

**Sunday, March 15, 2020
Stouffville United Church**

Home Worship Service

From Rev. Elizabeth: In this very different and difficult time, when so much in our world is turned upside down, we are able, through the grace of God, to find this time of worship together. Even though we are not physically side by side, spiritually, we are meeting in a space held for us through the Spirit's presence. May you experience in this brief worship a time of solace, strengthening, and peace.

Opening Prayer:

The light shines in the darkness
and the darkness has not overcome it.
In the Lord Jesus Christ
there is light and peace.
Thanks be to God.

Words from the Moderator of the United Church of Canada, the Right Rev. Richard Bott

It's important to remember:
church doesn't close. Ever.
We may need to temporarily stop our face-to-face, full-on-peace-passing, communion-by-intinction,
and offering-of-the-plates,
but the church -
the body of Christ -
is a 24/7/365 reality.
It's lived, around the world,
and in our homes;
it acts, when our hearts reach out;
it keeps going,
wherever there is one disciple of Jesus,
or two, or three -
living the Way we've been taught.
And, with Paul, I'd like to remind you
there is nothing -
there is NOTHING -
not a single thing -
not in the sky above, or the earth below,
not powers, nor principalities,
not things seen, or unseen -
nothing in all creation
that can separate that creation
from God's love in Christ.

We are the church.

Always.

And all ways.

(Posted on Friday, March 13, 2020 to the Moderator Richard Bott Facebook page. Used with permission)

Prayer before the Scriptures:

Loving God, we continue our Lenten journey, seeking truth and wisdom for the days ahead, knowing that we are guided by you every step of the way. As we receive your Word this morning, we continue to search for truth, understanding, and wisdom as we journey in faith. Amen.

(Written by Bill Steadman, St. Andrew's United Church, Sudbury, Ont., Gathering L/E 2019, page 35. Used with permission.)

A Reading from Exodus 17:1-7

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Reflection:

"Is the Lord among us or not?" The whole congregation were together. And the world was not as it should be. There was no water. Given the obsession of people buying out stores of toilet paper supplies this past week, the complaint should be, 'There is no toilet paper.' There was a heart-rending picture posted on Facebook yesterday of an aisle in a supermarket, with shelves completely bare except for a small cardboard box with a few items in it. A white-haired, elderly woman stood before it, looking to see what was left for her to take home to eat. Is the Lord among us or not?

To watch the Covid-19 Virus roll across the globe, not sparing any country or respecting any border, has been devastating to witness. Every 24-hour period has brought a whole new onslaught of devastation and panic. Yes, there is humour sprinkled here and there, especially over the toilet paper obsession, but in truth, we are exhausted, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. How do we pray into this darkness?

Is the Lord among us or not? Good question. And one that I can answer easily that yes, the Lord is among us, always has been, and always will be. Our faith offers us a safe haven from the

ravages of the pandemic storm that is effecting us, our families, our work places, our neighbourhoods, our country. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

We are called to remember to look out for each other, to telephone someone who we know would welcome a friendly voice on the other end, to use these coming days and weeks of isolated reality as a time to remember and call upon friendships, to take a walk in the fresh air, to realize that you can call on *anyone* in your church for help for anything. We are here to help each other. And you can *always* find me at 416-801-8739 for any reason. God is with us, we are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People as offered by Moderator Richard Bott:

In this time of Covid-19 - we pray.

When we aren't sure, God,
help us be calm;
when information comes
from all sides, correct and not,
help us to discern;
when fear makes it hard to breathe,
and anxiety seems to be the portion of the day,
slow us down, God;
help us to reach out with our hearts,
when we can't touch with our hands;
help us to be socially connected,
when we have to be socially distant;
help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear."
For the doctors, we pray,
for the nurses, we pray,
for the technicians and the janitors and the
aides and the caregivers, we pray,
for the researchers and theorists,
the epidemiologists and investigators,
for those who are sick,
and those who are grieving, we pray,
for all who are affected,
all around the world...
we pray
for safety,
for health,
for wholeness.
May we feed the hungry,
give drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked and house those without homes;

may we walk with those who feel they are alone,
and may we do all that we can to heal
the sick -
in spite of the epidemic,
in spite of the fear.
Help us, O God,
that we might help each other.
In the love of the Creator,
in the name of the Healer,
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,
we pray.

(Written by Moderator Richard Bott, Friday, March 13, 2020, on his FB Page, used with permission.)

The Lord's Prayer:

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 and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

A Closing Hymn Verse:

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

Blessing to say to the Church Family:

The Lord bless you and keep you:
the Lord make his face shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you:
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.