

PENTECOST 20
6/10/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

In our singing,

O God, be the note of joy.

In our praying,

O God, be the heartfelt word.

In our searching,

O God, be the will to endure.

In our need,

O God, be the source of hope.

In our serving,

O God, be the hands and feet of Christ.

Opening Prayer

God spoke through creation and the wonders of nature

and we are challenged to respond with care and with responsibility.

God spoke through prophets and wise leaders

and we are called to respond by seeking justice and by practicing kindness.

God spoke through the teachings, the cross-death, and the rising of Jesus,

and we are called to respond by following faithfully and by serving wholeheartedly.

God still speaks through prayer and through humble saints

and we are called to respond in our worship, in our care for one another, and in our concern for the poor and powerless.

Listen for the voice of God!

It is the voice we long to hear. Amen.

HYMN 158 God has spoken by his prophets

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We praise you, O God, for breaking through to us in the person of Jesus,

your Son, our Lord. When the words of the prophets went unheard and

when their actions were ignored, you spoke the creative word once more.

Bringing order out of chaos again - this time not to bring a world into being,

but to bring your very being into the world.

The essence of your love taking on our flesh.

In the midst of this congregation, we praise you.

With our lives, we worship you.

Gracious God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
to you be all glory and honour, now and forever.

We read in Hebrews that God, “for whom and through whom all things exist”, made the pioneer of our salvation “perfect through suffering.”

Lord Jesus Christ, pioneer of our salvation, the lengths that you were prepared to go to defeat evil and to show us the depth of your love are almost too much for us to grasp. You surrendered any advantage you could have had over us in order to become as we are, and to suffer and even die for our sake.

For our sake.

So that we could live abundantly and joyfully, with your powerful life in us.

But we confess that we carry a multitude of unhealed wounds around with us, and within us.

So much of our personal landscapes are filled with the chronic pain of broken relationships and unfulfilled expectations; with emotional, spiritual and physical suffering.

Forgive us, Lord, for trying to meet our needs solely out of our own power.

Embrace our weaknesses with your strength,

our brokenness with your wholeness, our suffering with your healing, our fears with your peace.

Remind us that when we bring our weariness and heavy burdens to you, you will give us rest.

Lord Jesus Christ, pioneer of our salvation, receive these our prayers, for we offer them in your name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Through his suffering and death, Jesus rescued us from lives dominated by evil and sin. He is the source of our salvation. Hear then the good news that in and through Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

Job1:1, 2:1-10

1 There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

2:1 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and the accuser also came among them to present himself before the Lord. ²The Lord said to the accuser, "Where have you come from?" The accuser answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it." ³The Lord said to the accuser, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." ⁴Then the accuser answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that the man has he will give for his life. ⁵But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." ⁶The Lord said to the accuser, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

⁷So the accuser went out from the presence of the Lord and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

⁹Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." ¹⁰But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive good from God and not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

- **Hebrews 1:1–4, 2:5–12**

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

2:⁵ Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere, "What are humans that you are mindful of them or mortals that you care for them?"

⁷ You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned them with glory and honour,
⁸ subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying,
“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.”

HYMN 217 Love divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eb6xfRzjhq>

SERMON

Looking at the readings this morning I am struck by the different approaches to God that come from Job and the Hebrews. One can seem at odds with the other when they are taken out of context. Today I have drawn on some excellent work on Job by a friend from my UTC days.

The Old Testament book of Job is a very striking and confronting discussion on the nature of God. On the one hand we seem to have the impression of Job being eternally patient on one side and the horrific machinations of ‘satan’ on the other.

If we take the time to study the text more fully, we may have to change our minds as these two approaches are not the reality. Job is not always patient as we see in the following verses from chapter 3:

20 Why is light given to one in misery,
and life to the bitter in soul,

21 who long for death...

and ... 22 are glad when they find the grave?

24 For my ...groanings are poured out like water.

26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;

I have no rest; but trouble comes.”

Job spends a lot of his time challenging the injustice that has been inflicted on him.

Nor is 'satan' the force of evil found in later Biblical passages. Despite the Hebrew word "satan" being generally translated as satan in English, the correct interpretation of the Hebrew text should be closer to 'adversary' or 'prosecutor.' The adversary has the role of investigating human actions and reporting to God. This role can also be found in Zechariah 3:1 when the 'accuser' wants to accuse Joshua of wrongdoing.

This means that we have to consider what is the purpose of the book of Job. One of its main functions is to contradict the sentiments that had been proposed in Deuteronomy. That book suggests that the righteous are always rewarded and evil is, consequently, always punished. The author of Job challenges this approach as their experience in life has obviously shown that good people can suffer and evil can go unpunished in the real world.

Consequently Job explores whether God is just in a debate in a heavenly court. Is God good and just is the conundrum being explored in the challenge to the approach taken in Deuteronomy.

Experts put the book of Job as probably being written during the 6th Century before Christ. At this time we know that the faithful had returned from exile in Babylon. However the book is careful not to identify any historical features of that time. It is written as a fabled encounter between a human and God. The scenario sets the interaction as not being in Israel but in Edom which is to the southwest.

There is a regular debate in Hebrew literature about how the wicked get good fortune while the faithful seem to suffer. Job seems to pull all these questions together. These injustices have been well known throughout history to the righteous poor under the oppression of the unscrupulous wealthy as one author put it.

In Job 9 we find:

"Therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked, when disaster brings sudden death, he mocks at the calamity of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked, he covers the eyes of its judges – if it is not he, who then is it?"

The book of Job sets out on a journey to explore the fact that both the innocent and the wicked can both suffer. Is there a rationale for God's action in the face of such suffering?

The 'adversary' points out that Job has never suffered from poverty and he had lived a fairly comfortable life. The protagonist suggests that it is easy to be righteous when you have everything that you need. The 'adversary' then asks the question that if Job's wealth and family were shattered how strong would Job's faith still be? In this context God agrees to the trials for Job.

This picture of God is not one that sits well with our Christian perspective. God in this scenario is willing to test Job's feeling even as the victim continues to profess to be a humble servant of God. This raises the age old question as to whether God tests the faith of His followers? This is a common debate in our modern western society with the idea often discussed as to whether this testing can help to deepen our faith.

How often have we seen this debate played out in the media when a person of faith loses their children or their partner suffers through a long bout with cancer? I personally can't sit with this harsh view of God, but it challenges me.

How many people from third world nations are caught in cycles of poverty and starvation while wars rage around them? While it can be some people's experience that some suffering can bring them closer to God most of the suffering people in places like those conflicted countries in the middle east would probably not agree to this approach.

Perhaps where we differ the most from Job is where we are not trying to lay the blame on God for people's suffering. We bury this approach in ideas like the 'Doctrine of Free Will.' That doctrine suggests that our free will is largely the cause of the astounding toll of wars, disease and abject poverty. Job puts the blame solely on God.

The series of painful incidents suffered by Job includes the theft of his animals, the murder of his servants and his children. These are not initially attributed to God by Job. Job still blessed God's name even as the

provocative 'adversary' repeatedly instigates more and more suffering. Each time God boasts of Job's righteousness in the face of suffering.

While this might seem a commendable approach to faith, Job's question in 2:10 hangs there for us:

"Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

Does God send both good and bad outcomes on the people of the world? Do good and evil both come from God?

If we look to Isaiah 45:7 we hear:

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."

And then we can turn to Deuteronomy 32:39:

"See now that I, even I, am he;
there is no god besides me.
I kill, and I make alive;
I wound, and I heal;
and no one can deliver from my hand."

In the Hebrew world this approach is well known even though it doesn't sit with our view of God. Evil had to be explained in some way for this ancient monotheistic religion and that sometimes meant a god who both blessed and cursed the followers.

Even when Job is joined by his three friends Job sticks doggedly to his stance on faith. They keep telling him that there must be some secret evil action in his past which brought on all this mayhem. Even though they had no idea of what Job's failure was they simply thought that Job deserved everything that had happened to him.

This interaction with Job's friends serves to showcase the failures of this approach to good and evil. Job is confident that God is omnipotent. This leaves the question hanging as to why God hadn't used his power to ensure justice for Job. At the end of Job 12 we read:

"The Lord makes nations great, then destroys them... He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light, he makes them stagger like drunkards."

Job is the one the early authors who most starkly brings out the debate about theodicy, the nature of God.

In more recent time David Hume in 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (1748) says:

Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both willing and able? Whence then is evil?

This follows on from the debate about the evil inflicted during the WWII by theologians of that time.

Job brings out the eternal questions of power and justice. It is only when you have been the recipient of unreasonable power that you can understand the full impact of how injustice can shatter our world view. This leads into the debate about human rights.

Why should a blameless and upright person who loved and worshipped his God be made to suffer?

Can we believe in a God who has a dark side?

Can we hold with a God who we see as all loving when there is evil in our world?

We then turn to another piece of Hebrew literature which goes some way to answering these questions in the New Testament. Hebrews was also written for a Jewish audience, but sometime after Christ.

We are told that in the cross we see that God has indeed come to experience life and pain personally with us and it is not some academic exercise or folk tale that we have in Job. We read the words: "You, O God, are worthy of our worship because you stop at nothing to set us free from sin and fear and guilt."

Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 when it says that while humans might seem insignificant God has created them only one rung lower than the angels. Jesus, who was initially on that same level as us, has been raised through His suffering and death to sit on God's right hand.

Jesus is the trail blazer who made the path known to us. This path gives us the chance to worship God in the fullness of grace and healing. Looking at Jesus we see God's image.

We enter into this experience as we gather at this table. We have Jesus call on us to become the body of Christ and know that God sits with us each day. God is not remote and manipulative like the image we have in Job. The God that Jesus showed to us sits with us in both the good and bad times in life, supporting His children.

HYMN 211 Jesus, lover of my soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvluR3KbPDs>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God, all that we have, all that is,
is a never-ceasing, always-giving gift of life.
Your nature is to give.
As we learn to give, we become like you.
In this giving, we open ourselves to you.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Toronto Uniting Church meets every Sunday at 9am with an attendance of approximately 50. Our Minister is a Deacon, Rev Allison Forrest. We have Ministry Teams which generally meet monthly and who report to our Church Council every two months. We have a weekly Christian Meditation Group, a monthly Prayer Group, a fortnightly Kinship Care Group, a monthly Men's Coffee Group and a weekly Faith Nurture Study Group. Our congregation are mainly in the over 60's age group at present. We are grateful for the receipt of a Presbytery Mission Development Grant, which has helped with the funding of the installation of new audio-visual equipment and will also be used to implement "Toronto Uniting Church Online" – a project which aims to open up some new ways into worship and discipleship for people not currently attending in-person worship. We hope that this project will open up ways for us to welcome in younger people, to get involved in the life of our church, and to take up opportunities to get creative in video and digital media production.

Prayer: For the Ongoing work of the TUC Online Project. Pray that a good number of our members will be equipped to operate the AV system confidently. Pray also for wisdom and encouragement for the members of the project team, as they guide this complex work. The Kinship Carers group – give thanks for the friendship, support and compassion shared between its members. Please pray that all the children and teenagers connected to this support group experience a wonderful year of life and growth. Each member of each Ministry Team – thanks for the gifts, skills and commitment which each person contributes to the mission of the church. Amen.

God of all,
God of the supernova and the atom,
God of the sea and the sky,
God of the mind and heart,
God of the body and soul,
you have created us to be a part of your great created order.
We know this, and yet we often find it hard to experience our oneness with each other and with the rest of the created order.
Today, we pray especially for those of us who feel alienated from your world,
from each other and from you.
We know that deep loneliness and alienation are the experiences of so many of us.
We know that many of us live life as if we were observers and not participants,
as visitors to this world and not as people at home in it.
God, may we be sensitive to the great loneliness in our culture.
May we build bridges between human beings close by and far away.
May we live in harmony with all of creation.
May we open ourselves to the truth that you are all around us,
always alongside us and continually within us.
Amen.

Our Father 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 sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfHSk>

COMMUNION

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right that we should give our thanks and praise.

It is right to glorify God,
and to give thanks;
for you alone are God, living and true,
dwelling in light inaccessible
from before time and for ever.
Fountain of life and source of all goodness,
you made all things
and fill them with your blessing;
you created them to rejoice
in the splendour of your radiance.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power;
your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.
You formed us in your own image,
giving the whole world into our care,
so that, in obedience to you, our Creator,
we might rule and serve all your creatures.
When our disobedience took us far from you,
you did not abandon us to the power of death.
In your mercy you came to our help,
so that in seeking you we might find you.
Again and again
you called us into covenant with you,
and through the prophets
you taught us to hope for salvation.

Father, you loved the world so much
that in the fullness of time
you sent your only Son to be our Saviour.
Incarnate by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
he lived as one of us, yet without sin.
To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation;
to prisoners, freedom;
to the sorrowful, joy.
To fulfil your purpose
he gave himself up to death
and, rising from the grave, destroyed death
and made the whole creation new.

And that we might live no longer for ourselves,
but for him who died and rose for us,
he sent the Holy Spirit,
his own first gift for those who believe,
to complete his work in the world,
and to bring to fulfilment the sanctification of all.

We bless you, Lord God, king of the universe,
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who on the night of his betrayal
took bread,
gave you thanks,
broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this and eat it.
This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper,
he took the cup,
gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying:
Drink from this, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant
poured out for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, whenever you drink it,
for the remembrance of me.

We now celebrate the memorial of your redemption.
Recalling Christ's death,
and descent among the dead,
proclaiming his resurrection
and ascension to your right hand,
awaiting his coming in glory;
and offering to you,
from the gifts you have given us,
this bread and this cup,
we praise you and we bless you.

Lord,
we pray that your in goodness and mercy
your Holy Spirit might descend on us,
and upon these gifts,
sanctify them and showing them
to be holy gifts for your holy people,
the bread of life and the cup of salvation,

the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Grant that all who share this bread and this cup
may become one body and one spirit,
a living sacrifice in Christ
to the praise of your name.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
all honour and glory are yours,
almighty God and Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.
AMEN

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We thank you, God our Creator,
that through word and sacrament
you have given us your Son
who is the true bread of heaven
and food of eternal life.

So strengthen us in your service
that our daily living may show our thanks;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

HYMN 530 Now let us from this table rise
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMUCmn7Madc>

BENEDICTION

Go into this week,
with the love of God inscribed upon your heart,
the life of Jesus Christ imprinted within your being,
and the energy of the Holy Spirit giving you life.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74