

Applewood United Church
An Affirming Community
Hybrid Worship for January 28, 2024
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

(*please stand in body or in spirit; **bold** print is for all)

Territorial Acknowledgement and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Centering Music : "Alleluia" MV 50

Alle, alle, alleluia!

Alle, alle, allelu, alle, alleluai!

***Call to worship** (*Psalm 111: 1-2 & 10: NRSV*) Rev. Alison

One: Praise the Lord!

**All: I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.**

One: Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who delight in them.

**All: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practise it have a good understanding.
God's praise endures forever.**

***Opening Hymn**: "All Beautiful the March of Days" VU 530

All beautiful the march of days,
as seasons come and go;
the hand that shaped the rose has wrought
the crystal of the snow,
has sent the silvery frost of heaven,
the flowing waters sealed,
and laid a silent loveliness
on hill and wood and field.

O'er white expanses sparkling pure
the radiant morns unfold;
the solemn splendours of the night
burn brighter through the cold;
life mounts in every throbbing vein,
love deepens round the hearth,
and clearer sounds the angel hymn,

good will to all on earth.

O God, from whose unfathomed law
the year in beauty flows,
yourself the vision passing by
in crystal and in rose;
day unto day declare thro' speech,
and night to night proclaim
in ever changing words of light
the wonder of your name.

Prayer of Confession - Rev Alison

Jesus, You sought out the still places.
In these moments set aside for worship we come to You.
Not with too many words, may we find refreshment and nourishment for our souls.
Still our souls, quieten our anxious thoughts,
as we gather in Your presence and re-focus our lives on You.
O God, our merciful Redeemer,
we who have sinned in word, thought and deed,
and in what we have left undone,
humbly ask You to meet us where we need to be forgiven
and set our feet again upon the path that leads to life.
Loving God,
may we, with a broken world, know Your touch of healing and restoration
as we thank You for sisters and brothers across the world
and every act of human kindness.
Set free to worship You with our whole hearts,
we sing and tell of the joy there is in You, God of new beginnings,
who leads us through the dark valleys to green pastures,
who offers us a foretaste of the new creation.
May all glory and honour be Yours,
faithful God of mercy, justice and love.

The Lord's Prayer Sung VU 960

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 them that trespass against us.
And lead not into temptation
but deliver us from evil:
for thine is the kingdom and the
power and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Scripture Readings: (Inclusive Bible)

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

YHWH, your God, will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; to that prophet you must listen. It was this that you asked of YHWH, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let us not hear again the voice of YHWH, our God, nor see this great fire again, or we will die."

And YHWH said to me, "This is well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their people, into whose mouth I will put my words, and that person will tell them all that I command. If any person will not listen to the words which my prophet speaks in my Name, I myself will call that person to answer for this. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my Name a message that I have not commanded to be spoken, or speaks in the name of other gods--that prophet will die."

1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

Now, concerning food sacrificed to idols. We all possess knowledge. But knowledge puffs up, whereas love builds up. You may think you know something, but you still won't know it the way you ought. But anyone who loves God is known--completely --by God.

Well then, what about eating food sacrificed to idols? We know that idols have no real existence, that there is no God but the One. Even though there are so-called gods in the heavens--and on the earth as well, where there seem to be many gods and sovereigns--for us there is only One God, Abba God, from whom all things come and for whom we live; there is one Sovereign, Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made and through whom we live.

Some people, accustomed to idol worship until recently, are consumed with guilt every time they eat meat they buy in the market, because they know that the meat had been sacrificed to idols--and their conscience, because it is weak, gets defiled every time they eat. But food cannot bring us closer to God. We lose nothing if we refuse to eat. We gain nothing if we choose to eat.

Be on your guard, however, that this liberty of yours does not become a pitfall for the weak. Suppose someone who has this knowledge sees your eating in some idol's temple, won't this person be tempted to eat meat offered to idols? Realize that your knowledge--that idols are nothing and thus it is all right to eat this meat freely--might be the ruination of a weak sister or brother, for whose sake Christ died. By sinning against your sisters and brothers in this way and injuring their weak consciences, you are sinning against Christ. Therefore, if meat causes my sister or brother to stumble, I will eat it again--I don't want to be an occasion for sin to them.

Gospel Mark 1: 21-28 (NRSV - Rev Alison Nicholson)

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

One: For the Word of God in Scripture
For the Word of God among us
For the Word of God within us

All: Thanks be to God

Choir: "Stay With Us"

Reflection: "Is Prophecy speaking up for what is right?"

***Hymn:** "Healer of our Every Ill" VU 619

Healer of our every ill,
light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness,
grace us with your peace and gladness.
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts.

Healer of our every ill,
light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

In the pain and joy beholding,
how your grace is still unfolding.
Give us all your vision, God of love.

Healer of our every ill,
light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

Give us strength to love each other,
every sister, every brother.
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide.

Healer of our every ill,
light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know each thought and feeling,
teach us all your way of healing.
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

Healer of our every ill,
light of each tomorrow,
give us peace beyond our fear,
and hope beyond our sorrow.

Offering Invitation

We all come to worship with different needs and leave with different answers. Spending this time as community, sharing sacred story, singing holy song, and translating this time into our lives is a core spiritual practice for many of us. Sharing financial gifts is also a spiritual practice. You are invited to support the work of this church, Mission and Service, and beyond by giving freely what you can.

Offering of Music

***Sung Dedication:** "Praise God from Who All Blessings Flow" VU 541
Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word and Spirit, One.

Prayer of Dedication

All: God, as we offer our gifts, please use them along with those already given through PAR and online to create a space where you are present. Please help us to be your people, to be a blessing to others and to lead others to you. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Prayers of the People / Intercession

Sung Response: "Wait for the Lord" VU 22
Wait for the Lord, God's day is near.
Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart!

Gracious God,
as the disciples brought others to Jesus
that He might lay His hands upon their lives and bless them,
we offer our thoughts and prayers for people we bring to You now.
And, like the disciples, we bring ourselves as well.

We come to You who provides more than we can imagine,
we come to You, risen and ascended Jesus,
before the throne of God You pray for us and for all whom we would bring to You.

Receive our prayers O Lord:
some are for people we love,
others are for people we find hard to love,
some are for people who are happy,
others are for people in pain,
some are for people we know,
others for people known by You.
In quiet moments we pray.

Pause

Wait for the Lord God's day is near (1x)

Jesus, Saviour,
we pray today for a world so often in turmoil,
caught up in fear or war, injustice,
the neglect of the vulnerable, and of creation.

Teach us how best to use the freedom we have been given
to serve You and to make common cause with all who seek the wellbeing of others.
We pray for people in positions of influence,
remembering the Internet and other forms of mass communication.
May we have the wisdom to nurture what is good
and guard against what is harmful.
We pray for all who advance knowledge and extend the frontiers of science,
thanking You for the many benefits we enjoy as a result.
God only wise, may knowledge be used for good alone.

May we return often to the well-spring of wisdom,
that we may share what You have given us
to drink with a thirsty world.

Wait for the Lord God's day is come (1x)

Saviour Jesus, Son of God,
we discover in You that already life has overcome death,
goodness has triumphed over evil,
forgiveness has won the victory over sin,
love has conquered hate.

In you we renew our faith and commitment
to Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.
Glory be to you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for always. Amen

Wait for the Lord (3x)

***Closing Hymn:** "Mothering God" VU 320
Mothering God, you gave me birth
in the bright morning of this world.
Creator, source of every breath,
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.

Mothering Christ, you took my form,
offering me your food of light,
grain of my life, and grape of love,
your very body for my peace.

Mothering Spirit, nurturing one,

in arms of patience hold me close,
so that in faith I root and grow
until I flower, until I know.

***Commissioning and Benediction:**

All: Jesus has told us who needs us, to care. As we go out into God's world, we see Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the encamped, the sick, the addicted, and imprisoned, and we help them.

One: Christ's compassion shines forth in what you do. Live as those who know and have experienced God's goodness.

May God bless you....

Sung Amen: VU 974

Rev Alison's Reflection:

An apocalypse defined is marked by imagery, and the expectation of an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous for a life which is to come. The coming of the Kingdom of God. We might be more familiar with the apocalyptic movie, in which the Earth or another planet's civilization is collapsing or has collapsed. The event might be climatic, such as climate change, astronomical such as an impact event, destructive, such as nuclear holocaust or resource depletion, or medical such as a pandemic. Whether natural or human-caused; end time, such as the Last Judgment, or Second Coming with a variety of scary outcomes is apocalyptic. Many are fascinated and frightened by this genre of science fiction.

Today we are reading Mark's Gospel, we might with close reading, discover the strains of an apocalyptic struggle. There are no zombies or alien invasion, but in this early text, Jesus is performing an exorcism in a synagogue in Capernaum. Mark provides a first whiff of demonic sulfur after all the apocalyptic fireworks that preceded it in Mark 1:1–20. Mark 1:1–11 shapes the coming eschatological battlefield. Eschatological is defined as the end of the present age, in human history, or the world itself. Mark dramatizes, John's baptism as a mini apocalyptic theophany in which Jesus' beloved identity is revealed through a ripping open of the heavens in 1:10. The Spirit drives ("casts out") Jesus into a desert temptation scene with Satan, servant angels, and a few wild beasts for good measure in Mark 1:12–13. Jesus then preaches the apocalyptic notion of God's Kingdom, the very gospel of God in Mark 1:14. To wrap it up, he suddenly calls four disciples out of the everyday of their fishing boats in Mark 1:16–20 into apocalyptic urgency. The four men just drop their nets and leave with Jesus—immediately, as Mark is wont to say in verses 10, 12, 18, and 20. For these reasons, the Capernaum synagogue exorcism scene in

Mark 1:21–28 is not one that can easily be turned into something manageable—say, about being helpful to strangers in church. Its cosmic, apocalyptic urgency in 1:1–20 already frames the exorcism that is to come in 1:21–28. Apocalyptic urgency Mark as narrator carries over this urgency indirectly by describing the synagogue exorcism scene with the same koine Greek word meaning “immediately” (verses 21, 23, and 28) that appeared so often in the preceding material. Like the four disciples, we readers had best be ready to respond with some degree of shared urgency. Mark the narrator also does apocalyptic urgency in a more direct way—by describing the exorcism scene as one of graphic and sonic demonic encounter on the Sabbath after Jesus teaches. In the synagogue dialogue, readers overhear their conversation and see the results of this apocalyptic moment. David Schnasa Jacobsen 2/3 In this startling scene, an unnamed man with an unclean spirit speaks first. The fact that the possessed man speaks of himself in the first-person plural—“us”—only amplifies his cry: “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Then the man with the unclean spirit seems to recognize Jesus’ eschatological purpose of destroying evil, as well as his identity as “the Holy One of God.” The “we” of this demonic host obeys, but not without convulsions and cries commensurate with such a corporate, embodied struggle. Jesus’ success then further underlines the authority attributed to his teaching: not just authority as competency or entitlement, but eschatological power. The point of such an early exorcism scene in Mark’s Gospel is not to provide information. It signals the urgency of the coming apocalyptic struggle and invites readers into it.

So, what to do with apocalyptic Mark today? But what do we do with Mark’s apocalyptic praxis of struggle when the things that threaten our world are not so much demons and ripped-open heavens but regular old broken or demonic systems of human construction? Where in our own struggles are we confronted with the demonic, yet laying hold of a divine promise that Jesus preaches as “the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14

First, Mark never lets his readers forget that all of Jesus’ eschatological vision and apocalyptic miracles need to be understood with the view of the cross. It is, as Luther points out, a way of calling things what they really are.

Apocalyptic rhetoric is not about escape, but naming the world, its pain, and its promise aright. This very apocalyptic gospel of God (1:14) is also the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1). And who Jesus is matters for the way in which we would practice steadfast, embodied resistance to evil. This Jesus is not self-aggrandizing but silences demons when they speak of his identity. He is, from the beginning of his ministry in Galilee, self-effacing even as his reputation grows. We do not need to establish Jesus’ dominance through exorcism but rather note his self-awareness throughout the Gospel of Mark that he

is on his own steadfast way to the cross. It is the dying, crucified Jesus in Mark for whom the sun grows dark, for whom the curtain of the temple is ripped open, and whom even a centurion proclaims, “the Son of God” (Mark 15:33–39). This little exorcistic scene from Mark 1:21–28, set in a synagogue on the Sabbath, is spoken by a Jesus who aims with urgency to enlist his disciples, and anyone else with ears to hear.