

SA, SL, TS & DSM United Churches

Third Sunday of Lent – March 23rd, 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: Children of God, what has God done for you?

People: God saves, provides, and holds us in God's steadfast love.

Eric: Consider and remember: in the joyful times and in the sorrowful times, what has God done for you?

People: God covers us and lifts us up, protecting and empowering us with steadfast love.

Eric: When you have been like the fig tree in Jesus' story that seems unable to produce and that everyone has given up on, what has God done for you?

People: God tends the soil and waters the ground, nurturing us into life with steadfast love.

Eric: Children of God, come, let us worship God who never gives up on us!

People: We come to worship and cling to God, for God's steadfast love never fails! **

Opening Hymn: VU 651 "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more,
feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,

land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee. **

Opening Prayer:

People: We are wounded, worried, betrayed, afraid, and injured. We are physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged. We chase thrills, happiness, wealth, health, longevity, him, her, peace; the right job, the right look, anything to lessen our pain. We exhaust even ourselves with our efforts. We continue, broken - day in and day out, hopelessly applying quick fixes. The pain will not subside. We are beckoned by an eternal yearning. We remember a prayer that grandmamma taught us; a lesson learned the hard way, or a word from the Word spoken by a sage. We long for relief, we seek it, search for it, yearn for it - relief that can't be purchased or bartered. God, we are grateful that your thoughts and your ways are higher than our own. Thank you for forgiving our sins. Thank you for new mercies each new day. Thank you for always welcoming us back into fellowship with you. Amen. **

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 63: 1 - 8

God's Love Means More than Life

You are my God. I worship you. In my heart, I long for you, as I would long for a stream in a scorching desert.

I have seen your power and your glory in the place of worship.

Your love means more than life to me, and I praise you.

As long as I live, I will pray to you.

I will sing joyful praises and be filled with excitement like a guest at a banquet.

I think about you, God, before I go to sleep, and my thoughts turn to you during the night.

You have helped me, and I sing happy songs in the shadow of your wings.

I stay close to you, and your powerful arm supports me. **

Children's Story:

Children's Song: VU 663 "My Faith Look Up to Thee"

My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary, Saviour divine.
Now hear me while I pray;
take all my guilt away.
O let me from this day be wholly thine.

While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread, be thou my guide,
bid darkness turn to day;
wipe sorrow's tears away;
nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire.

As thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire.

Gospel Reading: Luke 13: 1 - 9

About this same time Jesus was told that Pilate had given orders for some people from Galilee to be killed while they were offering sacrifices. Jesus replied: "Do you think that these people were worse sinners than everyone else in Galilee just because of what happened to them? Not at all! But you can be sure that if you don't turn back to God, every one of you will also be killed. What about those 18 people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were worse than everyone else in Jerusalem? Not at all! But you can be sure that if you don't turn back to God, every one of you will also die."

Jesus then told them this story: A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. One day he went out to pick some figs, but he didn't find any. So he said to the gardener, "For three years I have come looking for figs on this tree, and I haven't found any yet. Chop it down! Why should it take up space?" The gardener answered, "Master, leave it for another year. I'll dig around it and put some manure on it to make it grow. Maybe it will have figs on it next year. If it doesn't, you can have it cut down." **

Message: "My Soul Clings"

David fell in and out of favor in the palace of King Saul. One minute he would sing soothing songs to calm King Saul's moods, but then immediately had to run for his life from that same king who wanted him dead. David spent time in the wilderness avoiding danger. The wilderness is not a happy place. It is barren, it is hot during the day, and cold at night. Likely there is not a lot of food or water. People in the wilderness would be hungry and thirsty.

So in this psalm there is thirst – "In my heart, I long for you, as I would long for a stream in a scorching desert". This is not the physical kind of hunger or thirst, but it is the spiritual hunger and thirsting for God. There is a longing for the presence that is as real as the longing for food and water.

In the wilderness, you'd imagine the first thing on the list would be physical sustenance. But no, the deeper hunger, the more powerful thirst, is for God. He is fainting for God's presence, driven to see not his own safety, not his own revival, but the very face of God. O God, you are my God, I seek you. God is always with us. Even in the wilderness.

Scripture and the Biblical stories give us memories, words, maybe a verse, that gives to us a moment of joy and hope, a moment of encounter, of intimacy and healing, a moment of shared love and closeness – something we can hold like a jewel in our minds. May we remember those moments when we felt close with God - when we were one.

Our experiences of God are Trinitarian. We experience God as community: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer - or Father, Son, and Spirit in the traditional language. God is always community. Our experiences of God are shaped by the community in which we live and in which we grew up in. "I know God because of you". "Because I love you and you love me, each of us can have feeling of what it is to be loved by God. Because of the experiences I have had with you and those who came before you, I can remember God in the memories of those experiences. Part of what I remember is not just God, but the God in you, the God I know in you—your love, your support, your care, your correction, you. You.

In the remembering, we are tending the tree so that we can produce more fruit. Like the fig tree, we sometimes do not get those memories, that help us to produce more fruit. But we get a second chance – like the gardener gave the fig tree. We need to be given whatever we need to grow great fruit. We may not get it the first time. We may need a second chance. We need to remember what we cling to. We need to remember and live as though it might be our last days. Jesus is not calling us to fatalism. Jesus shows us a way of clinging to fullness of life - the fruitful life. We are not waiting for a proper time - now is the proper time. We are not waiting for the proper season - this is our season. The countdown is on. What memories help us to produce great fruit? What memories do we have that helps us to see God in our friends and our neighbours? This is Lent – This is the season. Yet we do not travel alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 658 "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: We offer our gifts so we can bear fruit for your kingdom. May we till the soil of your kingdom to give others the chance to grow in faith and to love others. 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: Faithful God, our guide and sustainer, as we offer these gifts, may they bear fruit for your kingdom. In this solemn season of Lent, we remember your call to repentance and renewal. Help us tend the soil of our hearts so that we may grow in faith and bear witness to your grace. Use these offerings to bring hope to those in need and light to those in darkness. May we live as your fruitful servants, trusting in your abundant mercy. In the name of Christ who calls us to new life, 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 120 "O Jesus I Have Promised"

O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
remain for ever near me, my Saviour and my friend:
I shall not fear the journey if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

O let me feel you near me: the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, then draw nearer and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
now speak, and make me listen, O guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory your servant shall be too.
And Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Saviour and my friend. **

Blessing:

Eric: Go with the hope to cling to God, knowing that in the highs and lows, the joys and the sorrows, the known and unknown of this life, God's love never fails. Thanks be to God, now and forever more.

Chorus: VU 651 End of Second Verse

*Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.*

Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth