

SA, SL, TS & DSM United Churches

Fifth Sunday of Lent – April 6th, 2025

Prelude: - by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Thank you for your support of all our past services, which are posted on our websites - Talbotstreet.ca and Southbuxton.ca

Lighting the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: We come to worship, remembering God's goodness that has carried us and sustained us to this present moment. We remember the days when God covered us in love and filled us with joy.

People: **We come to worship, weary from stress, heavy with grief, and wondering when relief will come. We long for the days God covered us in love and filled us with joy.**

Eric: We come to worship to remember and remind one another that God's love has never left us, and God's joy cannot be extinguished. God, restore us that we know your love and your joy once again.

People: **We come to worship to remember and become the Body of Christ, a community called to restore the world around us.**

Eric: God, empower us to be your restoration people who fill the world with love, laughter, and abundant life.

People: Amen. **

Opening Hymn: VU 215 "Hope of the World"

Hope of the world, O Christ of great compassion,
speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent;
save us, your people, from consuming passion,
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.

Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,
bringing to hungry souls the bread of life,
still let your Spirit unto us be given
to heal earth's wounds and end its bitter strife.

Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
showing to wandering souls the path of light;
walk now beside us lest the tempting byways
lure us away from you to endless night.

Hope of the world, who by your cross has saved us
from death and dark despair, from sin and guilt;
we render back the love your mercy gave us;

take now our lives, with them your kingdom build.

Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
who by this sign has conquered grief and pain,
we would be faithful to your gospel glorious.
You are our Lord! You shall forever reign. **

Opening Prayer:

People: Come to this sanctuary, this house, this home, Holy Christ, And let us receive you with lavish welcome. You are the Restorer of our fortunes, The Promise of new life – We pour out our praise to you. Fill this room with your Spirit: The sound of wind, the warmth of flame, the scent of perfume and fill our hearts with your compassion, Not just in this time and place, But in all times and in all places, So that as we celebrate the great things you have done for us, We may also embody the love you give to all. Amen. **

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 126

Celebrating the Harvest

It seemed like a dream when the Lord brought us back to the city of Zion.

We celebrated with laughter and joyful songs. In foreign nations it was said, “The Lord has worked miracles for his people.”

And so we celebrated because the Lord had indeed worked miracles for us.

Our Lord, we ask you to bless our people again, and let us be like streams in the Southern Desert.

We cried as we went out to plant our seeds.

Now let us celebrate as we bring in the crops.

We cried on the way to plant our seeds, but we will celebrate and shout as we bring in the crops. **

Children’s Story:

Children’s Song: VU 226 “For The Beauty of the Earth”

For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light,
*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,

friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild,
*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

For each perfect gift sublime
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven,
*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise. ***

Gospel Reading: John 12: 1 - 8

Six days before Passover Jesus went back to Bethany, where he had raised Lazarus from death. A meal had been prepared for Jesus. Martha was doing the serving, and Lazarus himself was there. Mary took a very expensive bottle of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. She wiped them with her hair, and the sweet smell of the perfume filled the house. A disciple named Judas Iscariot was there. He was the one who was going to betray Jesus, and he asked, "Why wasn't this perfume sold for 300 silver coins and the money given to the poor?" Judas did not really care about the poor. He asked this because he carried the moneybag and sometimes would steal from it. Jesus replied, "Leave her alone! She has kept this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me." **

Message: "Fill Me With Laughter"

Some of the most significant psalms are some of the shortest ones. Today's Psalm is only six verses long. Yet it points to a deep reality. The reality is that we are still living in the turbulent times; still in the midst of the struggle. We are sowing in tears and going out weeping: It isn't all good news, no rainbows and unicorns here. We are still in the struggle of daily living. Will the crops grow? Should we put forth the effort, not knowing if we will bring a return. Things are so fragile. Yet can we still sing songs of hope that God will provide and bless us?

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our own lives and wishing for what we want. Do we even notice the seriousness of our collective situations? Who is it that is overwhelmed by the tears with which we sow - that we can't imagine reaping. How can we ever shout for joy?

Are we praying for the ability to laugh again, to hope again. If we can just live as people of hope and joy, we claim a fortune no lottery can award. Restore our fortunes, O Lord. Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy.

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouths are filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy; then it will be said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

Today we hear the gospel story of Mary pouring expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus. Some suggests Mary had got the message, and she was anointing the King with expensive perfume. Judas, the treasurer, didn't know how to celebrate a moment. Judas was a man who knew the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. Judas missed the moment because Judas was more worries about his finances than what was happening right in front of his eyes. Judas did not say in humility, "You shouldn't have,". The Gospel tells us that Judas shouted, "You shouldn't have, that money would have helped the poor". Judas may not have been so bold as to say it should have gone to him. Judas condemned the whole act as wasteful.

What about the other disciples did they get the message? Were they just one of the "some who were there"? It doesn't tell us if they understood. It does tell us that Judas did not understand. Sometimes we are looking for someone to hold up, someone to blame. We think of ourselves, "I couldn't have said that or thought that". To make us look better, we accuse others of bad things, even if we were thinking the same thing at the time.

Jesus points out to all of disciples (and to us) that no gift is wasteful when it is given in love, no matter how extravagant. No act of service, no matter how humble, can be demeaning when it is given in love. Is Jesus talking about his act of love for us? Jesus dying on the cross because he loves us so much? Cruifixation is so demeaning, but we hold Jesus' death on the cross up as the greatest act of love – ever!

The last verse says, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Is this Jesus' way of bringing the disciples into this special moment? It is not about giving up on the poor – because we will always have them, as we have witnessed every day since Jesus shared this statement.

Maybe it has to do with what fills us. When we are filled with fear, or scarcity, or self-importance, then our giving becomes suspect. However if we are filled with

laughter, with the joy of giving, being in community and relationship, then everything changes, and the dream of God's kingdom here on earth is realized. Like Mary, we are giving in love, not in duty. As the Psalm reminds us, live in love and joy, and know that we are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 421 "Lead On, O Cloud of Presence"

Lead on, O cloud of Presence, the exodus is come.
In wilderness and desert our tribe shall make its home.
Our slavery left behind us,
new hopes within us grow.
We seek the land of promise where milk and honey flow.

Lead on, O fiery Pillar, we follow yet with fears,
but we shall come rejoicing though joy be born of tears.
We are not lost, though wandering,
for by your light we come,
and we are still God's people. The journey is our home.

Lead on, O God of freedom, and guide us on our way,
and help us trust the promise through struggle and delay.
We pray our sons and daughters
may journey to that land
where justice dwells with mercy, and love is law's demand. **

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We offer our gifts so others can feel special in God's presence. Let us give to share our love with others.

Offertory: VU 541 "Praise God From Whom..."

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Offertory Prayer:

People: Loving God, source of all joy, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude. As Mary poured out her love for Jesus with costly perfume, so we pour out our gifts before you, seeking to honor you with all that we have. During this reflective Lenten period, may our offerings remind us of the abundance you've poured into our lives. Help us to give extravagantly, not out of duty, but from hearts filled with joy and gratitude. Bless these gifts and use them to bring your hope to the world. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen. **

Hymn: VU 400 “Listen To Your Children Praying”

Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
send us love, send us power, send us grace!

Pastoral Prayer & Lord’s Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 642 “Be Thou My Vision”

Be thou my vision, O joy of my heart;
naught be all else to me save that thou art,
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, my calm in all strife;
I ever with thee, and thou in my life;
thou loving parent, thy child may I be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my battle shield, sword for the fight
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower;
raise thou me heavenward, O power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Great God of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all. **

Blessing:

Eric: May you go out from this place in the blessing of God, who turns your weeping into laughter and your laughter into joy that plants seeds of restoration, justice, and abundance for all of God’s creation, now and forever more.

Chorus: VU 226 Chorus

*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth