

Call to Worship

Into life's challenges and questions comes the Mystery of God,
and God's truth opens our eyes.

Into our routines and rituals walks the presence of Christ.
and God's love brings healing and hope.

Into our traditions and conclusions blows the wind of the Spirit,
and God's people are born from above.

We gather in Jesus' name to encounter God's grace and glory.

Let us worship God with open hearts and minds.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent. March 5th, 2023. Year A.

*Hymn

She comes sailing on the wind

403

Refrain

*She comes sailing on the wind,
her wings flashing in the sun;
on a journey just begun, she flies on.
And in the passage of her flight,
her song rings out through the night,
full of laughter, full of light, she flies on.*

1. Silent waters rocking on the morning of our birth,
like an empty cradle waiting to be filled.
And from the heart of God the Spirit moved
upon the earth, like a mother breathing life into her child.
2. Many were the dreamers whose eyes were given sight
when the Spirit filled their dreams with life and form.
Deserts grew to gardens, broken hearts found new delights
and then down the ages still she flew on.

Refrain

3. To a gentle girl in Galilee, a gentle breeze she came,
a whisper softly calling in the dark,
the promise of a child of peace whose reign would never end,
Mary sang the Spirit song within her heart.
4. Flying to the river, she waited circling high
above the child now grown so full of grace.
As he rose up from the water, she swept down from the sky,
and she carried him away in her embrace.

Refrain

5. Long after the deep darkness that fell upon the world,
after dawn returned in flame of rising sun,
the Spirit touched the earth again, again her wings unfurled,
bringing life in wind and fire as she flew on.

Refrain

Words and music: Gordon Light ©1985, Common Company; arrangement, Andrew Donaldson
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mercy, Christ, both Lord and Servant, Spirit of new life,
Your mystery embraces the vast reaches of the universe and yet you are present with
us in the course of our daily lives. Even the tiniest spark of your wisdom illuminates
the greatest complexities. With the smallest gesture of your love, you renew our hope.
Deepen our sense of your holy presence this day. Assure us that your love will never
let us go. And so we offer our praise and our prayers this day to you, Holy God, Holy
One and Holy Three,
with humble hearts and faith that seeks understanding.

**God of mystery and mercy,
we confess that we prefer simply certainty to seeking for deeper understanding.
We settle for what we know, ignoring our doubts and questions. Forgive us
when our faith falters because what we think no longer satisfies. Open our eyes
to the truth you hold out to us in Christ, and give us courage to rethink what we
have assumed about you and your love for the world. Amen.**

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent. March 5th, 2023. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, God is for us and not against us!
For that very reason,
God sent the Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Believe the good news,
in Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

John 3:16–17

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1 © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press P101.

Scripture Reading

❖ Gen 12:1-4a

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”^[a]

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

❖ John 3:1-17

¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.”

³ Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.”

⁴ “How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?”

⁵⁻⁶ Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

⁷⁻⁸ “So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

⁹ Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?”

¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God?

¹³⁻¹⁵ “No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

The Message (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

Message Go from Your Country

It is so easy to get comfortable where we are. One of the hardest things that we can do is move. I can still recall vividly many of the moves that Ken and I have made in our

lifetime so far. For starters we moved nine times in the first nine years of our marriage. Some of the moves were from one house to another. A few were from one community to another. We lived everywhere from Swan Lake AB to Kamloops BC to Sundre AB. We lived in Drayton Valley for a time and then spent the longest number of years back in our home community of Spirit River. In 2010 we made the biggest and most drastic move of our lives when we went from our community of 1100 people in Northern AB to Toronto. From Western Canada to Eastern Canada. The most recent move, though not so recent anymore, was when we moved to Thunder Bay in 2013.

It might seem that Ken and I are pretty good at taking risks when it comes to moving from one place to another, but some of those moves were really challenging while others were not so much. It was hardest to move when we had settled in for longer periods of time in a certain community. Where we had developed relationships and were involved in the community.

The story of Abram is one of a family on the move. In Genesis we learn about Abram's father Terah taking "his son Abram, his grandson Lot, [who was Abram's brother Lot's son] and Sarai his daughter-in-law (his son Abram's wife) and set out with them from Ur of the Chaldees for the land of Canaan. But when they got as far as Haran, they settle down there." (Gen 11:31)

They didn't get to their intended destination. Somehow, they settled down and, in some ways, maybe they just settled. Maybe the journey became too much, too arduous, too dangerous, too difficult, or maybe Haran just was too nice to move on from. We have no idea. What we do know is that after many years "God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you." (Gen 12:1)

"Abram left just as God said, and Lot left with him."

If you are wondering how old Abram was at the time, we are told that he was seventy-five years old when he went from his country. He took his wife and his nephew, "along with all the possessions and people they had gotten in Haran, and set out for the land of Canaan and arrived safe and sound." Thing is, though he had arrived safe and sound, he still moved around through Canaan. Then there was a famine and Abram found himself moving to Egypt before returning once again to Canaan.

The point is that Abram and Sarai were on the move, and if you continue to read the story, they faced challenges and conflict, but never let go of the promise of blessing, for even in the midst of struggle of moving, they knew God was with them. Their movement was from place to place. It meant change and discernment, challenge and discovery, hope and promise.

But there are different kinds of movement in our lives. Sometimes God calls us to move from one place to another physically. It may be a new home or community; it may be to a new job or experience. At other times God calls us to move to a new understanding. Often a physical move is a move to a new understanding, certainly a new experience

that leads to understanding, but there are also the times when we are asked to move to a new understanding of how we are to be in the world, or how others are in the world.

Take a look for instance at the experience of Nicodemus. Here was a learned man, a teacher himself, and he comes to Jesus in the dark of night for a conversation. It appears that he had some concern about meeting Jesus in the light of day. It may have been his position in the community and he didn't want that threatened. After all, Jesus was a problem to those who were Pharisees, leaders of the Jews, of whom Nicodemus was one.

Nicodemus says what he thinks and what may have been the talk around town. "Rabbi, [he says to Jesus], we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it." (John 3:2) Nicodemus has come with his understanding of who Jesus is. He doesn't ask a question but rather makes a statement. One cannot be sure what Nicodemus was hoping to learn, but Jesus' words back to Nicodemus seems to come out of nowhere, saying "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to – to God's kingdom." (v3)

Well, that is pretty left field. Nicodemus is trying to figure that puzzle out and fails rather miserably. He takes things literally. He cannot understand that Jesus is speaking about moving from one understanding of what it means to be a follower of God to another. He blurts out, "How can anyone be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from -above' talk?" (v4)

And who of us wouldn't be confused in that moment. As people eavesdropping on the interaction, we get to come to this conversation with the fullness of scripture, knowing how the story of Jesus life, death, and resurrection all plays out. Nicodemus does not have that history or background. So probably good to cut him a little slack.

Thankfully Jesus spends a little more time trying to explain himself, his life's purpose, and the call on Nicodemus to move from one understanding to another. He continues, "Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation – the 'wind-hovering-over-the water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life – it's not possible to enter God's kingdom...the person who takes shape within is informed by something you can't see and touch." (vv5-6) The conversation does not stop there, but the call is to move to new understanding of what God is up to in the world.

Movement means change. Changing one's physical place or changing one's thinking. It all takes faith, trust, and a willingness to be open to what God is up to in your life and that of others. Movement in these ways means leaving the familiar for something new and deeper and different. At least that is the hope. Moving for the sake of moving, whether physically or in your thinking and being, is not the same as moving because you have discerned that it is God at work in your life. Sometimes moving or making a change is just running away or ignoring circumstances. It takes thought, prayer, discernment,

and conversations with other trusted and faithful people to know what God is doing in your life.

And even then, you may not be clear about what is next. You see, we don't know how Nicodemus responded to his conversation with Jesus. We are never told. What we do know is that Nicodemus spoke up and questioned the Pharisees tactics when they wanted Jesus arrested later in the gospel of John (John 7:50) and that he took Jesus body, laid it in a tomb, and prepared the body with spices. (John 19:38-42). He didn't stop being a teacher and ruler of the people, but there was some change in motivation, some risk he was willing to take because of his understanding of Jesus, however limited.

We also know that Abram and Sarai had no road map to follow as they picked up and left the comfort of Haran. They could not have anticipated all of the moves and the famine, the challenges they would face, but that did not stop them from putting one foot in front of the other, trusting that God would lead them. They didn't do anything perfectly, they made mistakes, tripped up more than a few times.

And that may be the take away for us as individuals and as a congregation, as the people of God in the community of faith and in the world. Are you being asked to trust God and go out in faith? Maybe it is to welcome someone new to your circle of friends, maybe it is a call to move from your home to another. Is it a call to move from the comfort of your thinking or how you share your faith with others?

As the church, we are in a time of great uncertainty, yet God is still on the move. God hasn't left the building except to lead us out of our comfort zones and into serving the larger community. We have a great opportunity to move to a new place of being God's people in the world. For some churches it will mean different things, for some it has meant moving from one building to another, for others it has meant closing their ministry all together and bringing what they have to other churches, for some it will mean redefining the mission.

All of it takes courage and a willingness to move to a new place of understanding how God is at work in the world. It will require faith, trust, and a willingness to leave the familiar, whether it be a physical space or an old familiar way of doing things. Be curious, with the willingness to move to something new and deeper and different.

We do not go alone. That Spirit that Jesus spoke about with Nicodemus goes with us. God is with us. Let's be curious. Let move from the inside of ourselves and our ministries to the outside. Let's be the people of God on the move.

Prayers of the People

Lord God, you are our keeper,
shade in the heat of the world's troubles,
light in every shadowed time of life.
In all our comings and goings we are yours.
And so we thank you for your care which sustains us,

and offer you our trust for those things we can do nothing about.
Thank you for the energy to focus on the things we can do day by day,
putting our love and care to work in community and creation.
By the power of your Spirit, bless us with the insight and passion to act in hope.
May your wisdom guide us in all things.

Attentive God,
we bring our concerns for the world to you in these uncertain times.

We think of Abraham and Sarah setting off to an unknown land
and pray for people on the move:

For those seeking safety and shelter, fleeing violence;

For those settling into a new home or community;

For those who must travel, whatever the conditions.

God, our Companion

Walk with us on the way.

We think of the Psalmist looking to hills

And we pray for people seeking help:

For those seeking help for the earth itself as its fragile balances are threatened;

For those seeking help to make ends meet as bank balances are threatened;

For those seeking help for vulnerable people to right the balance of justice

God, our Companion

Walk with us on the way.

We think of Nicodemus turning to Jesus with questions in his heart

and we pray for people seeking answers:

For those with health challenges, seeking diagnosis and treatment;

For those researching problems and policies, seeking to better our common life;

For those wondering if you exist, O God, wondering if you have a purpose for them

God, our Companion

Walk with us on the way.

We think of Jesus, calming his disciples amid their fears,

challenging us all to follow him in love and faithfulness

for he is our Companion on the way who taught us to pray together:

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent. March 5th, 2023. Year A.

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

All that we have is a gift from God.

In faith and gratitude, we return now a portion of what we have so abundantly received, as grateful heirs of the promises of God.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 1 © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press P103.

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>

*Hymn

Be thou my vision

461

1. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art;
thou my best thought in the day and the night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, thine own may I be;
thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.
3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my armour and be thou my might;
thou my soul's shelter and thou my high tower:
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.
4. Riches I heed not, nor vain earthly praise,
thou mine inheritance, through all my days:
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.
5. High King of heaven, when the battle is done,
grant heaven's joy to me, O bright heaven's Sun!
heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Words: Irish, anonymous 8th century; translation Mary Byrne (1880-1931): paraphrase, Eleanor Hull (1860-1935), alt ©1994 Hope Publishing.
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

As we continue our Lenten journey, remember the promise of the Psalmist:
"The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forever more."

So go now, trusting that your help comes from God,
And may God's presence strengthen you,
Jesus' faithfulness guide you,
And the wind of the Spirit bring you energy to serve with love.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent. March 5th, 2023. Year A.