

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [May 10/20 Worship Service Video](#)

An audio file of this week's reflection is on the church website: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/sermons/>

**Church School** – Rosalie Finch and Laura Rousseau are holding weekly live Cool School on Zoom each Sunday at 10:00 am. If you would like to join or are not receiving our children and youth emails please contact Laura at [lrousseau@charleswood.org](mailto:lrousseau@charleswood.org) to be added.

Dear Friends

If we were able to gather together in church this week we would be celebrating two things simultaneously. The second Sunday of May is Mother's Day and we would be praying with thanksgiving for the gifts mothers universally provide. But at Charleswood we also use the second Sunday in May for our Spring Baptism service. The two go hand in hand of course. What better way to remember the blessings of motherhood than to have new mothers, with their families, in our midst.

However there is much more to baptism than mothers, or even fathers and babies. Baptism is above all a sign of God's grace. It is an opportunity to be reminded of all the places and all the people and the times that God has blessed us freely and without reservation. I like to repeat at baptism services that the child or adult we receive with the waters of baptism is not joining a congregation or a denomination or a particular tradition. It's not about the church. Baptism is the welcome of a newcomer into the body of Christ and so we welcome humbly and with thanksgiving for the ways each of us has been made welcome in that Body whatever name it happens to go by.

You are welcome in this place. Just the way you are.

### **Opening Hymn**

Join the hymn "We Praise You, O God" by clicking here: [We Praise You, O God](#)

### **Bible Reading**

The Gospel Lesson for May 10 can be read it by clicking here: [John 14:1-14](#)

### **Song**

A musical offering from our friends in Faith Based: [Your Love is Amazing](#)

### **Reflection**

Just over a year ago I had the wonderful experience of visiting Israel and Palestine for the first time in my life. The opportunity was created because my daughter was living and volunteering for three months in the West Bank city of Bethlehem and I wanted to go see her. I arrived at the airport in Tel Aviv and took a shuttle bus to Jerusalem where we had agreed to meet. In order to fend off jet lag we thought it would be a good idea that the first thing we would do is go on a walking tour of the Old City of Jerusalem.

After an hour with an excellent tour guide we continued to wander through the cobbled streets on our own and found ourselves led to perhaps the most important feature of the Old City, the Western Wall. The Western Wall is the most holy site in Judaism and it is a large retaining wall that held up the ground where the Temple stood during the life of Jesus. As we came to the access point that would lead into the plaza where one could pray at the Western Wall, we walked past a sign that drew my attention. It said, "Dear Visitors, you are approaching the Holy Site of the Western Wall where the Divine Presence always rests."

These words are reflective of an ancient understanding. It was thought by ancient Israel that whenever God was on earth, God resided in the Holy Temple. It was what made the Temple such a place of significance during the life of Jesus. As the early Christian church began to consider the question of where the Divine Presence was to be found, something became abundantly clear. By the early second century, during the time in which the Gospel of John was written, the church was coming to terms with the idea that there would need to be a break from, a separation, an apart-ness, between Christianity and Judaism. It wasn't a rejection of Judaism by any stretch of the imagination. Rather it was an understanding that in addition to the covenant that God had made with Israel, in Jesus God had made a new covenant with all of humankind for all time. What had been given to Israel was now being expanded upon. What Israel understood as Divine Presence must also be expanded upon in the life of the church.

The lesson that has been the focus of our attention is from the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. It addresses the question of where the Divine Presence is to be found and it does so in a narrative form. Jesus and the disciples find themselves in a time of fear and anxiety. The forces conspiring against Jesus have been growing in power and courage. In fact, in chapter 13 Jesus has told his followers about the death by which he will die and in the very last verse of that chapter, tells Peter of his eventual denials. So it is that in John 14:1, Jesus seeks to reassure the disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid." And then he begins to speak about the dwelling place of God. Those of us who remember verses from the King James version of the Bible may recognize the phrase, "In my Father's house are many mansions." The Revised Standard Version says, "In my Father's house are many rooms". A lot of contemporary translations of scripture use the expression 'many dwelling places'. *Many dwelling places*.

As Jesus begins to expand their understanding of Divine Presence and where God may dwell in this life and in the next, the disciples understandably are confused. Philip in particular, is confused in the lesson we read. "Show us the Father" Philip asks, employing a common metaphor for the God of Israel. And Jesus gently helps Philip and the rest come to a new understanding of the relationship between God and Jesus, a new understanding of where it is that God dwells. Not removed or remote but in person, in the flesh. He tells Philip that he has seen the Father because the Father is in him. That he and the Father are One. That the words of the Father are the words of Jesus and vice versa. Jesus teaches that Divine Presence isn't about a single location but that Divine Presence, so beautifully described in that sign in Jerusalem, is all around us.

When we are going through fear and anxiety, we need more than to be reassured that our troubled hearts ought to be at rest. It's easy to say but a difficult thing to achieve. But it is possible when we develop the capacity to recognize that the Divine Presence is all around us. The Divine Presence can be recognized and acknowledged in the medical experts who are doing their best to lead us through this time of pandemic. The Divine Presence can be found in those who never thought they would need courage to go to work as the grocery store. The Divine Presence can be witnessed in that tireless pharmacist behind the counter. The Divine Presence is evident in people who are working in hospitals in places where the challenge of this moment is much more severe and dire than in our hometown. The Divine Presence is in everyone who is staying in, who is exercising restraint, who is limiting their movement, essentially going against their will and instinct to be outside and moving freely. People are sacrificing their liberty and mobility for the sake of the well-being of everyone around us.

Wherever sacrifice is made in the cause of love of neighbor, the Divine Presence is to be found. And in these days, that is nearly everywhere you look. Amen.

## Hymn

View and enjoy the More Voices hymn “Spirit, Open My Heart” by clicking here: [Spirit, Open My Heart](#)

## Prayers

Holy, Life-Giving, and Everlasting Spirit, in the beginning you blessed the human family with unity and beauty and wonder. In your first children you granted a glimpse of perfection. And even as we pulled away from your providence you remained steadfast and faithful to your Word. We give you thanks for meeting us with grace and granting us such an Eden as this earth in which to be your children.

We thank you tender and nurturing Spirit, that you create each of us unique from one another and yet commonly in your image. We thank you for the gifts you place in all of us and for the curiosity that seeks to discern these gifts. We look into one another’s face and find you are reflected there. We praise you for this reminder of your companionship.

Almighty and Loving, You are the Way, we praise you for those who are leading us through this dark and difficult period in human history. We celebrate those among us with the skill and expertise to direct us on the path of healing and renewal.

Almighty and Loving, You are the Truth, we thank you for those who hold fast to what is true and trusted. We pray with thanksgiving for those who are providing all the things your people need for the fulfillment of our living. We pray for their continued courage, service, and safety.

Almighty and Loving, You are the Life, and through you we have found the wholeness and well-being you desire for us. So it is we open our hearts to hold in prayer your people who suffer and are ailing, your children who are afraid and anxious, your beloved who grieve and mourn.

Eternal Father, you are our protector and in you we trust. Bless us with a common commitment to hold fast to one another, and in so doing so, to find you in our midst. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour who leads us to pray together by saying...OUR FATHER. Amen.

Be well, safe, and hopeful.

Michael

## Postlude

A favorite from Carla and Brendan: [May the God of Hope](#)