

HOPE – March 29, 2020

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CENTERING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP:

If you have a candle - real, battery-operated or imaginary - please get it ready to light.

Remember that this is Lent, and we are choosing to leave the Christ candle unlit until Easter. If we were worshipping all together, there would be six Lenten candles at the front, and the first four candles for Lent would already be lit. Picture that in your mind.

- The first candle commits us to saying "yes" to the ways of Jesus.
- The second candle is our promise to being a blessing to others.
- The third candle signifies that we will worship anytime, anywhere.
- The fourth candle reminded us to be grateful that we already have all we need.
- Today we light the fifth candle...

As the Psalmist cries from the depths for the Lord to hear his supplications and as the disciples watched Jesus almost embrace and welcome his terrible fate as they approached Jerusalem, we too often experience a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and despair. And yet, throughout God's story in scripture, we know He can do the impossible, giving hope to the helpless and the hopeless.

As we light this 5th Lenten candle, let us acknowledge that all things are possible through Him and through Him there is always hope.

Light the 5th candle for Lent

OPENING PRAYER

You, who are the Holy Spirit, moving the waters,
you, who are the Christ, breathing new life into the church,
you, who are the Wind that Makes All Winds Blow,
your people are here.

Your world is here.

wondering if there is still life in us,
speak to the winds, we pray.

Fill us again, with life,
life abundant,
life made new.

Fill us again, that we might breathe, loving God!
Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;
Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

MESSAGE: We are God's Watchmen

This message has been prepared by Deb Hopper for the Faith United Milton congregation on March 29, 2020. Any comments you might like to pass along after reading it can be sent to uccandeb@gmail.com ©2020 Deb Hopper. Provided here with permission.

Dear friends,

We are God's watchmen.

When last I was with you it was the first Sunday of Lent. We put away our Hallelujahs and together entered into a time in the wilderness of Lent, a period of deep sombre, sober reflection.

The world has changed so much in just five weeks.

When we, together, left church went out into the wilderness of lent, we could not have known then how "Christlike" our journey would become. Like Christ in the desert, we are all isolated, frightened, alone. We have been forced to confront some uncomfortable truths about our government, our world, our healthcare system.

Was there ever such a time when Psalm 130 spoke so clearly?
We are God's watchmen.

Out of our depths of isolation, of fear, of illness, of poverty, of unemployment, of confusion – we cry to God. We have turned to God, knowing all other earthly authorities are truly helpless.

We are like Jonah entombed in the belly of the whale, surrounded by an unending ocean, crying to God for help. Just as God heard Jonah, He will hear us.

We ask God to hear our cries, let your ears pay attention to the world and our need for your mercy. We know our God can help us. When we follow God's word, we know what to do when there is trouble,

A watchman knows his commander.
We are God's watchmen.

God does not keep a count of our sins. There is no heavenly score card, no book with black marks beside our names. God is too busy loving us to count our sins. His love is unconditional. Our creator knows us well. He knows that we would dwell on our mistakes to the point of paralysis. We have all unintentionally caused pain, made bad choices and experienced failure. Failure is meant to be a teacher, not a prison.

It seems right now that so many politicians didn't pay attention to the warnings. So many populations are suffering because their healthcare systems didn't respond quickly enough. Stories are everywhere about overrun hospitals and doctors getting sick. People are dying. I cannot imagine what that kind of remorse must do to a soul.

They were the "watchmen" and they missed the attack coming. Does that mean they shouldn't get back on the wall?
We all live with regret. Regret breeds fear. Fear holds us back from serving God and others. The bible tells us many times "do not fear".

A watchman cannot be afraid of the night.
We are God's watchmen.

God's forgiveness frees us. If our all-seeing, all-knowing, world creator forgives us, we should follow His divine example and forgive ourselves. Knowing we are loved and forgiven, we can move past our sin to love and service.

A watchman performs his duty even if he makes a mistake.
We are God's watchmen.

Hebrew is dynamic, its written form consists of small pictures meant to inspire mental imagery. The Hebrew reader sees so much more than just the word, he sees the image suggested by the root word.

In Hebrew, the psalmist has used the word Qavah, which roughly means "to expect". The root word picture is an image of "binding together by twisting". Like a rope, the roots of a tree, or a vine around a tree trunk. It is a picture of two actively becoming one.

To "wait for the Lord" is to intentionally interweave the Lord himself into your life. Our whole being, our thoughts, our actions, our spirit, should be one with God. We do this through scripture study, meditation, prayer, and serving God with our gifts.

We spend time learning to listen to God. We try to cultivate a patient soul. We attempt to be the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. This is meshing God into our world. This is “waiting”.

The watchman actively scans the horizon, he is trained to be keenly alert.
We are God’s watchmen.

Waiting is active and intentional. We’re not just sitting around to see what happens next. We’re not bored or wasting time. We are deliberately preparing, expecting something amazing.

This is the intention of Lent. The intention of Christ when he isolated himself in the desert. In the wilderness, at 30 years old, Christ prepared for the last years of his life. To use his time to share God’s love, to be an example for us all. We, like Christ, need to get ready. We need to gather energy and to rest.

Five weeks ago, we together, began to prepare for Christ’s ultimate sacrifice and resurrection. We are anticipating Easter.

The watchman is physically and mentally ready for the night, rested and awake.
We are God’s watchmen.

We can anticipate the dawn, and with great purpose be prepared. The watchmen expect the morning, in the same way we blink and breathe. It happens because God wills it so. There is no doubt that the dawn will come.

We are the watchmen waiting for the morning. Ready to mark the new day, ready to announce the dawn. Just like the watchmen, we know that this will end and we must be ready to see the new day.

Eventually the need to quarantine will come to an end. Our period of social and physical distancing will end. Children will play in school yards; we will have coffee with friends at Tim Hortons; we will come together again to praise and worship God.

What do we need to do to be ready for that day? How will we have spent this Lenten time in the wilderness? Will we spend it cowering in fear? Or will we spend it by putting our faith in God and preparing for the resurrection of our communities?

The watchman knows what to do at the first glimmer of the dawn.
We are God’s watchmen.

In His word we put our hope. We put our trust in God. To do anything else is a waste of spirit, a waste of energy. Our whole being – body, mind and soul – needs to be engaged in active hope.

We are the watchmen waiting for the morning. Ready to mark the new day, ready to announce the dawn.

We put our hope in our God, who loves us without reserve, relentlessly and forever.

Peace, Deb

HYMN: I Will Wait For You (Psalm 130) by Shane and Shane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C3WQ1G1Uso>

CLOSING PRAYER:

Adapted from a prayer written by the Rt. Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator of The United Church of Canada for the "Loving Our Neighbours" 2020 Lenten worship resource.

Each step on Christ's Way, each step of our lives,
takes us to new places, new times.
Some of those are times to rest —
like Jesus did, when he stopped to pray.
Some are times to be challenged —
as Jesus was, by the woman from Syrophonecia.
Some are times to celebrate, even in the face of grief —
as Jesus did, when he shared his last meal with his friends.
With bones given flesh, and lives renewed,
let us go into God's world —
listening for the Sprit,
loving one another,
worshipping our God!
In Jesus' name we pray,
Amen