

**FIRST THINGS FIRST
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA
MARCH 2021**

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

As I began to prepare for worship in the Season of Lent this year, I noticed the obvious theme running through the Revised Common Lectionary's Hebrew Scripture texts – the theme of covenant. And that theme resonated with me as something that I needed to hear at this time.

One year ago, we entered another Season of Lent. And it turned out to be the “Lentiest Lent we ever Lented” with so many things we were required to give up, not by choice but by necessity, like gathering, singing together, touching, and sharing food in community; and, for some of us, health and well-being, loved ones, work, or livelihoods.

This year, I definitely did not feel like taking on an extremely penitential season, wallowing in my sin and failings. What I needed was to hear a message of consolation and hope from God in order to endure through another Lent of physical distancing, dispersed community, and the uncertainty of the pandemic. I found that message clearly in the first readings for each Sunday in Lent, and I decided quickly that those texts would be the focus of my preaching during this season.

Rather than working their way through a particular Bible book, as the lectionary does during some seasons, in Lent of Year B the readings begin early in Genesis and then jump through time to catch glimpses of the relationship between God and God's people at various moments.

A covenant is a promise, of course – a promise made by God to us that usually invites us to respond with the same promise for our part, but with a gracious awareness that our capacity to be as faithful as God is limited. God continually takes the initiative to re-establish and renew the relationship, inviting us, guiding us, forgiving us, and giving us what we need to become partners with God in building the world of love, justice, and peace that is God's intention for us all.

On the First Sunday in Lent we heard the story of God's covenant with all living creatures in the story of Noah. On the Second Sunday, God covenanted with the couple whose descendants will become the people of Israel, the particular group through whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” A universal covenant is followed by a particular one, though it's still for the sake of the whole.

Both covenants are called ‘everlasting’ and in that sense are not subject to human failing or forfeiture: God establishes these covenants, and promises they will never end. A powerful way of thinking about all of this is that it's not so much that God makes separate covenants here and there, but rather that God's covenantal relationship with creation unfolds in salvation history, like a single flower blooming over time, with later covenants helping to reveal the depth and beauty of what was there all along.

The rainbow in the sky reminded us that no matter how much we stray, or fail, or fall in our walk with God, God will be faithful to us and promises not to destroy us like the flood wiped out all the people and creatures of the earth. And then the story of Abram and Sarai revealed the idea that God still wants us to participate intentionally with God in a relationship of love, and actively partner with God in creating a world of love, peace and justice.

Like Sarai and Abram doubted at times, and laughed out loud numerous times at the likelihood of God making a nation out of the two of them, and at the long-shot of God using their lives to bless all the families of the earth, we may doubt whether our lives and ministries can make a difference. But their story reminds us that God is faithful to the promises and God will do it.

As the purple rose of Lent continues to bloom in the coming weeks, God will take us by the hand to teach us how to love God and one another well. God will ask us to look at a bronze serpent

on a pole, acknowledging the effects of our sin so that we can be healed. And God will bless us with a sense of right and wrong within our very hearts so that we will know God personally and be assured of our beloved-ness.

I hope that your Season of Lent will be a time of drawing close to God, of leaning into the promises of God, and enjoying the blessings of the covenant relationship that will sustain you through the ongoing challenges of these days.

Rev. Amanda Currie

SESSION

At its meeting on Wednesday March 3, Session voted to extend the suspension of in-person worship, and of facility rentals, until April 8. Although the Saskatchewan government is hinting at a possible loosening of COVID regulations, we feel that nothing has substantially changed and we want to keep everyone as safe as possible. Some of our congregants have been scheduled for vaccinations, so this is a hopeful sign that we will soon be in a better place!

Please mark your calendars for our Easter services which will be livestreamed on Facebook and available for viewing at the following times: the Maundy Thursday service on Thursday, April 1 at 7:00 pm; the Good Friday service on Friday, April 2 at 10:30 am; and the Easter Sunday service on April 4 at 10:30 am.

As we look forward to summer, the Synod is planning to hire two students who will again provide online ministry - leading worship and Vacation Bible School experiences. Watch for more information in the coming weeks.

Jo Szostak
Clerk of Session

WORSHIP COMMITTEE

During the month of March our thoughts turn to Spring and the Church Season of Lent and Easter. The Worship Committee, along with the Rev. Amanda Currie and our music team, are busy making plans for upcoming services.

It appears that many are participating in our online worship services, and the monthly Hymn

Sings have been very well received. It is most rewarding to see how many "views" we are receiving on Facebook for these services. Also, there are many who watch the services on Rev. Amanda's website.

Hopefully, we are meeting the needs for a time of worship for everyone. We look forward to everyone being able to continue in the same manner until we are once again able meet in person.

Our thanks to our music director, Bill Sgrazzutti, and the music team including Rodolfo Omolida, Gabe Omolida and Cade Eastwood, as well as to Marianne Woods for the work they do, reaching out to our congregation in performing these much-needed tasks.

Bill and the music team have arranged special presentations for Lent, leading up to the services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Please plan to be a part of these. Thanks also to soloists Paula Weber, Kate Mazienko, Juan Marie Watkis, Graeme Mitchell, Marianne Woods, Rodolfo, Gabe and Gigi Omolida, and the Rev. Amanda Currie for your contributions to worship. Marianne has arranged for readings of Scripture throughout Lent and Easter. Thanks to Graeme Mitchell, Bill Sgrazzutti, Andrew Donovan, Alfred Ferozdin, Jo Szostak, Sheila and Bob Wilson, the Omolida Family and Albert Ferozdin's family for their readings.

The times of special services are:

- Maundy Thursday - 7:00 pm
- Good Friday - 10:30 am

It is hard to believe we are entering our second Easter of having to worship online rather than in person. We are hopeful we will soon be blessed with our vaccinations and be back together for worship. You will all be able to participate in our usual memorial flower project this year as in the past. We will continue to do our best to give the sanctuary that special appearance for the season.

The Worship Committee sends its good wishes to all at this time of reflection on the blessings we have. Happy Easter!

Joyce McKersie
Worship Committee member

BOARD OF MANAGERS

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held on Sunday, May 2 at 1:00 pm. We currently anticipate this meeting will be held online. Congregants will be able to join the meeting by Zoom or phone. Annual reports are being assembled and will be provided for you to read two weeks prior to the meeting.

FREEDOM 55'ERS

Did you know that the Freedom 55ers Group continues to meet on Tuesdays at noon despite the pandemic? Although the group members are seniors, that is not stopping them from gathering by Zoom, eating their lunches "together" and enjoying a variety of programs. Thanks to Jo Szostak for hosting the Zoom gatherings and organizing the schedule of topics and programs.

If you would like to participate, there are people available to assist you with getting connected, and Jo will be happy to add you to the email list to receive notices about upcoming events. We do have a wonderful time together! Check out this photo from our Mardi Gras celebration on February 16th.



HALF AN HOUR OF HYMNS

Thanks to the Music Team and singers who come together about once a month to livestream "Half an Hour of Hymns" from the church. These videos are appreciated by many members of First Church, and they are shared widely on Facebook with our friends and families. The videos receive hundreds of "views" online, and always are watched by more viewers than the Sunday morning worship services! We hope you'll continue to enjoy these little times of worship and reflection through song, and that you will keep sharing them in your networks.

The next "Half an Hour of Hymns" is planned for Sunday, March 14th at 2:30 pm. It will be on the theme of St. Patrick's Day. Watch it live at <https://www.facebook.com/firstpresregina1925> or later at www.curriejesson.ca



Marianne Woods and Bill Sgrazzutti



Rodolfo & Gigi Omolida



Bob & Sheila Wilson, Jo Szostak, Bette Kelly



A virtual vigil marking one year of COVID in Saskatchewan on Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 7 pm CST. All are welcome! Bring a candle. Together, we will shine our light in the darkness.

Register for the Zoom event or watch it live on YouTube. Find more info at www.covidvigil.ca Brought to you by a community of people of diverse cultures, worldviews, spiritualities, beliefs, and faiths in Saskatchewan.



**EASTER WITH THE MODERATOR:
Oh look and wonder, how good it is!**

Sunday, April 11, 2021, 2 p.m. (SK Time)

You are invited to spend an hour with the Rev. Amanda Currie, Moderator of the General Assembly, and begin the Season of Easter together with Presbyterians across the country. While we continue to struggle through the global pandemic and to endure the ongoing conflicts and disagreements in the church, the Season of Easter invites us to look for, and celebrate, the experiences of unity, compassion, and hope that are happening right now. This gathering will include a look at the early church's witness of fellowship and sharing and will invite us to

identify and rejoice in the ways in which God's Spirit is drawing us together in unity and common mission today.

Please register for this gathering to receive your unique link to join the meeting.

<https://presbyterian-ca.zoom.us/join/85985202020>

Note: After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Rev. Amanda Currie

BLACK HISTORY MONTH¹

Throughout February, I had been reading and thinking a lot about Black History Month. One of the things I heard, in many places, was that Black history is important throughout the year. I wanted to post this reflection after February, then. I've also been thinking about my own context—that of a white settler—and the perspectives and biases (conscious and unconscious) I carry because of that. If you had a TV and lived in Canada in the 1990s perhaps you remember, as I do, the "Heritage Minute" commercial with this narration: "Between 1840 and 1860, more than 30,000 American slaves came secretly to Canada and freedom. They called it the Underground Railroad." I vividly remember this "Heritage Minute" and the accompanying sense of pride it inspired in me as a young white person in Canada. But this wasn't the whole story.

Canada recognizes February as Black History Month, a time to honour the legacy of Black Canadians and their communities. As I've thought about my experience growing up, I am struck, and somewhat dumbfounded, by the prominence of this commercial in my childhood memories, and its disconnect from anything else I can remember learning in that time about the history of Black people in Canada. Why wasn't I taught about Buxton, Africville, and other historic Black communities? Or who Viola Desmond was? Why wasn't I taught the terrible truth that Black people were also enslaved in Canada, and that racism affected and continues to affect the

¹

lives of Black Canadians? I was an adult before I learned that slavery existed in Canada too. The collective memory of many Canadians too often fails to recall this, and in so doing, masks the deepest roots of anti-Black racism.

More of the story...

African people have been in the lands now called Canada for centuries. Mathieu Da Costa was the first free African man (of whom we know) in the territories that would come to be called Canada. He was a translator for Samuel de Champlain, amongst other colonial agents, in the early 17th century. The first named Black slave in Canada (Indigenous people were also sometimes enslaved here) was a child given the colonial name, Olivier Le Jeune, who arrived in 1628. His birth name was not recorded. Both English and French people in Canada had slaves throughout the 1700s. More people came to Canada from the United States following the War of Independence, including some Black people who were brought as slaves by their Loyalist owners. Other Black people came who were promised land and freedom in exchange for their service to the British Crown (those who received land tended to get smaller parcels of less desirable land).

In spite of the Underground Railroad, and while there were legislative actions to limit slavery in Canada, it was not abolished until the British Imperial Act of 1833 which took effect across the British Empire the following year. The formal abolishment of slavery in Canada did little to counter the roots of anti-Black racism, however. A 1911 Order-in-Council made by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, for example, was proposed to ban Black persons from entering Canada on the purported grounds that it deemed Black people to be "unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada."¹ In spite of longstanding anti-Black racism, the legacy of Black people in Canada is also longstanding and resilient.

In the summer of 2020, the harrowing deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor raised cries for justice for Black people to a fever pitch (again) and drew the public's attention to the disproportionate levels of violent encounters between police and Black people in Canada. Black people make up 2.92% of our population

but account for 8.63% of deaths involving police. Anti-Black racism is deadly. It is past time to confront anti-Black racism in Canada and its colonial roots which privilege whiteness while devaluing Blackness.

As Christians, we are rooted in Jesus' Great Commandment to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. As Presbyterians, we can orient this biblical grounding toward the vision of God's justice outlined in Living Faith. We recognize that doing so necessitates confronting anti-Black racism, both its historical roots in Canada, and the current-day systems that perpetuate the deadly devaluing of Black people and Black lives. This is something we need to do not just in February during Black History Month, but every day.

Written by Katharine Sisk, Justice Ministries, Presbyterian Church in Canada.

1 Yarhi, Eli. "Order-in-Council P.C. 1911–1324 — the Proposed Ban on Black Immigration to Canada." The Canadian Encyclopedia. Published online September 30, 2016, edited February 26, 2020.

Prayer

Creator God, we know that we live and love imperfectly. You called us to love our neighbour as ourselves, but collectively we have not, and individually we often fall short. We say we all reflect your image, but when we act, we do not always show it. We have not always looked truthfully at the history of racism and slavery in Canada that has caused so much harm, and continues to shape our lives. For when we have been ignorant or complacent and not sought out the truth, we repent. For those of us living with pain or grief or trauma caused by racism, we ask you, God, for healing and strength. For those of us living with privilege, only now becoming aware of oppressive structures in our history and our present and wondering what to do, help us learn to listen and work to end racist systems that oppress. As you came to set captives free, free us all from those ways of thinking, speaking and acting that belittle or harm any of your beloved creations, and show us again how to live in your love. Amen.

MARCH EVENTS

- Mar. 7 10:30 am Worship (Lent 3)**
12:15 pm Sunday School
1:00 pm Coffee Hour
- Mar. 8 7:00 pm Youth Membership Class
- Mar. 9 12:00 pm Freedom 55'ers
1:30 pm Pastoral Care Committee
7:30 pm Lent Book Study
- Mar. 10 7:00 pm Book Club
- Mar. 11 8:00 pm Choir Chat
- Mar. 14 10:30 am Worship (Lent 4)**
12:15 pm Sunday School
1:00 pm Coffee Hour
2:30 pm Half an Hour of Hymns
(St. Patrick's Theme)
- Mar. 15 7:00 pm Youth Membership Class
- Mar. 16 12:00 pm Freedom 55'ers
7:30 pm Lent Book Study
- Mar. 18 1:00 pm Bible Study
- Mar. 20 10:00 am Presbytery of Assiniboia
- Mar. 21 10:30 am Worship (Lent 5)**
12:15 pm Sunday School
1:00 pm Coffee Hour
- Mar. 22 7:00 pm Youth Membership Class
- Mar. 23 12:00 pm Freedom 55'ers
7:30 pm Lent Book Study
- Mar. 24 7:00 pm Board of Managers
- Mar. 25 1:00 pm Bible Study
8:00 pm Choir Chat
- Mar. 28 10:30 am Worship
(Palm/Passion Sunday)**
12:15 pm Sunday School
1:00 pm Coffee Hour
- Mar. 29 7:00 pm Youth Membership Class
- Mar. 30 12:00 pm Freedom 55'ers
7:30 pm Lent Book Study
- Apr. 1 1:00 pm Bible Study
7:00 pm Maundy Thursday
Worship**
- Apr. 2 10:30 am Good Friday Worship**
- Apr. 4 10:30 am Easter Sunday Worship**
(No Sunday School or Coffee Hour Today)
- Apr. 6 12:00 pm Freedom 55'ers
- Apr. 7 7:00 pm Session