

World Wide Communion Service (Season of Creation 4)  
Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council  
October 1, 2023

*If you have been following the Season of Creation themes from Gathering – Creation Time 4 “Creation asks: Love Me!” The symbols used on this day are the bread and the chalice/ wheat & grapes – symbols of creation’s bounty and God’s love for us through Jesus. You might want to display some wheat stocks, grapes and a variety of breads encompassing the diversity of God’s world on the communion table.*

### **Welcome and Announcements**

- We welcome you to worship on this World Wide Communion Sunday. As we gather today, we are sharing in a liturgy written for use by churches throughout our region. Whether you are watching and participating in this service on line or in person, in your own church or with others, we hope you will feel a connection with friend and stranger as we share, not only in worship together, but in Holy Communion. If you are watching on line, and haven’t already done so, you might wish to prepare your own elements for later in the service during the singing of our opening hymn. Use what you have on hand, perhaps bread and wine, or a cracker or muffin and juice. (our President Jennifer has been known to use lefto over pizza and diet coke when in a pinch) Just as Jesus would have used what he had at hand when he shared this meal with his disciples.

- any other announcements for your community of faith.

### **Centering**

And now, I invite you to take a deep breath, and invite the calming and centering spirit of the Holy One into our midst.

**Opening Hymn:** Come In, Come in and Sit Down VU 395

### **Lighting of the Christ Candle**

As is done in many churches across this land, we light a Candle as we begin worship. The light reminds us that the love of Christ is ours to cherish and to share. And so we call it the Christ Candle, and we welcome the light of Christ into our shared time together.

## **Call to Worship**

In a world where wildfires and hurricanes are a part of daily newscasts, we ask

**Where is God?**

In our busy lives with the stress of daily living, the rising cost of food and shelter, we ask

**Where is God?**

In a world of conflict, and refugees, of displaced persons and homelessness, we ask

**Where is God?**

God is here, in creation, in homes and workplaces, in schools and playgrounds

**God is here,**

calling us to bring about a world of peace and of love

**God is here,**

Inviting us to be renewed through God's Word, to be renewed in the sharing of the bread and the cup

**God is here,**

Welcoming us into God's presence.

**Let us Worship God.**

## **Opening Prayer (in unison)**

**We come before you, Creator God, unable to fully understand the suffering of the people closest to us, let alone all around the world. Yet, on this World Wide Communion Sunday, we stand side by side, heart to heart, with our siblings near and far, in this place and around the world. We are in awe of You and the healing work you call us to do. Yet we know how easily we give up or become discouraged, or just plain forget. Forgive us, God, and light a fire so deep within us that we burn with the same love and passion shown by your Son, Jesus. We pray in his name, Amen.**

## **Children's Time**

Who can tell me what faith is?

Faith is trusting in God and depending on God when times are tough.

Faith is like a muscle.

Who has muscles? Show your muscles? How do your muscles get stronger?

By exercising, eating healthy and using your muscles every day.

Did you know your tongue is a muscle, in fact it a combination of 8 muscles... we exercise our tongue every day don't we.

And what about the muscles that make our eyebrows go up and down.

Faith is like a muscle – it gets stronger when you use it.

Some of the ways we strengthen our faith are by reading our Bible, studying what Jesus taught and by sharing in a simple meal together. Some might call it a snack, because it's only a small piece of bread and one swallow of juice. But we call it a meal, because it is a symbol of the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. Sometimes we call it the Last Supper. Or Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. It's a sacrament – and sacraments are a very important part of our faith. When we share in the sacrament of communion we are exercising our faith, and strengthening it.

*Today, our communion table has some wheat and some grapes on display. These are symbols of creation – symbols of where the bread and juice we will share in communion come from. They remind us of how important it is to care for creation and to love the beautiful creation God has given us.*

Today is World Wide Communion Sunday, and churches and people of faith all around the world are all having communion. So we have a variety of breads, to remind us of the diversity of our world. The bread and juice also symbolize our love for creation. Just like it doesn't matter if you lift a bar-bell or a jug of water to strength an arm muscle (*you could even bring a barbell or jug of water or other things to lift*) It doesn't really matter what symbols we use for our communion elements. The important thing is that we share this meal together and remember what we believe – that's what exercises and strengthens our faith.

A little later in our service, we will share that meal together, and we will remember that thousands of people in hundreds of places are doing the same as we are. We can imagine all of us exercising our faith together. And I think that when people exercise their faith together, the world becomes a better place, because God's love gets shared more.

(children can either remain in the service or go to Sunday school, and return when it is time for communion)

**Ministry of Music** (Choir anthem or special music)

**Scripture:** Exodus 17: 1-7 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>The people quarrelled 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?’ <sup>3</sup>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?’ <sup>4</sup>So Moses cried out to the LORD, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’

### **Reflection:**

The Israelites are at it again... or still at it. Things are not going well. First it was food that they were lacking, now they are thirsty. And once again, they turn to Moses with their complaints.

Poor Moses. He is doing the best he can with the resources he has available to him. And when he has no answer, he turns to God for help.

God tells him to take the staff that he used at the Nile, and to strike the rock. God tells him that water will come from the rock and the people will be able to drink.

Life cannot exist without water. Our bodies are 65% water. We can live a long time without food, but we need water to survive. It's no wonder the Israelites were anxious for water. But poor Moses, once again he bears the brunt of the complaints from his people.

I feel for Moses in this morning's passage. Here was a man, not necessarily in the prime of his life any more, being called to lead his people out of bondage, to a new land. A land none of them even knew for sure existed, but a land that Moses told them God had promised to them. It was a land of milk and honey, a place where they would have plenty of everything they needed. They would no longer be in bondage, subject to the whims of the Pharaoh. They would be free to raise their families, they would have land to call their own, life would be good. No doubt they went willingly, ready to follow Moses to this paradise that God had promised them. Things went along pretty well in the beginning. Moses was able to part the

sea for them to pass through, and close it up again before their pursuers could catch them. Miriam danced with joy. Manna fell from heaven. Indeed, all was going well.

Until they weren't. Here they are in the wilderness, well into their journey. The newness and the excitement of possibility had worn off. Here they were in the wilderness with no water to drink. Just before this particular passage, they had suffered from starvation, with no food to eat. Life under the pharaoh wasn't looking so bad after all. At least then they had food and water. Now here they are, dying of thirst, and that, after suffering starvation. Oh sure, God had provided bread from heaven and quail in abundance, but now there was no water. What was next?

Naturally, their first instinct was to turn on Moses. He was their leader after all. He was the one who had made all those promises. Time to call him to account. The people needed water. The people are thirsty.

Things haven't changed much in 3500 years have they? We still choose our leaders, based on the promises they make to us, and then we grumble and complain when things don't work out just the way we had hoped. We listen to the campaign promises and try to make sense of them. Which politician is telling the truth? Which one is going to be able to deliver on their promises. How are they going to be able to improve health care and education without increasing taxes? Who is going to ensure that the food we want and need is affordable? And what about those interest rates and the gas prices? How do we determine the one who is honest and sincere versus the one who wants the job for the prestige and the expense account they may or may not be able to exploit?

Yes indeed, the human race was born to complain. And sometimes I think we were born to find someone else to blame for our troubles. We love to play the blame game.

Moses offers us an example of how we should deal with things when they aren't going our way, particularly if we have some responsibility as a leader. And I think each and every one of us do indeed have responsibility to be leaders. Leaders in our homes, our church and our community.

The first thing Moses did was to pray. He prayed a brief, humble, frightened prayer using plain words. "What shall I do Lord, they are ready to stone me?" That's something we can all do. We don't need fancy words, we don't need to tell God what we want the outcome to be, all we need to do is use simple words and

ask God for help. We need to remember that we are not alone, nor do we have to suffer whatever it is we are complaining about alone. We can talk to God. We can ask God to help us. That's something the Israelites forgot. It was easier just to complain, to blame Moses for their thirst. Seems to me they thirsted for more than just water.

The second thing Moses realized is that he had the tools to solve his own problems. God told him to take his staff in hand and use it to find water. We have the tools we need too. Instead of complaining about our problems, we would be better to face the problem head on, and give some thought to what we need to do to solve it. Most problems don't solve themselves, but most problems can be solved with a little thought and a little effort, using the knowledge and tools we have been given. Taking the first step to solving our problems is necessary to get started, and recognizing the tools we have in the gifts and skills God has given us is a big part of that first step. We can dwell on our problems. We can try to figure out who to blame for our problems. Or we can look around and figure out how we can solve those problems.

The final thing Moses did may be the most important of all. He didn't work the miracle of producing water from the rock alone, nor did he try to accomplish it in front of the entire community. Instead, he called forward a few elders, and took them with him to solve the problem. Rarely do we have to solve problems alone. We have people ready and able to help, but we have to ask. And we have to trust.

Sometimes, I think asking for help is the hardest thing of all to do. We think we have to solve our problems all alone. We're embarrassed if we can't. Sometimes we think we are a failure if we have to ask for help. Or maybe we think we are weak. We're afraid we're letting others down if we can't fix things ourselves.

Maybe it's time to rethink some of these things. I'm often guilty of trying to do things myself. If I'm really honest with myself, I can even admit that I have a certain arrogance about it. After all, if I don't do it myself, will it be done right? If I don't do it, will it get done on time. I've gotten better about asking for help, but there are still plenty of days when I find myself buried or overwhelmed because I won't ask for help. Not that I won't offer help myself. I'm plenty generous with my time – so why do I have such a problem asking someone else to help me? I don't mind accepting help when it's offered, but I seem to hesitate to ask for it.

Sometimes I think we also need to put our problems into perspective. Certainly being without water in the wilderness would be a pretty serious problem. But how

many of our problems are really as serious as we like to make them out to be? Cold and snow when we have warm homes and plenty to eat, weighed against the life of a homeless person, who has to seek out the nearest homeless shelter, or accept the blankets and sleeping bags from the street worker on those minus 30 degree nights that will be upon us in a few short weeks, makes our complaints about the weather look pretty foolish.

Complaining about the heat a few short days ago, or the sudden drop in temperature when measured against the disaster of those who have lived through hurricanes and earthquakes seems – well it seems crazy!

A disagreement with our son or daughter, or our spouse seems insignificant when measured against the conflict in the middle east or the problems in the Ukraine.

Worrying about how we are going to pay for a renovation we might want to do to our home, when measured against the devastation faced by those affected by the wildfires that appear to be going on even longer than usual this year.

Grumbling about the price of our water bill when compared to First Nations communities who have no clean water to drink...

All these things seem just a little petty or selfish when we really think about it.

Giving a little extra to the church or another charity that supports disaster recovery this year, needs to be weighed against our ability to take a luxury vacation or cruise.

Indeed, we are born to grumble and complain. It's been going on for hundreds of generations. All the way back to Moses and the Israelites in the desert. Their thirst for water was the presenting issue. It's what turned them against Moses. But one has to wonder if it was just water they were thirsting for. Perhaps the hardships they were facing, the long journey they had been on, the complaints they lodged against Moses were just the presenting issues. Perhaps their thirst went much deeper than the physical need for water. It seems to me that they were actually becoming discouraged, despondent, and without hope. They were questioning whether God was among them or not. Their thirst was as much a spiritual thirst as it was a physical thirst.

We question sometimes too. We feel discouraged and despondent and without hope at times. We test, and we need proof. We wonder if God is really with us. God knows us, in fact God knows us so well that God sent us a reminder that we are not abandoned. Jesus came to live among us. He came to teach us how to live

with one another. He showed by his actions that even those who feel alone, and abandoned are never alone. Jesus showed us that questioning God's presence didn't mean God wasn't there.

Sometimes our spiritual thirst is as deep as any physical thirst we might have. It is then that we need to do as Moses and the elders did, and come to God in prayer and thanksgiving, recalling our blessings, and being reminded that we are not alone.

Is it enough, or do we need proof of God's presence? - Like water pouring forth from a rock? Perhaps bread broken and wine poured in Jesus name? We need to open ourselves up to seeing and feeling God's presence in our lives. That, and that alone will ease our spiritual thirst.

**Hymn:** As We Gather at Your table VU 457

**The New Creed:** As we prepare to celebrate communion together, let us affirm our faith by repeating the New Creed together

**We are not alone...**

**We live in God's world.**

**We believe in God:**

**who has created and is creating,**

**who has come in Jesus,**

**the Word made flesh,**

**to reconcile and make new,**

**who works in us and others by the Spirit.**

**We trust in God.**

**We are called to be the Church:**

**to celebrate God's presence,**

**to live with respect in Creation,**

**to love and serve others,**

**to seek justice and resist evil,**

**to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,**

**our judge and our hope.**

**In life, in death, in life beyond death,**

**God is with us.**

**We are not alone.**

**Thanks be to God.**

**Celebration of Communion**

As we gather to share in this meal, we are reminded that this is the table of our Lord. It is not the table of ( *name of church* ) or even or the United Church of Canada. This is the Lord's table and all who believe are welcome here.

May the God of Creation be with you

**And also with you**

Let us open our hearts and minds to all that God offers

**We open them to God and to one another**

Let us give thanks to God

**It is right to give God our thanks and praise.**

O God, Our Creator,

we pause now to be thankful for the food we will share today. Let us remember the First Nations of the Americas, who cultivated corn and potatoes, sharing them with Europeans who came across the sea 500 years ago.

Let us remember the ancient peoples of Africa and Mesopotamia who cultivated wheat, and those in Southeast Asia who first cultivated rice.

Let us remember traders and settlers who carried seeds and roots from place to place so that today we enjoy creation's bounty.

Let us work together for justice and the sharing of all the goods of the earth. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Brother and our friend

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one  
who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

After he had completed 3 years of teaching and healing He entered Jerusalem in triumph. He taught and healed some more.

He had angered religious and political leaders who were sometimes more interested in having power than in loving God and others. He even suggested that one of his own disciples would soon betray him. He knew he would probably soon be killed.

So Jesus gathered his closest friends and he shared a special last meal with them.

After the meal was over, Jesus took a loaf of bread. He broke it, as we break it now. (*Break a loaf of bread.*) Jesus said to his friends, “This bread is just like my body, which soon will be broken. Eat this bread and remember me.” He shared this bread with his friends, as we will do today

Then Jesus picked up a cup of wine. He said, “This wine is just like my blood, which will soon be poured out for you. God is giving you a new covenant in my blood.” He shared that wine with his friends as we and others do today. (*Pour the juice into chalice*)

**Christ has died,**

**Christ is Risen,**

**Christ will come again**

Let us pray: Loving God, you are everywhere. People around the world feel your presence and celebrate your love. May we feel your presence here today as we share in Holy Communion. Bless this bread and juice, that they might refresh us and renew us as Christ’s body in the world.

Bless this world in which we live. As we work towards reconciliation with indigenous peoples across this land, may the work of our region and the wider church help us to learn more about our history and about one another, so the mistakes of the past will never be repeated.

As people across this land deal with the aftermath of this summer’s wildfires, may they find the support and care they need to rebuild their lives.

As the hurricane season causes devastation through winds and flood waters, we pray that those affected will find safety and support in rebuilding their lives.

And in places where war continues to rage and refugees flee for safety, we pray for peace and security.

*you may wish to add prayers for your own community)*

We pray all these things and more, in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray together, saying, our Father, who art in Heaven..... Amen

And now, come to the table, for all is ready.

The Gifts of God for the People of God

The bread of life  
The cup of blessing

**Prayer After Communion:** (in Unison)

**Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus, and for being with us here and always. We feel your presence in the meal we have shared. We experience your love in our hearts and in our lives. We celebrate this Communion meal with all your followers around the world. May we be strengthened to carry your love with us in all we think and do. Amen.**

### **Offering Invitation**

As we celebrate World Wide Communion we think of our brothers and sisters around the world. We think of our indigenous neighbours and friends and pray for your guidance as we seek reconciliation. We recognize that the gifts we give to the church through the mission and service fund make a difference in our efforts towards reconciliation and in supporting those in crisis here and around the world. We offer ourselves and our resources for that work. Our offering will be received.

**\*Doxology:** Praise God From Whom all Blessings VU 541

### **\* Prayer of Dedication**

We give thanks O God for all that we have. May these gifts, which are a small token of our gratitude be used to help us bring peace and justice to a world that is lacking. Amen

**Closing Hymn:** Let us Talents & Tongues Employ VU 468

### **Blessing & Sending Forth**

Just as others around the world have been nourished this day,  
by the bread and the cup,  
we too have been nourished by this Holy Sacrament.

Let us go now from this place, renewed in spirit,  
reconnected with God's people everywhere.  
Let us go, strengthened by our Communion meal,  
Committed to service in Jesus name,  
Safe in the love of God,  
the grace of Christ and  
the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

**Closing Blessing Hymn or Postlude**

God be with You till we Meet Again VU 422 *(or your usual Choral Blessing)*

*Liturgy provided by Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council for Churches in the Region. For Use on World Wide Communion Sunday.*