

BELLS CORNERS UNITED CHURCH

LENTEN WORSHIP & REFLECTION

Sunday, 10 am – March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Verses to Ponder: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

(Mark 12: 30-31)

Lighting of Christ Candle:

(light a candle if you wish or turn on a battery operated flashlight or a lamp)

We light this candle as a sign of God's Love at work in the world.

May the light of God shine through us as we brighten the world.

****Call to Gather:***

This is the place and this is the time;

here and now God is ready to break into our lives:

to change our minds, to convert our lives,

to transform our ways;

to make us see the world and the whole of life in a new way;

to fill us with hope, joy and openness to the future.

This is the place, as are all places; this is the time,

here and now.

Let us gather in God's love.

Prayer of Approach and Confession:

Holy God, who is Creator, Redeemer and Guide,

we come before you in prayer, in praise and in quietness.

May we welcome your holy presence among us and within us.

Inspire our minds that we might hear your Word.

Lift our voices that we might praise you.

Quieten our souls that we might find you.

Forgive us the many times we listen to the noise and clamour of the

world above your Voice; the times we complain rather than give you

thanks; the times we are too preoccupied to be still.

Holy One, grant us the wisdom to listen for your Voice and to follow

in your Way.

Words of Assurance:

The good news is that when we face ourselves with the awareness of our need,

we are given grace to grow, and courage to continue the journey. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination:

We give you thanks, God of sacred story. Open our hearts, inspire us, challenge us. Through your Word, enable us to be your people. Amen.

Gospel Reading: The Two Greatest Commandments Mark 12: 28-34 (NRSV)

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³ and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Sermon: “It’s All About Love!” (Rev. Kim Vidal)

LOVE is a four-letter word. And so is the word FEAR! With the rest of the world, we are watching with concern as the developments of COVID-19 continue to shake our comfort zones on a daily basis. Over the last few days, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as pandemic, the whole world has changed including our life at Bells Corners United Church. The announcement prompted mandatory school closings, cancellations of gatherings and events including worship services and travel plans and workforce disruptions. In times of crisis and social disruption, people still look for spiritual guidance and assurance that we are not alone in this troubling time, and indeed, God is with us! Even as churches are cancelling face-to-face worship and moving to online services, the time to be present for each other in our communities is upon us. We need to put love into action. Where is love in this uncertain time? How do we see love in this wilderness time?

The famous theologian Frederick Buechner once said: *“Of all powers, love is the most powerful and the most powerless. It is the most powerful because it alone can conquer that final and most impregnable stronghold that is the human heart. It is the most powerless because it can do nothing except by consent.”*

Love is a radical word. We say it almost all the time. We try to express it in many ways. And yet for some reasons, love is also the most violated, abused and misunderstood of all words. We remember in our gospel reading today, that a scribe, an ancient Jewish record-keeper, approached Jesus with a question: “Which commandment is the first of all?” I’m sure the scribe knows that there were 613 laws in the Torah. How was a person to keep track of them all, let alone prioritize them? Jesus answers with two commandments from the Torah that he learned growing up: “You shall love the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6: 5) and “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19: 18). “There is no other commandment greater than these.” Loving God –loving others – these two cannot be separated. You cannot love God if you do not

love your neighbour. Similarly, you cannot love your neighbour if you do not love God who is the source of love.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul begins his message with these words: “Let love be genuine.” And then went on to expound on a string of attitudes and behaviours that I believe bring out the true meaning of a genuine love: hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all; live peacefully with all. All of these values are needed in this time of uncertainty.

I was scrolling through some news on the internet when I bumped into a story in Toronto. The coronavirus pandemic has inspired kind Canadians to organize “caremongering” groups, offering help to the vulnerable especially to seniors and those most at risk amid the outbreak. Some volunteers are picking up groceries or prescriptions for those who are not able to leave their homes. Others have offered to help the less technically savvy set up home offices, while others have replaced the books in some Little Free Libraries with food for those who need it. Another chap has created a video chat to those undergoing addiction recoveries in isolation and there are some businesses who came up with creative, innovative ideas including a Toronto distillery that’s making hand sanitizers instead of liquor and donating them for free to seniors and those with low income. These are the faces of a genuine love!

Due to the growing concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, we have assumed that the world is in very bad shape. But we are called to making it more life-giving by virtually touching as many people as possible to the true meaning of love. Pray for one another. Call people and check how they are doing. Send emails and facetime loved ones who are in self-isolation. Offer to pick up groceries or prescriptions for your neighbours. We can make the world better by small acts of kindness and compassion, yes, even in this time of uncertainty. We do not need to withdraw from the world, for it is here where love must be put into action. We are part of the human community in good times or in bad times. We get our hands dirty to change things. We walk the extra mile. We journey with those who are hurting, in pain or those who are ill. And that is how love is professed. If we lose sight of the other and the needs of others, we risk becoming as what Paul says to the Corinthians, “noisy gongs and clanging cymbals”. For those of us who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, our daily work is the discipline of bringing into balance the love of God and others to our lives.

The call to genuine love is a call to profound unity of heart, mind, body and spirit. A lawyer asked Jesus – who is my neighbour that needs my genuine love? Who is our neighbour? Our neighbours are those who long to be accepted of who they are. Our neighbours are those ignored by society yet wanting our care and compassion. Our neighbours are the street marchers who confront those in power. Our neighbours are the homeless people with the desire to have decent lives. Our neighbours are the privileged and the affluent wanting to reach out for friendship and understanding. Our neighbours are those facing life’s uncertainties because of illness or loss of employment. Our neighbours are those in our community wanting to be affirmed and welcomed. Our neighbours are those affected by COVID 19 including those who serve as healthcare workers,

grocers, postal workers, transport people and others here and around the world. Ours is not only about seeing others as a neighbour; our calling is also to become the neighbour we would like to meet.

Loving God and our neighbour means that we need to listen to the world and engage with it. As people who are taught genuine love by following Jesus, we need to bring love in the world by being vulnerable, by listening, by participating to endeavours that bring hope and give life. An ideal way of engaging the world with love is to be like those kids in the Special Olympics. We start out together and if one falls, another will stop and kiss the scratched knee or the bumped elbow. Another will sit down and see how we are coming along. Maybe someone else will find a Band-Aid to cover the boo-boo and another bring some water to refresh the spirit. Sooner or later, everyone gets to be together as we come to the end, with each other, holding on for dear life, upholding each other in the power of community and the presence of God. No one, not even the least of these will be forgotten or ignored. As Frederick Buechner has written, “humanity is like a giant spider web. Touch it anywhere and the whole thing trembles.”

Dear friends, a wilderness time is in our midst. So much faith, hope and love will be required. As we commit once more to making genuine love possible, please be reminded that we all are given many gifts, but One Spirit of Love that binds us in such a time as this and always. If we are true to our calling as givers of genuine love, let us act here and now.

LOVE, indeed is a four-letter word. And so are the words HOPE and LIFE!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Let us open our hearts in prayer. Let us pray.

Loving God, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings to keep them safe, protect us under your loving embrace. Give us courage to overcome fear.

Compassionate God, we long for this community to be a sanctuary of inclusive love, acceptance and the embodiment of life-giving spirit. This longing can often be met with fear, resistance, hostility and rejection, So we ask that you strengthen our faith and give us the gift of courage to face the times of challenges and difficulties.

Sheltering God, we cry out for homes that are nurturing and safe. We want to be families who are free of domestic violence and neglect, where all the children can grow without fear. Empower us to make your love a reality in every home we know.

Healing God, here and around the world, we pray for all who suffer, for the sick and the lonely, for those who have suffered loss, for those trapped in anxiety and fear, for those downtrodden by hopelessness and despair. We pray for those of us who yearn for your healing touch and those among us who long to seek recovery, comfort and good health. Let your healing spirit flow through all of us that we may become a healing presence to others.

Holy God, we ask for your presence in the troubled parts of our community, our country and the world especially as we go through this pandemic. We pray that every heart that is filled with fear, questions and grief be shown the light of love, kindness and compassion. We pray for the health workers, the grocers, our leaders, those who help us with our daily needs, our families, friends

and neighbours in this time of uncertainty. We pray for peace in our troubled world. Help us to do our parts in small and large ways towards transformed lives and healed relationships.

Loving God, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings to keep them safe, protect us under your loving embrace. Give us courage to overcome fear. These we ask in the name of Jesus who taught us this prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done in 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, For ever and ever. Amen.

Offering of time, talents, treasures and prayers for the community and the world.

(If you are not on PAR and wish to send in your offering, you can drop in your offering envelopes in the door slot by the kitchen door of the church or you can mail your cheque. Thank you for your continued love and support to BCUC)

Offertory Prayer:

God of great wonders, we join with you in the joy of giving.

You give us life and breath, you fill the world with beauty,

our hands with bounty, and our hearts with the desire to give.

Accept these gifts, and ourselves in your service. Amen.

****Sending Forth.***

As you walk through the world,

look up, look out, look all around,

seeking those who need love;

love that you may show them,

love by which they may know of God's love.

We are called to be God's people.

Let us follow in love, hope and trust. Amen.