

## January 2 - **Chosen Home**

### **Welcome & Announcements**

A warm - and I do mean warm -welcome to everyone who is gathered here in the sanctuary this morning and a warm welcome - as well - to those of you joining via the live stream. For those of you joining later in the day or week – I am glad you are choosing to join us as you are able and a warm welcome to you as well.

This seems to me to be a low energy time. We have cleaned up the crumbs of Christmas – for many of us a Christmas that was not all we wanted it to be because of worries around Covid. Gathering with family was a challenge, especially for families that are not all on the same page around vaccination. We continue to worry about Covid – thanks to the omicron variant -many gatherings were altered - Flights were cancelled – plans adjusted – rapid test kits utilized. It was not the carefree Christmas we had hoped for.

As we move into this New Year there is much to continue to worry us.

Some of us have taken a crack at a New Years resolution – anybody make one of these self promises? This is day two of the new year – how are you doing? Anybody already in trouble? I received an email this week from Nadia Bolz - Weber a wonderful writer and theologian and she expressed just what I needed as we begin the new year – perhaps this makes sense to you as well.

### **A blessing for the new year:**

As you enter this new year, as you pack away the Christmas decorations and get out your stretchy pants

as you face the onslaught of false promises offered you through new disciplines and elimination diets

as you grasp for control of yourself and your life and this chaotic world

May you remember that there is no resolution that, if kept, will make you more worthy of love.

There is no resolution that, if kept, will make life less uncertain and allow you to control a pandemic and your children and the way other people act.

So this year,

May you just skip the part where you resolve to be better do better and look better this time.

May you give yourself the gift of really, really low expectations.

May you expect so little of yourself that you can be super proud of the smallest of accomplishments.

May you expect so little of the people in your life that you actually notice and cherish every small, lovely thing about them.

May you expect so little of the supply chain and the service industry that you notice more of what you do get and less of what you don't and then just tip really well anyhow.

May you expect to get so little out of 2022 that you can celebrate every single thing it offers you, however small.

Because you deserve joy and not disappointment

So, I wish you a Happy as possible New Year.

Love, Nadia.

So let us together set the bar low, be super gentle with ourselves and those around us. Let us cherish the small and lovely moments that this year will bring.

Let us be open to the grace of God who washes over our wounds and carries the heaviness of this time, with us and who loves us in our smallness and who keeps lighting the darkness.

We venture into worship this morning trusting our God of light and love. We light the advent candles and carefully open our hearts in worship.

Let us sing.

**Sung Opening:** Will You Come and See the Light (VU 96, vs 1,4,5)

### **Call to Worship**

Jesus said,

**“This is my Father’s house.”**

So come into this space

**just as you are.**

Come into this space

**speaking your truth.**

Come into this space

**with your authentic self.**

This is God’s home.

**This is our home.**

Let us worship God.

### **Call to Confession**

Research shows that on average, humans make about 35,000 choices in a day. In the prayer of confession, we acknowledge the moments when our choices do not reflect God’s love and we ask for grace. So let us pray together, trusting that God is with us in each of those 35,000 moments, cheering us on, and guiding us home. Let us pray:

### **Prayer of Confession**

We could offer welcome,

**but we often choose judgment.**

We could choose action,

**but we often choose silence.**

We could choose advocacy,

**but we often choose comfort.**

We could choose truth,

**but we often choose ignorance.**

We could choose God,

**but we often choose ourselves.**

Forgive us, gracious God, for the moments when we chose poorly.

**Open our hearts to choose you, to choose community, to choose love.**

**Gratefully we pray, amen.**

### **Words of Forgiveness**

Family of faith, no matter how we choose, we cannot lose God's love. It is undeserved, overwhelming, ever-present, and always with us. So may we accept God's grace, and use it as fuel for better days.

Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel:

**No matter how many times we walk away, God always welcomes us home.**

**We are loved. We are forgiven. We are invited.**

**Thanks be to God, amen.**

**Hymn:** Joy is Now in Every Place (VU 45, v 1,3)

### **Prayer for Illumination**

Author God,

Scripture tells us that when Jesus taught in the temple, all who heard were amazed.

We want to be amazed too.

We want to hear your word with new ears.

We want to be unraveled and transformed by the truth tucked between those sentences.

We want to be opened up by the hope in these holy pages. We want to be amazed.

So as we read today, transport us to those early days in the temple. Open our hearts so we can hear your word like never before.

We are listening. We are grateful.

Amen.

**Scripture:** Luke 2:41-52

<sup>41</sup>Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming

that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." <sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

## Reflection

Sermon for Sunday January 2, 2021  
Luke 2:41-52

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever wondered if Jesus had to spend time - in time out - as a toddler? Have you ever wondered if Jesus ever have to stay late after class to write lines on the board stating he would never do - that thing he did wrong - again and again. Do you wonder if he was grounded as a teenager? I wonder about these things.

Our lesson today is the only Biblical story we have that tells us something about Jesus' life between birth and baptism. I love how, hot on the heels of the sweetness of the baby Jesus, the gospel writer Luke give us a glimpse into the life of an adolescent Jesus. The story nudges us out of our sentimental understanding of Jesus as baby and into the very real, gritty life of Jesus and all that his growing up holds.

Just as they had done every year. Jesus and his family had packed up to make the journey to Jerusalem so they might take in, not only the religious festival, but all of the wonderful things that surrounded it. It was a family affair that extended to siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins and even more cousins. This pilgrimage would have taken them to the temple where they – no doubt sang the hymns of their day – the Psalms – singing "How good it is to be in the house of the Lord." This pilgrimage was not an obligation but rather it was a welcome break from the ordinary. It was an opportunity to connect and reconnect with family and with the solid foundation of their faith, the temple. It was a chance to stand on Holy Ground and to reorientate their hearts, souls and hearts to God.

All too soon – not unlike our Christmas celebrations - the festival ended and the family packed its bags once again and the great caravan of extended family, feeling blessed by the joy of being together and the time away, began their journey home. Some may have been a little bit tired from the festival and therefore they may have been moving rather slowly others might have been feeling all jazzed up, feeling energized by the whole festivities recounting all they had seen, sharing memories of all they'd done and heard. Some would have been catching up with each other around the gossip they had heard, and others would have been making lists readying themselves to re-enter everyday living. In all that hustle and bustle someone was missing.

It isn't hard to imagine the panic of Mary and Joseph as they were settling into rest, after that first night on the road home, when they couldn't find their boy. At first a few would have noticed Mary and Joseph's terror, but I imagine their concern spread like wildfire through the whole family unit. This was long before a parent could track their child on their smart phone.

When Jesus couldn't be found they began retracing their steps all the way back to Jerusalem. They searched for three days – three whole days. That must have felt like an eternity for Mary and Joseph. I wish I could say this was the last “three day” wait for Mary, but we all know that she had another agonizing three day wait in her future.

Can you imagine the searching?

Our searching for the holy one is different than that of Mary and Joseph. But for some of us the searching in these days of Covid, of longer nights, of isolation, of worry have been filled with a similar urgency and angst.

Many of us have been surprised to find the holy – not where we expected but rather in places we never even dreamed.

We have found the God power in Hospitals. Nurses, doctors, social workers, physio therapists, cleaners, lab techs, chaplains, and so many more. Caring for the sick when doing so might put their own health at risk. They have giving witness to “love thy neighbour” in very real ways. They have held phones to the ears of those we love when we could not visit ourselves and they have held their hands when our loved ones have felt alone and afraid, and they have bathed our loved ones in their own tears as they have died and blessed them with the same tears when our loved ones have found their strength and returned home.

We have found the God power on the news as we take tender steps toward truly seeing the brutal injustice of residential schools and shift our understandings and embrace reconciliation. We have glimpsed the holy as we have let the voice of not only indigenous leaders but all those who have and are experiencing racism break open cold hearts. We have seen the holy as we acknowledge the struggle of all who struggle with their mental health and with addiction in our community, in the hands and feet of all those who are doing what they can to help and heal.

We have found the God power in our neighbours. Watching for the “I'm good” sign hanging from doorknob. Buying groceries for us and others when we were in quarantine or because it was not safe for us to go out. Did you know that the McClure

Place staff purchased groceries for several residence of the tower so they would not have to go out – this was not in their job description by the way. We found the God power in those who shared the difficult news of a positive test so that we could be aware and careful. Did you know that Covid shaming is a thing – blaming folks for their own illness and treating them poorly. Seems to me telling folks that you have Covid is a very responsible and respectable thing to do and not at all worthy of shaming. Phone calls, care baskets, cards and smiles behind masks - is where many of us found the God power in this treacherous year.

We also found the God power on our computer screens. If we couldn't hug the ones, we love at least we could see them. We managed do accomplish connection, work, learning and even worship in this new two-dimensional platform. I did a funeral preparation visit with siblings in three different parts of Canada via zoom and at the close of our time they talked about how wonderful it was to share in the planning - how good it was to share stories and make decisions together. As a congregation we have even managed communion together – communion on screen – does not make sense given everything I believe about communion and yet it was holy. Looking at the faces of those I journey with, seeing the pieces of bread broken in each home and the many different cups of juice sipped prayerfully – surprised me in its holiness. God was mysteriously with in us and amongst us nurturing us and making us stronger. Even in our altered routines and our unexpected shifting of plans we have encountered holy quiet, creative adjustments and gentle rest.

As I look back over 2021 I have been surprised by the many places I have found the holy. In this most challenging year many of us have been surprised by where we have found God. Our God who refuses to be held to human expectations and confines. Our God who is steady in the midst of chaos, offering peace and assurance at every turn. Our God that with loving eyes sees us and understands and embraces us even in our unhinged moments. Our God that travels with us and settles in with us for the long haul, in the everyday, and who grows alongside of us and within us.

For those who are still searching for solid ground - for the Holy one. Don't stop looking. Like Mary and Joseph, you will find who and what you are looking for. Like many of us sitting next to you, we are here to help and we are cheering for you as you search. Keep your eyes open, your heart open, your being open and you shall find. You shall find God right where you hadn't looked before, in a place that is so close you will wonder how you ever missed it. You may even find God where God has always been at home in the temple of your heart.

Amen.

**Hymn:** Once In Royal David's City (VU 63, v 1,2,3)

### **Invitation to Offering**

There are many things we choose in our lives.

We choose what kind of car we want, where we want to live, the career path we prefer.

We choose decaf or caffeinated, am or pm, today or tomorrow.

We choose to read the book or see the movie, we choose dogs or cats, and we choose where we want to give our time, our energy, and our money.

So today we are invited to choose this place, this community, this family of faith.

Today we are invited to choose generosity, trusting that God can take whatever we give and use it for good.

Celebrating all that is given – let us pray.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

**Gracious God,**

**Your story is one that forever invites us to be our full selves, to take up space, to go where we feel called, and to allow this community to feel like home.**

**So use our gifts to keep building your home here. With gratitude as tall as the ceiling, we pray. Amen.**

**Sung Offertory:** When Heaven's Bright (VU#93 vs 4)

### **Prayers of the People**

Holy God,

We come to you today full to the brim. We are carrying gratitude and hope, dreams and fear, scars and love, and in this moment of prayer, we give it all to you.

So as we remember Jesus in the temple, who felt at home there, we give you thanks for the places in our lives that have felt like home for us.

Thank you God for playgrounds and family vacations, for crowded tables and fire pits.

Thank you for churches that become as familiar as a grandparent's house, and for friends' homes, that have become sanctuary.

And as we remember Jesus in the temple, who took up space to be himself, we give you thanks for the places in our lives where we have been able to follow his lead.

Thank you for jobs that bring joy, and for hobbies that keep passions awake.

Thank you for the people who have encouraged our gifts, and for those who have spoken our call out loud.

We have so much to be thankful for, and yet we also know that there is still need here. So as we lift our gratitude to you for places that feel like home and for calls that change our lives, we also remember those who feel homeless.

Draw near to your children who have been forced to choose a new home because they were not welcome in their own. Surround their grief and their pain with your love, and give us the eyes to see and arms to welcome them in here.

And when fear draws close, pressuring us to play it small and play it safe, give us the courage to be who you call us to be.

Help us to not only hear your call on our lives, but to live it—even if it surprises the ones who know us best.

Remind us that there is nothing wrong with taking up space, for you gave us that space in the first place.

God there is so much good here, and there is so much we have yet to learn.

Help us to be people that create chosen homes. Help us to be people that welcome others into those safe spaces. Help us to be people who follow our calls boldly and bravely, holding open the door for others to follow suit.

We come to you today full to the brim, O God, with prayers that are close to home. Hold them closely.

And now, with the confidence of teenage Jesus in the temple, we pray your prayer together, saying...

Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

**Hymn:** A Light is Gleaming (VU 82 vs 2,3)

### **Benediction**

As we go from our worship this morning:

    May the joy of the Angels sing in our voices;

        May the hope of the shepherds enliven our minds;

            May the strong faith of Mary strengthen our spirits;

And may the love of the Baby penetrate our hearts.

    God's blessing be upon us all this day and forever more.

**Sung Blessing:** Go Now in Peace (MV 211)