

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

“Civic Holiday Service” – August 2nd, 2020

Prelude: “If I Ever See You Again” – by Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Welcome to our Service today as we celebrate our “Civic Holiday Service”. This will be our last online Service until August 30th, which will also be an online Service. Our Church Boards will meet in September to decide how we will move forward in our church buildings.

Annette and I are traveling for the three weeks of the middle of August. Pastor Andrew Gilliland (Charing Cross Pastoral Charge – (519-358-2147) will be around those weeks I am away. Sharon Campbell Rayment (519-401-5529) has offered to help if needed. Service Links from Charing Cross and Wallaceburg are here to share in Andrew’s and/or Sharon’s services.

Charing Cross: www.facebook.com/CharingCrossWesley

Wallaceburg: www.facebook.com/scrayment

Continue to keep in touch with others and to share our websites; at southbuxton.ca, and talbotstreet.ca

Thank you to Christie Coatsworth for our music this morning.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

If you wish – grab a candle to use while we share our services. The flame of the Candle reminds us of the light of Christ that collects us as the faith community, “We are One in the Spirit”. Thanks be to God.

Call To Worship:

Eric: Holy Presence, we know you are with us, yet we long to see you face to face.

People: **We breathe, and it is you filling our lungs and beings with life.**

Eric: We wonder, and it is you who teases our imaginations and delights our senses.

People: **We strive, and it is you who calls us forth in the desire to be in communion with others and this magnificent planet.**

Eric: We struggle, and it is you who heals and renews us – body, mind, and spirit.

People: **And still, yet, we long to see you face to face. We wrestle, Holy Presence, with this longing.**

Eric: In our worship, help us to know and experience your presence so fully our longings are quenched, and our spirits renewed.

Hymn: VU 299 “Teach Me God to Wonder”

- 1 Teach me, God, to wonder, teach me, God, to see;
let your world of beauty capture me.

Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
life be celebrated, joy you give.

- 2 Let me, God, be open, let me loving be;
let your world of people speak to me.
Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
life be celebrated, joy you give.
- 3 Let me, God, be ready, let me be awake,
in your world of loving my place take.
Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
life be celebrated, joy you give.
- 4 Teach me, God, to know you,
hear you when you speak,
see you in my neighbour when we meet.
Praise to you be given, love for you be lived,
life be celebrated, joy you give.

Opening Prayer:

Like Jacob in the night, we are here, Holy One, to wrestle a little with what it means to be your children. We are here to allow that struggle to strengthen and guide us. We know you are with us and will bless us at our parting. Show us the way as we offer ourselves to this time. Help us to open our senses and spirits to all of who you are and all the ways you reveal yourself to us. We thank you in the Name of Jesus, our Loving Friend. Amen.

Scripture: Genesis 32: 22 - 31 - Jacob Struggles – In Story Form

I had sent them all away; I was completely alone at the border of my homeland hoping to re-enter in peace, to meet my brother without hostility, to be able to come home after so many years in self-imposed exile.

Suddenly, a stranger appeared, didn't greet me or make an introduction, just stood there! My first thought was that my brother had sent him, and he held some malice intent towards me. I had left home in terrible circumstances. I had been deceitful and dishonourable; it would not be surprising if this stranger had come here to this lonely place, so close to my homeland, to punish me for those past wrongs.

We stood face to face. I struggled to know what to do, how to behave, what to say. I couldn't let him stay here without explanation. I couldn't let this stranger go, let him journey toward those I loved without knowing who he was and what were the intentions. I couldn't put them in danger. So I stood tall and straight and demanded that he tell me who he was, and what he was doing here.

Nothing, not a word! I was determined not to let this pass, not to let him think silence would appease me or give any advantage over me, and so I stepped forward – and that's when the struggle began.

I was stunned, but not so overcome that I could not defend myself, and so I grabbed this stranger, and the two of us began thrashing about on the ground. I was struck on the thigh, it was painful and debilitating, but it made me more determined to hold on, not to give up. He tried to hold me pinned to the ground, but I twisted around and held him down. He struggled to get out of my grasp, but I held on tight and refused to let him go. Throughout the night, we remained locked in this battle of will and strength and all the while, not a word uttered.

Birdsong broke through the silence of night and day began to break in rays of pink and gold. The stranger spoke and demanded to be set free. Maybe it was the sound of the voice, but suddenly I was struck by the memory of the last time I was in a place like this on the edge of home and alone – God had come to me and spoken to me. Could it be that this was God? I needed to know if I was right, I breathlessly asked for a name but still got no response. I drew on my strength and demanded the stranger's name.

My demand was refused, but if this was God then at the very least I needed a blessing. I could not let this struggle go until I had the reassurance that God remembered the promise made to me all those years ago when I was on the run. But then he asked me my name. "Jacob," I said.

"Your name is no longer Jacob, you are now Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with every kind of person and have not been defeated."

I let go. Once again, I have encountered the God of my ancestors, and I have been transformed.

Message: "Face to Face"

Today we hear the story of Jacob coming face to face with God, and face to face with himself, all in anticipation of coming face to face with his brother, Esau, from whom he is estranged. These face to face encounters are moments of awakening, deep awareness of who Jacob is, who God is, and what it means to be human.

As we have been following Jacob over the last few weeks, it becomes apparent that struggling is a familiar experience for Jacob. Jacob struggled in the womb with his brother Esau. Jacob was his mother Rebekah's favourite, while Esau was Isaac's favourite. Favouritism creates its own struggles, always trying to please the other parent. Rebekah wanted Jacob to receive Isaac's final blessing, and she helped her son get it - by putting animal's clothes on his arms to trick Isaac into thinking Jacob was Esau, as Esau was a hairy man. Then after Jacob hightails it to his Uncle Laban's land and works for his Uncle, marries his daughters, and is tricked by his uncle to work double the seven years for free – we see more struggles.

Of course, Jacob lived in a time when it was understood that empires exploited and profited from the domination of one people over another. Jacob knew what it was like to struggle. Yet it seems that Jacob's struggling experiences have made him wise and a wealthy man.

We as humans struggle to be in relationship with one another. We struggle to be in relationship with our world. We as faithful Christians struggle to know God, and all that God creates. When we are cut off from these relationships, we feel estranged - cut off from that which is most vital to us as humans. We struggle to make things right. We do not wish to be estranged.

This is where we meet Jacob today. Something in his world was incomplete and broken. Jacob longed for a restored relationship with his twin brother, Esau. Material wealth was no substitute for the worth of his brother's blessing. Our story is on the evening of day before Jacob was headed over the river to meet his brother Esau. We can only imagine how his mind was going through all the scenarios that Jacob could face with his brother. Maybe he slept enough to get into dreaming mode. Jacob was awake enough to remember what was going on, but not awake enough to really be present. Like we talked a few weeks ago, Jacob was in that thin space – that space where heaven and earth intersect.

Jacob awakes to realize this is a Holy Struggle. Jacob would call this place, “Peniel”. This is the place where Jacob comes face to face with God. In this struggle Jacob also comes face to face with his own identity. What we may see in this story is in the struggle, we discover our restored relationships are ultimately what continue bringing us face to face with our God.

“Face to face” means making ourselves vulnerable to living in relationship and the truth that relationships require. Seeing someone face to face makes avoidance of uncomfortable truths much more difficult. Coming face to face with someone, or yourself, or with situations or circumstances, and ultimately God, takes an extraordinary amount of honesty. Coming face to face makes deception very difficult.

In today's world we use E-mails and texts a lot to communicate. We can say pretty much whatever we want (and many do). Sometimes we say stuff without thinking about its impact on the other person, or how they might interpret our written word. In texting we can hide our vulnerability and even the truth. It's hard to develop and maintain a “caring” relationship.

Over the past four months we have found that sending texts and emails can communicate with others, but do they really say what we are thinking, or wanting to say? I know when we started sending out services only in written form, I felt they were so impersonal. Others have told me that was not the case, as they consider it more like getting a letter from a friend. We started recording audio of the service which made me feel I was communicating better. But I found without your faces in front of me, I was not being natural. We started video and Zoom about the same time. It might not be totally face to face, but they helped a lot to be natural. Seeing you face-to-face, even electronically makes the Sunday Service so real – at least the best we can until we can meet again in person.

Where have we found God in the space of the past four months? Where have you found your partner, or even your kids when they deliver your groceries - in the past 4 months? Have your

relationships become more real, more caring, or even just “more”? Personally I have found the extra time Annette and I share together has been a refreshing blessing. I see God in her patience and in her encouragement to keep doing what you are doing – it’s working. In what we are doing, and in how we are caring for one another, we are blessed. Jacob asks God for a blessing, which God gives. We are not alone. We have each other and we have God. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: VU 422 “God Be With You Till We Meet Again”

- 1 God be with you till we meet again;
loving counsels guide, uphold you,
with a shepherd's care enfold you;
God be with you till we meet again.
 Till we meet, till we meet,
 till we meet at Jesus' feet;
 till we meet, till we meet,
 God be with you till we meet again.

- 2 God be with you till we meet again;
unseen wings protecting hide you,
daily manna still provide you;
God be with you till we meet again.
 Till we meet, till we meet,
 till we meet at Jesus' feet;
 till we meet, till we meet,
 God be with you till we meet again.

- 3 God be with you till we meet again;
when life's perils thick confound you,
put unfailing arms around you;
God be with you till we meet again.
 Till we meet, till we meet,
 till we meet at Jesus' feet;
 till we meet, till we meet,
 God be with you till we meet again.

- 4 God be with you till we meet again;
keep love's banner floating o'er you,
smite death's threatening wave before you;
God be with you till we meet again.
 Till we meet, till we meet,
 till we meet at Jesus' feet;
 till we meet, till we meet,
 God be with you till we meet again.

Offering:

Eric: God blesses us even in the midst of a pandemic. We offer our blessing to others so they know we care. We offer God's blessings in love to help others. We are children of God and we are truly thankful. In thanking God for blessings, let us give our blessings.

† 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:

For the ways we can see, feel, touch, smell, speak of, and taste your kindness and generosity to us, we give and rejoice. Bless this giving, we pray, that it might become an encounter with you beyond this moment and place. We thank you for being willing to wrestle with us. And we praise you for showing us a new day. 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:

Eric: O God, we have longed to see you face to face and we thank you that we have done so, and not only survived, but have been enriched, strengthened, guided, and gifted by every encounter with you.

People: **For we have seen your face in one another today – in the generous smiles and open welcome we have received.**

Eric: We have seen your face in the ideas of grace and glory shared and imagined in this service.

People: **We have seen your face as we have struggled to understand our lives and experiences.**

Eric: We have seen your face in our desire to be in deeper communion with you and your realm.

People: **We have been so blessed. And so we pray this same blessing on others.**

Eric: May all who struggle find your grace, and see your face, in the midst and on the other side of their challenges.

People: **May they recognize your presence with them along the way.**

Eric: May all who lead and have the power to influence, do so reflecting on your face and beauty.

People: **May they be guided by your wisdom and infused with your compassion.**

Eric: May they seek your will and follow your ways.

People: **We thank you that we have been adopted by you and have been granted to be heirs to your legacies of covenant, glory, law, and promises.**

Eric: Help us to deserve and embody them.

People: **Show us your gracious countenance in all that we see and share.**

Eric: And teach us, again, to be your people, as we pray the special prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

*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, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

Benediction:

Eric: In your face, is the face of God. Go now and let it shine, now and forever more.

Go Now in Peace:

**Go now in peace, never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of ev'ry day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know He will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others, so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.**

Postlude: “He Touched Me” – Christie Coatsworth