

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [Worship Video for Sunday, May 17, 2020](#)

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 to be added.

Dear Friends

In the fall of 2018 Charleswood United Church was asked to participate in a food drive, along with other faith groups across the city, to help the Yazidi refugee community living in Winnipeg. For many of us this was the first time we had heard of this ancient ethnic and cultural group who had fled Northern Iraq after brutal treatment at the hands of ISIS. It was also our introduction to Operation Ezra, the Jewish led inter-faith coalition created specifically for the purpose of helping Yazidi refugees in Winnipeg.

After a successful food drive, two members of our church had the idea of sponsoring a farm project for the summer of 2019 where Yazidi folk would gather and work in order to provide food for themselves as well as for sale at local Farmers' Markets. In fact, we had 2 of those markets right at the church last fall and they were wonderfully well received.

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a parable as his ministry draws to a close. In it he offers the often quoted line, "I was hungry and you gave me food." Those listening ask "When did we find you hungry and give you food?" and the response comes "When you did it to one of the least of these, you did it also to me." There are few things more essentially Christian than meeting the needs of hungry, thirsty, or otherwise hurting people. Remembering the text helps us recall that the promise is that Christ meets us in these people and as a consequence of these efforts. It is holy work that lifts up the presence of God in our midst. Just as promised.

Opening Hymn

Join the hymn "Sing Praises to God" by clicking here: [Sing Praises to God](#)

Bible Reading

The Gospel Lesson for May 17 can be read it by clicking here: [John 14:15-21](#)

Interlude

Amazing Grace performed by Carla Plosz and Len Van Roon: [Amazing Grace \(instrumental\)](#)

Reflection

The biggest mistake people make about good works and mission projects is that they exist to lift up the virtue of those who give. A close reading of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25 reveals that Jesus thought of good works in an entirely different way. To Jesus giving drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, welcome to the stranger, clothes to the naked, care to the sick, or company to the imprisoned was nothing less than the opportunity to be in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But neither should it be forgotten that immense blessing comes to those who give. Meeting the risen Christ in our neighbor is the fulfillment of our life's dreams and ambitions. It is the perfect definition of a win-win scenario.

This past Tuesday was potato and onion planting day at the farming project our church is involved in with Operation Ezra and the Yazidi Community of Winnipeg. It is the start of a second season for an initiative that began last year and was tremendously successful. To describe it briefly, Bo and Gloria Wohlers have donated land (and much expertise) so that Yazidi refugees can work, be fed, and profit from the growing and selling of vegetables. More than 8 acres of land west of St. Francis Xavier is going to be planted, irrigated, and harvested this year.

I had the opportunity the other day to talk with two key people in this ongoing effort, asking them about what this project means for them personally. Michel Aziza is the coordinator of Operation Ezra. They began their work 5 or 6 years ago in response to the crisis of Yazidi people literally fleeing for their lives from their homeland in Northern Iraq. Michel conceived of this response within his Jewish community as an opportunity for different faith groups to come together and help out yet another. This is what inspires him the most, people of one faith helping other faith groups in recognition of our common humanity above all else.

Michel told me that this year the Yazidi community have given the project a new name. They call it The Healing Farm. Their experience last year was such that for many the therapeutic benefits of working in the fields and providing for their families was just as significant as the food itself. Many who had been farmers in Iraq and many who had been traumatized in the flight for life have said that the farming project was the most 'normal' thing they had done since leaving their homes.

Bo Wohlers was the person who first approached me about the possibility of a farming project a year and a half ago. His expertise and generosity has been the single greatest contributing factor to the success of this endeavor. I asked him about what involvement in The Healing Farm meant to him personally. He readily shared that the first thing he thinks about is how important, essential, gardening was to him when he was a child. Bo was a child living in Germany after World War 2. For him and his family growing food was literally the difference between life and death. When he heard of the situation the Yazidi community were in and recognized he was in a position to help, there was nothing else he could do. It cannot be overstated how much gratitude these new Canadians have for Bo and Gloria.

In John 14 Jesus is addressing his disciples and telling them something of what life will be like for them when he is gone. He assures them that God will send another, an Advocate, a Spirit of Truth, what we typically refer to as the Holy Spirit. They are not to worry because the presence of the Holy Spirit is indistinguishable from the presence of Jesus himself or of the God of Israel. The Three are One and the One is Three in the mystery we call the Trinity.

The presence of the Holy Spirit may sound to the outsider like a strange and foreign concept but it is as simple as loving your neighbor as yourself. Amen.

Hymn

View and enjoy the Voices United hymn “In the Bulb There is a Flower” by clicking here: [In the Bulb There Is a Flower](#)

Prayers

Holy and Loving Spirit, our Advocate in this world and the next., we come before you with thanksgiving for the beauty and wonder of the world you so love. Even as we struggle through difficult days our eyes are open to the life which surrounds us. We praise you for the greening of grass and trees and plants to which we bear witness. We praise you for the gift of wildlife returning by migration or awakening from hibernation and making their company known. We praise you for the opportunity to plant and water and find solace in gardens where you dwell.

Spirit of Truth, we thank for the many ways we discover your presence. You have said that you will meet us in our neighbour and we thank you for the opportunity to know you in those around us, that when we care for the least of these, we care also for you.

We pray for the success of The Healing Farm this season. We pray that it will once more be a source of comfort and community, of sustenance and strength. We pray for the well-being of the Yazidi community in Winnipeg with thanksgiving for the ways their presence among us has blessed and enriched our city.

As we journey through this time of unexpected fear and anxiety, we ask for the gift of knowledge that we are not alone, that you are present and walk this path with us. We pray for our neighbours who have been adversely affected by the suspension of activity and economy. Especially we pray for those who have lost their jobs and are experiencing financial hardships. Let us share the burden of the moment and together keep our minds fixed on the coming days of renewal.

Healing and Holy Spirit, brood over your people and your creation we await a new day. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who taught us to pray together by saying... OUR FATHER...

Be well, be safe, be hopeful.

Michael

Postlude

Our choir Director Shauna with her son Eric: [I'll Fly Away](#)