Teaching Sermons on Suffering*, she wrestles with this text and comes out with what I think is a beautiful and poignant understanding of its invitation to us: “I am a daughter,” she writes, “a wife, a sister, an aunt, and each of those identities has shaped my life, but none of them contains me. I am Barbara. I am Christian. I am a child of God. That is my true identity, and all the others grow out of it. You are

God's child first. That is no role. That is who you most truly are". Claiming that identity, and living faithfully into it, can have consequences in a world of empire and fear, in the first century and the twenty-first as well. There are risks and there will be struggle and uncertainty. And yet in this passage we hear repeatedly "Do not fear". This passage offers us hopeful images of God's love as tender and watchful, even in the face of deprivation, uncertainty, and division. It also invites us to tell in the light what this tender loving God says to us in the darkness, to proclaim from the housetops what the Divine whispers to us in the quiet of our hearts. We are reminded that what we lose for the sake of Christ we will find again, returned to us more alive than ever before.

So how do we remember and live into our truest identity as God's beloved children when we are faced with hardship? In this pandemic time how have we experienced God's love as tenderly watchful? In this time of racial revolution and the call for acknowledgement, advocacy, action, and change, how do we discern what is ours to learn, say, or do? How are we proclaiming in the light what the Divine whispers to us in the darkness? How do we foster resiliency, strength, and hope in the midst of these uncertain times?

I recently attended a webinar with Dr. Janet Ramsey, a writer and retired professor, parish minister, and nursing home chaplain. Her research and writing looks at spiritual resiliency in later life and how we maintain strength and hope in the challenges throughout our lifespan. In her research, Dr. Ramsey has collected the stories of older men and women who have experienced uncertainty, fear, and suffering in times of conflict and war, illness and caregiving, aging and loss. How did they make it through times of hardship? What spiritual resources helped them not only cope, but learn, grow, and adapt? What practices continue to give them strength and make them hopeful?

I noticed three themes emerge across the stories that Dr. Ramsey shared. The men and women interviewed said: "**We are hopeful because of our faith, we are hopeful because of the stories we tell and we are hopeful because of one another**". I hear echoes from our gospel passage in these 3 statements as well as invitations for us to consider how we might increase our spiritual resiliency during these uncertain times. Let's take a closer look at each theme together:

The first theme in the stories of spiritually resilient people was "**We are hopeful because of our faith**". When asked "How did you endure that hard time in your life? What got you through?" the first thing people would say was "I couldn't have made it without my faith," or "It was my relationship with God that saw me

through”. They didn’t talk about the security of finances, jobs, health, or even family. The most common response was faith. These wise elders spoke of a variety of spiritual practices that helped them hear God’s voice and remember their true identity. In times of uncertainty we are invited to remember who we are and whose we are. We are beloved children in the tenderly watchful care of God.

The second theme that spiritually resilient people shared was “**We are hopeful because of the stories we tell**”. Those interviewed said that how we talk to ourselves and each other during uncertain times matters. Spiritually resilient stories honour the complexity of life, with its mix of joy and sorrow, strength and struggle. They tell of longing and waiting. They are stories of gratitude and hope on the horizon. They suggest a better tomorrow and trust in God’s promises. At our house during the pandemic we’ve made a commitment to talk together about what is hard and lonely about self-isolation as well as what we are grateful and hopeful for. We’ve been sharing stories about what we’re learning about ourselves, each other, and God during this time and it has been boding us well. What are the stories that we are telling ourselves and each other during these uncertain times? How are we telling in the light what we hear God say in the darkness?

The third theme of spiritually resilient people was “**We are hopeful because of one another**”. Many expressed that receiving practical expressions of hope and encouragement made all the difference during times of hardship. They also expressed that they felt more hopeful and strong when they were offering help and mercy to others. This echoes Jesus’ words in our gospel passage that our lives are most deeply found when, paradoxically, they are given away. What expressions of hope and encouragement are we offering one another? Whether it’s a phone call, an encouraging note, a meal, or really listening to someone whose experience is different from ours, giving and receiving in community sustains us and gives us hope in uncertain times.

Hope-filled faith, stories, and community serve us well in the challenges of life. Here in the Grace Mennonite Church community you are doing these hope-filled things! You are reminding one another of your identity in Christ. You are telling hopeful stories through word, song, and conversation. You are giving and receiving in loving relationships with one another and outward into the wider local and global community. I’m inspired by the ways you work together in the shared ministries of your People Care Network, Women’s Chorus, Preaching, Worship and Fellowship/Outreach teams. May you continue to cultivate practices that help you hear God’s voice, remember your true identity, tell stories of faith, and discern what actions you can take to join with God’s healing force at work in the world.

In this time of transition as a community, may the Spirit of the Living God continue to guide and direct you in rich and hope-filled ways. Amen.

Hymn: ***Longing for Light*** BB #52 vs1,2,5

*Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.*

*(Refrain) Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

*Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.*

*Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.*

Benediction:

Living God, light of the world, in our worship we have encountered your healing presence. Heal our lives. Send us beyond this time with a song of praise bursting from our hearts to sing your praise. We acknowledge your wonderful deeds and with thanksgiving share them with generations to come. Pour your Spirit of renewal and blessing upon us. Amen.

Sending Hymn: ***Spirit of the Living God*** HWB #349

*Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me.
Mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.*

Postlude: **Annie Schulz**