

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [June 21 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: [Open Our Hearts](#)

Dear Friends

This week marks another first in the ministry we offer at Charleswood United Church. While we decided to cancel the baptism that had been scheduled for Mother's Day we thought it was worth a try to attempt a virtual (or at least remote) baptism for the date scheduled in June. Two families took us up on our offer and we were delighted to welcome them into the sanctuary this week so that this good news could be shared with the congregation for this Sunday.

Baptism is a sacrament and, at its heart, a sign of God's grace. Different Christian traditions may do different things. Roman Catholics in Europe once made 'baptisteries', separate buildings outside cathedrals just for the ceremony. Some Anglican churches place the font at the door of the church instead of the front of the sanctuary. Our friends in Baptist and Mennonite traditions reserve baptism for adults, sometimes using a tank for full immersion. But in every tradition, baptism is always two things happening simultaneously. It is a ritual of repentance, reminding us of God's love and mercy. And it is a ritual of initiation, welcoming someone new into the household of God.

Our first hymn was chosen by my friend Thelma McEvoy. One of her favorite hymns is one that we have learned quite recently. It is called "My Love Colours Outside the Lines". It not only draws our attention to the image of water but speaks of the God's love for all in the broadest possible ways.

Opening Hymn

Join the opening hymn by clicking here: [My Love Colours Outside the Lines](#)

Bible Reading

The Scripture Lesson for June 21 can be read it by clicking here: [Luke 3:10-16](#)

Trio

A musical celebration of the baptisms held at the church this week: [I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry](#)

Reflection

When I am teaching about baptism I like to point out that of the four accounts of the life of Jesus in the Bible, it is only the Gospel of Luke that tells the story of Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem where there is no room for them in the inn. It is only in Matthew that we find the story of three wise men who travel from the east following a star and presenting gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In fact, the Gospels of Mark and John have no birth story of Jesus whatsoever. However, all four gospels bear witness that before Jesus begins his public ministry, before he calls any disciples, before he performs any miracles or tells any parables, Jesus goes to John to be baptized in the Jordan River.

When we talk about baptism in the church therefore, there is value in talking about the meaning of John's baptism. John was offering the people of his day an opportunity to perform a ritual that would bring them closer to God and renew their spiritual life. This was not accomplished by asking people to be more pious, or more prayerful, or more worshipful but by attending to the things that matter most to God.

Baptism is not simply a family ritual though it is a cause of great joy and a reason to celebrate. Nor is it only what it was for John, an invitation to live life with a greater consciousness about generosity, honesty, and working for peace. The early church adopted the practice of baptism as its rite of initiation into the new Household of God because in addition to these first two understandings it is also a sign of God's grace, a reminder that the gifts of Jesus are always given freely and abundantly, not as reward or something deserved. We do not offer baptism because we are good, but because God is good.

We have celebrated the gift of baptism today and for that we are very thankful. It is a welcoming into the Household of God of one whose life is new, in the hope that we will all be renewed for love and mercy.

(For those reading this reflection, a video of the sacrament of baptism is part of the YouTube worship service. You may watch by clicking on the link at the top of this page.)

Hymn

View and enjoy the Voices United hymn: [God Be With You Til We Meet Again](#)

Prayers

God of the ancient and new covenant, by your wisdom you call us into right and just relationship with you, with one another, and with your creation. We thank you that you have blessed us with the capacity to be in such relationship in every type of family. From the familiar to the emerging, you are there to bring wholeness, compassion, nurture, gentleness, understanding, and humility to all our homes. We praise you for the variety and complexity in the human family and among human households.

God who invites us to, and honours covenants, we praise you for those who have stood before us today to make pledges of faith and commitment. We thank you for the joy in these young families and ask your Spirit's guidance to make their homes places of love and mercy.

God who has covenanted with the church to be agents of peace and reconciliation in Jesus' name, we pray that we might be proven true to the promises we make at baptism. Keep us open of heart and mind and spirit, that all who enter to seek nurture in your ways may be welcomed and accepted.

Your covenant extends to all people and all times and is a promise of your healing power and grace. Where there is anxiety in the present moment, bring your peace. Where there is sorrow, bring your comfort. Where there is fear, bring your courage. Fill our hearts with gratitude for the gifts of grace that surround us and which find representation in the waters of baptism.

Every day we will praise you Gracious God, for every day you meet us and walk with us and receive our prayers. Every day we will trust in you, for every day your word is a lamp beneath our feet and a light for our way. Today we pray as we do every day in the name of the One who gives us this day to honour you, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together by saying...OUR FATHER...

Be well, be safe, be hopeful.

Michael