

Words of Welcome

Where does one put their trust when changes, whether welcome or not, are happening in our lives? As we consider this question and more, we look to Moses and the words he shared with his people, where the wisdom of one man gave courage and instruction to generations to follow.

Call to Worship Psalm 86:9-10

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ **For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.**

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Hymn

Will you come and follow me

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1. Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown; will you let me name be known:
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?
2. Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?
3. Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?
4. Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?
5. Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, we rejoice in your presence. We acknowledge that you have done great things in our history, in our present, and in our future. Our hope rests in you. We rejoice in confidence that you abide in our dry spaces and in our flowing streams. Lead us through troubling times and empower us to continue to press toward you and your way. In our worship, part our lips in praise, open our hearts in love, and quench our spirits in worship.

Righteous God, you made us in your divine image and yet we often turn to the gazes of others to see ourselves. We yield to the temptation of comparison and measure ourselves according to standards not made for us. You declared us good, and we question your judgment. We turn from your truth and receive the lies of the enemy of our souls that devalue and condemn even though your grace is sufficient for us. Mend the brokenness within us. Fortify us with your love, hope, and vision. Shield us from stagnation and despair.

Leave Her Alone Service Prayers for the Fifth Sunday in Lent was written by the Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, Minister for Worship and Theology, United Church of Christ

Creator God, you spoke and light appeared in chaotic nothingness.

Your Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and lived among us.

Speak again with the power of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, read and interpreted, and transform our understanding so that our lives may more fully conform to your Living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

The God of grace sees us fully, knows us fully, and loves us fully.

May our eyes be ever open to see ourselves as God sees us and restore our souls.

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Scripture Reading Deuteronomy 31:1-13

When Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, ²he said to them: "I am now one hundred twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the LORD has told me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' ³The LORD your God himself will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua also will cross over before you, as the LORD promised. ⁴The LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. ⁵The LORD will give them over to you and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command that I have given to you. ⁶Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you." ⁷Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. ⁸It is

the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

⁹Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. ¹⁰Moses commanded them: “Every seventh year, in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths, ¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. ¹²Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law, ¹³and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess.”

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message A Healthy Transition

In business and organizations there is often talk and work done for succession planning. Succession planning is essentially determining who and how things will move forward into the future once those in place now resign, die, or otherwise move on from their places of prominence, position, or power. Growing up around farmers, at one time it was almost a given that the oldest son would take over the farm. It was certainly not guaranteed, but for some time that was the expectation. I have seen large farms with multiple families involved in the operation spend considerable time figuring out how to provide for those who have been in charge and are now retired or for family members whose spouse has died, and the next generation takes over the responsibilities for the land and operations.

In some families that have grown in business that certainly also has been the case. One can think of the Paterson Family locally, or the McCain family nationally to name just a couple. Organizations need succession planning as well. I once taught piano using a method that had been developed by a woman living in Dartmouth called *Music for Young Children*TM. The company has grown from a family operation from their home to an international music program based out of Kanata, ON and I remember when they were doing their succession planning in order to ensure that the program would always be available to people long after she would end her day-to-day involvement.

Locally, I have recently read on Facebook that the Underground Gym has a succession plan in place. Peter Penetta wrote, “My daughter Chyenne...is the now the legal successor to the Underground Gym. Good thing ‘cause 2 weeks ago I had my 2nd heart attack in 10 years. I am okay (2 stents) but I definitely have to make some major changes to continue to work with the children. I love them all like my own & I am not ready to leave them yet. My work is not done.” Peter states that his work is not done, and yet he knows that a plan needs to be in place.

Succession planning has been a part of the human experience, and the scripture reading today imparts the succession plan of the Israelites as they prepare to cross over the Jordan into what is referred to as the Promised Land. This particular reading is part of a longer discourse from Moses as he knows that he will not be crossing over with them. He is preparing them for the change in leadership, and sharing knowledge and wisdom that will determine how they step into this future story.

Moses informs them that Joshua will cross over before the people, he will be their leader now, but even more so and most importantly, he says, “The Lord your God himself will cross over before you.” (v3) God will go before his people preparing the way, and being present with them.

Now before I go further, I know that without reading the whole story some may wonder why God will destroy nations and dispossess them so that the Israelites can have their land. There are two things that may be helpful here. One is that God created all people, but many nations and tribes, as is the fact today, were filled with greed and a desire for power and control and so in the story we hear, those people are removed from their lands. Secondly, this is a story particular to the people of Israel. It was told from their perspective. What is not evident in this passage is that Deuteronomy is a teaching on a treaty of sorts. As long as the people were obedient to God, following the teachings of the Ten Commandments, which held relationships with God and others in high regard, well if there was obedience then there would be blessing. The flip side of this is that where there was disobedience, a wandering away from those things that kept people in good relationship with God and others, then there would be curse or some might say, troubles and misfortune.

God wanted the people to rely on God’s presence and provision to sustain them. Trust and care were needed for the relationship to flourish. Moses in this part of his speech is telling the people, and Joshua as well, that in no uncertain terms they are to be strong and bold, because it is God who goes with them. Moses says to the people and Joshua himself, in the same words, “He will not fail you or forsake you.” In other words, God’s got this.

The people are facing unknowns, unknown people, unknown land, unknown and unforeseen circumstances and they are told, God’s got this. In this big transition of their lived experience from one leader to another, from being nomads to settled people, from one country to another, God is present, God goes before them. And what they have heard, what they will continue to do, is share that promise with the generations to come. Which is why the command to hear this over and over again. A reminder of what has been and how God has always been present, has always gone before, has provided.

As Christians in this time of Lent it is also a reminder to us that through Christ, who is our promise and with whom we have relationship, the one who has fulfilled all that the Israelites hoped for in their relationship with God, we too live in promised land. Rachel

Bouwkamp says it this way, “The promised Land is not a geographic place like Canaan or heaven or, for that matter the U.S. or Mexico or Canada. The Promised Land is the place into which the Lord our God crosses over before us. It is anywhere and everywhere our God resides. It is not a nation. It is not a language. The Promised Land is the presence of God.”¹

The presence of God is always there for us, we may not recognize it but when we are in relationship with God, taking time to nurture that relationship, and nurturing relationship with others, whether they be the person you live with, the store clerk, or any others, God goes with us. We can be strong and bold trusting that God is present.

The presence of God is near, what can take practice is trusting that God goes before us as well. I have made a habit over many decades of asking God to go before me into my day and into my moments, and into the big things like New Beginnings that our church is working through. I have asked God to go before my friends and family facing health issues or struggle or celebrations and amazing life changes. I don’t think I realized until reading this passage that this was a promise that goes back to Moses.

So, I encourage you to trust that God is present, to ask God to go before you and those you love, to go before nations seeking peace and security whether it be food security for all or bodily security and safety. We can trust that God’s got this. God had the Israelites and God’s got us through Christ. For our part, we are to trust, to live in ways that are life giving for ourselves and others, to trust that in our transitions in life a way is being made whether as individuals or as a church.

God has got this. God has got you. Live in grace, in hope, in love, in the knowledge that God is present and God goes before you, as you and others, as churches and countries, transition through the challenges, struggles, good changes and into a future hope. Amen.

Prayers of the People

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,
We come to you in prayer, trusting that you are with us in the ups and downs,
the joys and sorrows of these challenging days.
We give you thanks for every sign of your presence with us,
for every unexpected kindness, every word of comfort or encouragement,
every sign of courage in the face of injustice,
every hopeful step towards reconciliation amid conflict,
and healing in the face of disease or danger.
Thank you for your presence with us in all things.

In this unpredictable world, we pray for those whose lives are caught up in reckless terror or planned oppression, and for those living in places where they are afraid to

¹ Bouwkamp, Rachel. [Reformed Worship 143 © March 2022](#) Worship Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.

walk freely; we remember all who find the uncertainty of our times overwhelming and discouraging:

May those living in fear courage to go on in your company.

As the stories of Jesus turn us toward the cross, O God,
we pray for those who also walk the road of suffering.

We remember before you those whose lives have been plunged into sorrow or despair through tragic death, through critical illness or chronic pain.
and through complicated problems that seem to have no end:

May all these know your comfort and compassion.

O God, the stories of Jesus show us that he faced the clamour of many demands and the pressure of many critics. We pray for all those who are exhausted these days, juggling more demands and fewer resources in their work or at home, for those who cannot seem to get it right, whatever they do, and for all those facing unfair criticism and expectations in the responsibilities they bear on behalf of others.

May all these be strengthened by your Spirit of justice and mercy.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.

Anoint us with your Spirit of healing and hope, and bring peace to our lives and this world you love for the sake of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray together:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Invitation to the offering

We know God's love as a resource that cannot be depleted. Grounding our faith in that knowledge, and relying upon the companionship of Christ and the sustenance of the Spirit we give freely, generously, and gladly.

© Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P148.

As we are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

1. All my hopes on God is founded who does still my trust renew;
through all change and chance God guides me, only good and only true.
Love unknown, God's alone, calls my heart to be God's own.
2. Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown, betray all trust;
what our care and toil establish, tower and temple, fall to dust
but God's power, hour by hour, is my temple and my tower.
3. God's great goodness reigns eternal, deep in wisdom, passing thought;
light and life are all God's splendor bringing beauty out of naught.
Evermore from God's store newborn worlds rise and adore.
4. Daily does Almighty Giver bounteous gifts on us bestow,
God's desire our soul delighting, pleasure leading where we go.
Love will stand at God's hand; joy will wait on God's command.
5. Still from earth to God eternal sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising for the gift of Christ, the Son.
Hear Christ call one and all: you that follow shall not fall.

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Benediction

And now, God sends us out into our communities,
not to cling to a faded past, but to share all the new things God is doing.

And now, Jesus calls us to notice those around us,
**to shower them with hope, to feed them from our deep pantries,
to welcome them as family.**

And now, the Spirit anoints us with grace,
**to make a way through the injustices around us so we might walk with others
into the kingdom springing forth in our midst.**