

Prelude:**[Annie Schulz]****Gathering Thoughts and Call to Worship:****[Doug Schulz]**

Welcome to Grace Mennonite Church on this third Sunday of Lent! Our theme these weeks leading toward Easter is “Wilderness Calls to Deep Faith.” Today, while we are not nearly back to “normal life”, it is great to be able to meet again this way in our church sanctuary, our meeting place.

Today Pastor Beth Woelk will lead us in her reflection with a focus on Jesus as the Living Temple - the meeting place between God and God’s people - his humanity as the true sanctuary where God is revealed. Beth wrote me a week ago to share her thoughts about today’s theme, and said: “When God becomes flesh and bones and dwells among us...the Divine is no longer confined to bricks and mortar...the Divine is revealed in Jesus, in us, and in the world! We will explore how we as the Church and we as individuals are called to also be that meeting place...living sanctuaries for the healing of the world.”

Well, speaking about flesh and bones, and healing, we are just so glad Beth is able to be here today after breaking bones in her ankle a couple of weeks ago – on her week of staycation, no less! We are so sorry about your suffering, Beth, and hope and pray for a full recovery.

We give thanks today to Mary Koop for our Lent theme banner. We also thank our musicians and recording technician for their meaningful service week by week.

Now, take a deep breath and open your heart and mind as we listen to this brief Call to Worship (taken from Psalm 19) and Prayer:

Let the words and meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you, O Lord,
our rock and redeemer.

We call out to you,
as you call us to deeper wisdom in faith.

Deep calls to deep.

We call to you from the depths of our hearts.

We confess when we have settled into sameness,
forgetting the rhythms of the heavens,
ignoring the rhythms of justice.

We confess when we have not looked up
into the eyes of a neighbour,
into your Word that still lives.

Deep calls to deep.
You call to us from the depth of your love.
Calling us to deep wisdom in faith.
We come to you, O God.

Scripture:

Psalm 19

[Doug & Annie Schulz]

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
12 But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Sing now with heart and soul (with masks on, hum or whisper-sing). Words for this song are on the back of your bulletin.

Hymn: “How Great Thou Art” [Voices Together #436, vv. 1,2&3]

*O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed.*

Refrain: *Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art, how great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee:
How great thou art, how great thou art!*

*When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze: [Refrain]*

*And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin: [Refrain]*

Passing of the Peace and Prayers of the People [Doug Schulz]

I invite you to stand if you are comfortable doing so and turn about a bit to greet one another. It’s been awhile since we’ve done this, so take your time to look around and - generously, as best you can, however you can - pass peace and joy today.

“The peace of Christ be with you!” [Be seated]

We pause recording now to invite sharing of celebrations or concerns to be included in our time of “Prayers of the People”. [Sharing, if any]

Now, please join your hearts with mine in this prayer written by Terri C. Pilarski:

Creator God, we come before you
asking prayers for those who lead
nations cities churches homes.

As you poured out your love in the Word
may we hear your word and follow;
may the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts lead us to you.

Holy One, we come before you -
a people broken into shards of lives
sick, poor, hungry
hidden by the limitations of our eyes.

Help us to see as You see
as you poured out your love in the Word.
May we hear your word and follow
may the words of our mouths and
the meditations of our hearts lead us to you.

God of Mercy, we come before you –
seeking to live as you command, but often failing,
and thus we are torn by
cries of despair anger power control
lost to foolishness and stumbling blocks
despite your love in the Word

Help us to hear your word and follow
May the words of our mouths
and the meditations of our hearts lead us to you.

Gentle God, we come before you
giving thanks for all our blessings
the gift of life hope faith love family friends
all we care for this day. Help us to be Your hands.

Incline Your heart, O gracious God, and teach us to love
O Christ, our rock and our Redeemer.

And now, with gratitude, we conclude with the strong, kind words of prayer that
Jesus himself gave us when he said:

“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.

over the past 25 years have intentionally not owned their own buildings or even met in church buildings. Eric and I have valued being a part of churches that gathered in community centres, multi-functional art gallery and movie house spaces, parks and back yards, and even one that met in a pub. And one of the gifts of the church culture that I grew up in was the teaching and practice that the Church was not a building but a community of people; a living breathing organism. It's also ironic given my deep belief that the presence of God and the acts of worship and prayer are certainly not limited to these more formal places but can be experienced and expressed on forest paths, in gardens, around dinner tables, beside lakes, at kitchen sinks, and in coffee shops. In the natural world and in the midst of our mundane and everyday settings.

However, I am still intrigued by the structures we build as meeting places for God and God's people, the architecture, artistry, and aim of these spaces. Although I am often moved by the art and beauty in houses of worship, I am most interested in the relationship between form and function. Is there a congruence between the physical environment and the purpose of the place or it's community? I love to hear stories about ways that churches have re-imagined their buildings or created multi-purpose spaces in order to bring their physical structure into greater congruence with their purpose and vision. I've enjoyed hearing about the way that this congregation under the leadership of Waldo Pauls made physical changes to this sanctuary in order to be more congruent with your calling at the time.

It is a deep kind of incongruence that is on Jesus' mind when he sweeps into the temple in the gospel text read earlier for us by Mary Koop. In an act of prophetic clarity, Jesus disrupts the business of the day, what was understood to be the necessary business of ritual sacrifices. But Jesus signals the need for a change, a clearing out, a cleansing, a return to the congruence between form and function, to the integrity for which the temple was created. Commercial transactions have overtaken Divine interactions.

This story is found in all four gospels. However, whereas the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all place this story right after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, John places it as one of the very first stories in his gospel. Biblical scholars suggest that John uses creative license to move this confrontation to the beginning of Jesus' ministry as a way of underscoring a theological theme that he carries throughout his gospel. In John's gospel the Word becomes flesh and bones and dwells among us. The Divine is no longer confined to bricks and mortar. We hear this in our text when Jesus says "*destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" The Jews then said, "*this temple has been under construction for forty-six years and you will raise it up in three days?*" And then John lets us in on a secret that he and the disciples will have figured out later "*he was speaking of the temple of his body.*" Through his incarnation, death and

resurrection, Jesus is the Living Temple - the meeting place between God and God's people - his humanity the true sanctuary where God is revealed.

John writes his gospel around 90 AD, shortly after the fall of the temple. The destruction of the temple is devastating for both the Israelites and the early followers of Christ. Their sense of institution and religious practice are in upheaval. A seismic shift is taking place with Jesus that challenges everything they have known. Temple theology and faith traditions are overturned.

Perhaps some of us feel like we are in a similar time of religious upheaval. People are turning away from religious institutions in growing numbers. Church leaders, seminaries, sociologists, theologians and ecclesial scholars have been studying the changes the Church has been facing for years. Something big is happening, something seismic even. Some have called it a great Spiritual Awakening, Emergence or Migration that invites us to reflect, to reassess, and to ask questions about what the Church has to offer in this post-christendom reality. It's a task heightened by the wilderness realities of a global pandemic, racial injustice, and climate change. What calls do we hear in these wilderness times? What keeps us in congruence with God's larger Shalom vision for the healing of the world?

When interviewed for the MCCCanada Study Conference this past autumn, Sara Wegner Shenk, President Emerita of AMBS, reflected on the questions "Why the Church? Does the Church still have legs?". She spoke about how in this time of global crisis, fundamental questions about the larger story we're a part of and who we are relative to God become exceedingly pertinent. The calling of today's Church is to be found within the larger biblical Shalom vision and the calling to be the living breathing Body of Christ in the world. This is what guides us forward and keeps us in congruence. *"We learn about this vision from the scriptures. We tell stories and rehearse that vision together as we intentionally seek to follow the "Jesus Way" together and become the hands, feet, mind and heart of Christ in the world. So why church? We are a human association that organizes around what we believe is an alternative vision for the flourishing of all creation - the Shalom vision of God - where we are all sons and daughters of God, where every human being has dignity and worth."* Wegner Shenk encourages us that when the church recognizes this and is in congruence with this by making it our mission in the world, it impacts everything we do. When this vision becomes our guiding light we resist all kinds of divisive, life-denying, life-crushing forces and replace them with the loving forces of hospitality, solidarity, reconciliation and justice.

The wonder and the mystery of the gospel text and of Jesus' life, lie not only in how he gives his body as a sacred space but also in how he calls us to be his body in this world. Christ's deep desire, so evident on that day in the temple, is that

we pursue the congruence he embodied in himself - that as the Body of Christ, we would take on the forms that most clearly display his presence and welcome. In our bodies and in our lives, in this church building and in our community of faith, even in the unknown of wilderness times. Christ calls and empowers us to be a place of meeting, a live sanctuary of healing; through our hospitality, through our witness, through our lives of prayer and love.

This season of Lent invites us to consider whether there are things that need to be cleansed and cleared out in order for us to have the congruence that Christ calls us to. As we enter the wilderness of an unknown future for our world, our lives, the life of Grace Mennonite, and the future of the Church may we create space to ask good and hard questions, may we listen carefully to one another, may we draw close to the empowering presence of the Spirit, and may the Shalom Vision of God - where we all are beloved children - guide us forward so that we may be a Living Temple - embodying the hospitality and love of Christ in our lives and in our church. Amen.

Hymn of Response: “Where cross the crowded ways” [HWB #405]

*Where cross the crowded ways of life, where sound the cries of race and clan,
above the noise of selfish strife, we hear your voice, O Son of Man!*

*In haunts of wretchedness and need, on shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
from paths where hide the lures of greed, we catch the vision of your tears.*

*From tender childhood’s helplessness, from woman’s grief, man’s burdened toil,
from famished souls, from sorrow’s stress, your heart has never known recoil.
The cup of water giv’n for you still holds the freshness of your grace.
Yet long these multitudes to view the sweet compassion of your grace.*

*O Master, from the mountainside, make haste to heal these hearts of pain.
Among these restless throngs abide – O tread the city’s streets again,*

*till all the world shall learn your love, and follow where your feet have trod,
till glorious from your heav’n above shall come the city of our God.*

Benediction: (by Roddy Hamilton, Church of Scotland) [Doug Schulz]

May we find the road that leads to life;
may we take the turns that brings right relationships;
may we pause to accompany others on the way;
and may we journey with God through Lent,
and long for the horizon and dawn. And the grace.

Sending Hymn: “May the Face of God Shine on You”

[VT #844]

*May the face of God shine on you.
May the face of God shine on you,
with the words of promise whispered in your ear.
May the face of God shine on you.*

*May the peace of Jesus steady you.
May the peace of Jesus steady you
when the world is shaking and challenges come.
May the peace of Jesus steady you.*

*May the joy of the Spirit carry you.
May the joy of the Spirit carry you.
May the laughter pour washing over ev'ry day.
May the joy of the Spirit carry you*