

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [June 14 Worship Service Video](#)

An audio file of this week's reflection is on the church website:

<https://charleswoodunited.org/media/sermons/>

Prelude

Carla and Brendan share a favorite of theirs and ours: [Peace Like a River](#)

Dear Friends

It has been 3 months since we made the decision to suspend worship and all gatherings at our church. It feels like a long time and there have been no shortage of challenges. However we are now in phase 2 of re-opening and on the list provided by Manitoba Health is places of worship. However, the limit of 25 people or 10% of capacity remains in place. I have heard of a church that was holding a lottery to choose the 25 members who would come to worship. We could have a lottery here but I am unsure if the lottery "winners" would be those who could come to church or those who can stay at home!

The question of resuming services is something the Church Council has been asking and is keenly aware of. For the time being we all agree that until such time as a larger number of people and gather, and gather safely, we will continue on as we have since March.

And continue we do. We continue as a community of faith holding one another in prayer. We continue to exercise a ministry of Worship and Witness. We continue to offer a ministry of care and compassion. With our mission partners we continue to have a ministry that reaches out to those in need in our community. And we certainly continue to make a joyful noise.

Our "Favourite Hymn" this week was chosen by Heather Gies. It is a hymn that she learned as a child while attending CGIT camp in Southern Ontario. It remains beloved by her because it speaks so beautifully of her love of nature, something that continues unabated to the present day. Heather learned it as "This is My Father's World." In our hymn book we sing "This is God's Wondrous World." Let us be together in worship.

Opening Hymn

Join the opening hymn by clicking here: [This is God's Wondrous World](#)

Bible Reading

The Scripture Lesson for June 14 can be read it by clicking here: [Romans 5:1-8](#)

Faith Based

The gift of music in the song "Praise the Father, Praise the Son" found by clicking here: [Praise the Father, Praise the Son](#)

Reflection

Recently in conversation and in my own reflections I have been giving expression to the notion that we in Manitoba have much to be thankful for. Compared to many places we have avoided the worst of the COVID 19 pandemic. Through a combination of good fortune, wise leadership, and an uncommon unity to struggle together, we have been much less affected than other regions. Which is not to say that we are not connected to nor separate from the many communities where the virus has hit hard and there has been much suffering. Nor in any way do I wish to fail in recognizing that there are many people within our community who have struggled mightily, who have been affected severely by illness, economic, or mental/emotional trials.

Paul the Apostle has much to say about suffering. And some of his most important lessons are found in the Letter to the Romans from which our lesson today is taken. I cannot imagine that it was at all easy to be a Christian in Rome in the 1st century. All around you, everywhere you looked, there would have been constant reminders of the glory of Rome, of the might of Rome, of the violence and tyranny of Rome. In fact living as a Christian in 1st century Rome would have amounted to residing in an imperial city with the counter-imperial values of the Gospel. The best you could hope for would be to be undetected or simply ignored.

In the 5th chapter of Romans Paul takes on the question of suffering directly. He begins by reminding the reader that we live in a state of grace as a consequence of God's redeeming activity in Jesus Christ. By grace he means to lift up the idea that God's gifts are not anything we have earned, nor deserve, but rather are something given freely, lovingly, abundantly, extravagantly. Central to the gifts we have had freely given is the knowledge that we *rejoice* in hope (as the RSV translation puts it). Or *exult* in hope (Revised English Bible). Or *boast* in hope (New Revised Standard Version).

Paul writes that we begin by recognizing that we are a people of hope before he addresses the question of suffering. In fact he says that we also rejoice (or exult, or boast) in suffering because suffering produces endurance. And endurance produces character. And character produces hope. Paul is often misunderstood or misinterpreted in this teaching. He most certainly does not mean to suggest God wants for our suffering or creates our suffering in order to lead us to hope. Remember he begins by stating that we live in a state of grace, a state of giftedness. Rather, Paul wants us to know that we always have hope, no matter what we are experiencing. The love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ offers us hope even in the midst of suffering. Faith does not remove suffering from our lives, but it provides for a companionship that allows us to persevere and look forward to a new day.

The other day I was speaking with a dear friend who has been living in an assisted living complex since the pandemic began. She was describing to me that after three months, how exceedingly difficult it has been for herself and for her fellow residents. Most of her time is spent in her room by herself. Meals which were once held in a common area are now brought to the room and taken alone. If someone has to leave the premises, even for a doctor's appointment, they are required to remain in isolation in their room for 14 days upon their return. The comfort of simply walking the halls is denied. Speaking for herself and also for her neighbours she was saying that it is a difficult situation that can't go on much longer.

But she has hope. She is a woman of great faith and has not lost sight of the promise that we will find our way through this. There will be a new day. Rides, and restaurants, and worship will resume. She believes something is coming very soon that will be a reward for our sacrifices, suffering, and hope. We give thanks to God who does not abandon nor forsake, but fills our lives with grace and the free gift of hope by which we face whatever the day may offer. Amen.

Hymn

View and enjoy the Voices United hymn: [Come O Fount of Every Blessing](#)

Prayers

God of all Wonder and Beauty, as we move through the days of longest light, we pause and give thanks to you for the light that shines in the darkness and is never diminished. We celebrate all there is to be thankful for in this season of growth and blossom. We praise you for the goodness of creation which supplies all our needs.

We thank you this day for the generations who have gone before us and left a legacy of love and service in your name. The wisdom of the past remains a great blessing for the church in the present.

We thank you for the First Nations of this land, for their wisdom and patience, their generosity of Spirit. We thank you for the Metis Nation and its fundamental contribution to the creation of Canada and Manitoba. We thank you for generations of people who have come to Canada from other lands to create a majestic tapestry of culture and colour and custom. As we work together for renewed and renewing relationships, addressing racism in all its forms, particularly against black communities, we ask for your patience and guidance.

God whose peace passes understanding, we hold in prayer this world that you so love which has been upended and dis-oriented by the COVID 19 crisis. We pray for the places where spread is quick and rising. We pray for those who have experienced loss of life and severe illness. We pray for those who have risen up and fought tirelessly for our well-being in offices and hospitals, in grocery stores and farms, in transportation and communication. Restore hope where it is failing.

As a community of faith displaced from our routines and our capacity to be in one another's company, we pray for unity. We hold in prayer those among us who are ill, those who are grieving, those who are alone and tiring. We remember with thanksgiving the life of Alfred Laser and pray your comfort and support on his family.

Accept the prayers we offer this morning, in the light of a new and glorious day, as we seek to bear witness to the truth which binds us to you and to one another. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour who leads us to pray together when we say...OUR FATHER...

Be well, be safe, be hopeful.

Michael

Postlude

Click here: [We Shall Go Out With Hope of Resurrection](#)