





full plate, a comfortable bed, education for their children, police who help and do not threaten and know they have found the Promised Land.

But our Promised Land is threatened. We have done an injustice to God's earth and it is battered, hurt, wounded and full of pain. It needs the same Tender Loving Care from us that those refugees receive from the volunteers at Romero House. It is time to be servants to our broken world. At those refugee centres staff do this in the name of God; we must do the same.

But why radical *servitude*? What is servitude? The word invokes images of being at someone's beck and call, as a servant. It might even remind us of slavery. Let us take a look at a legal definition that applies to land transaction, the buying and selling of land and how land is passed down from parent to child, from one generation to another:

*“Servitude to the land is an umbrella term for all types of promises that are binding on future landowners, as well as the landowner making the promises. Both easements and restrictive covenants are servitudes that create rights and obligations that run with the land.”*

Now we begin to have a clearer picture. This concept of servitude has something to do with covenants, promises made on both sides: it concerns both rights and obligations.

This morning we heard in Isaiah of a great commission: “Here is my servant...in whom my soul delights”. It is with this ringing endorsement that the master (or mistress: we don't know) addresses the servant. The master has complete faith in that servant, knowing the servant will not let him down, but “will faithfully bring forth justice”. How does the speaker know this? He also knows that the servant will “not grow faint or be crushed”. How can he so sure? Is it because the servant is perfect? No, it is because the servant is, like the master or mistress, filled with the transcendent Spirit of God. It is that Spirit that enables this servant to do what seems impossible, to undertake tasks and fulfill promises that would otherwise defy ability. That is radical. That is radical servitude.

We here in this congregation have made promises or, as the definition suggests, covenants. Our promises are also for our children who will inherit this earth. Even though our task is radical, it is the mission we have been given. Our earth is broken and

we must mend it before we can hand it down to the kids. It is both as simple and as daunting as that.

Given that, is it any wonder we get weary and feel hopeless from time to time? There is so much to do and the daily newspaper and the news at night remind us that we are falling behind. Our cities are smothered by the number of cars on the streets. Climate change melts our glaciers. Droughts, flooding, famines. It seems impossible that we can ever be good enough servants to tidy up this mess. Hope is a commodity in short supply.

And yet: there is progress. First of all, we must remind ourselves that newspapers thrive on crisis. Bad news sells newspapers and makes people watch TV and listen to their radios and buy magazines! But there is good news, too.

The River Thames in London, England was once badly polluted. Between the dumping of raw sewage, industrial waste and ineffective flood control, the river produced no life. If an unfortunate soul were to accidentally fall in, they might die of the effects of the water before they drowned! And all this despite the fact that the first anti-pollution measures were taken by the city of London residents in 1388: a local Prince asked his loyal subjects to pay a levy when they dumped their chamber pots in the river to remind them that burial of waste was better. These measures and many others worked and there were fish in the river, children paddled by the shore and women drew water from the flowing stream. The people were proud of the River and it came to be known as *Liquid History*.

But London's industry grew and so did the population. The river became a breeding ground for cholera and plague. The last salmon was recorded desperately trying to swim upstream to spawn in 1833. But the so-called benefits of modern life were so great that the people simply accepted their filthy, listless river as an unfortunate but necessary sacrifice to modernity.

Until World War II. When the German bombs destroyed the water treatment plants, the result was a cesspool running right through the centre of the city. It grew worse each year. In 1950, the Thames was declared officially dead. All citizens of London mourned

for their once mighty waterway. Something had to be done: the will of the master, in this case the citizens of London, demanded service to the river that had once defined the city.

Well, through great effort, clean up days at the riverbank, increased tax funding by paying for water use and severe fines for industrial dumping, it worked. Wildlife returned to the riverbanks. A salmon was sighted in 1974, exactly 150 years after they had disappeared. Today, people actually kayak on the river. More than 120 species of fish have been recorded swimming in its waters and they are edible! The Thames has risen, like Lazarus, from its deathbed.

Work is required to deliver this sort of service to our world. If we give up hope, this effort is not possible. Even if our hope seems out of place in the face of dramatic headlines, we must lean on our faith to see the future. Can you imagine what the headlines looked like in the *London Times* and *News of the World* on the day the Thames was declared dead? We must defy this pessimism against all odds. We must be radical servants to our wounded world in the face of those who say we can't make a difference.

It is possible that we will be called upon to give radical service. We can take one step at a time. We can do these things in God's name with the strength of faith. There may be times when you hover over your recycling containers trying to remember where tin foil goes. You may decide to take the bus to save the emissions from your car and that dratted bus is late. Perhaps you will feel the switch from dishwasher detergent to one without phosphates is unnecessary. But we can't give up. Each small act is part of our larger service. With God's help "we will not grow faint or be crushed." And together, one small step at a time, we can "bring forth justice" to our world.

This is an *Observer* Worship Service and, with apologies to John Milton: "they also serve who sit and write" might be said to be the motto for this 179 year-old publication of our church. *The United Church Observer* has made a pledge to both inspire and provide practical assistance in these tasks. It will carry stories of those who have succeeded in providing service. Editors at the magazine have pledged to try to avoid the 'doom and gloom' breast-beating in favour of enlightenment and aid. On this *Observer Sunday*, the

magazine is bound to its readers in congregations across Canada by the yoke of responsibility, to be Radical Servants in this, the best of causes. And to God be the Glory.

**HYMN:** *In Christ There is no East or West* (Voices United-#606)

### **OUR MORNING OFFERING**

**HYMN:** *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow* (Voices United -#541)

### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

**Sustainer God, we offer back to you a little of the abundance we have been given and pledge our service to you. We give you but your own. Amen.**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

*(Please feel free to use your own words or adapt this)*

**Redeemer God, we come before you knowing there are those who would join us if only they could. We thank you for the opportunity to join together in community with those who hold the candle of faith in a stormy world. We will keep it lit with our hope, in service to our good earth and in joy at its' recovery. There is a space in our hearts for those who need our prayers. We raise their names (*speaking each one aloud, saying their names in our heads*) and offer them to you. Grant them peace and serenity and freedom from pain and loneliness. We grace this moment by saying once again the ancient words of the prayer that Jesus taught us... (The Lord's Prayer). Amen.**

**CLOSING HYMN:** *Forth in Your Name, O Christ* (Voices United-#416)

### **BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH**

**All: We leave this place ready to serve the earth with good will .**

**One: Go now in peace, strengthened in your task: God goes with you.**

## **Observer Children's Time: All About Service!**

(This works best if you have a whiteboard/chalkboard or easel pad and markers available and pull it out as children come forward)

*Today we are thinking about 'service': do any of you know this word? (Write it on white board.)*

*Can you think where you have heard or seen that word lately?*

- Service with a smile
- How may I be of service?
- Service desk
- Customer service
- I'll be your server tonight

*If your friend loaned you her bike how would you take care of it?*

- Gently
- Ride it carefully
- Be cautious
- Only in my driveway

*Have you ever thought that we just borrowed this earth from God to live on for a while? How can we, as servers of God, make sure we take care of this great gift?*

- Take a reusable drink container in your school lunch, instead of a juice box or water bottle.
- Use both sides of the paper when you are drawing or taking notes.
- Turn out the lights, TV or computer when you leave the room.
- Don't leave the water running when you're brushing your teeth.
- Take short showers.
- Use your drawings and paintings to wrap presents instead of gift wrap
- Walk or bike to the corner store instead of hopping into the car.
- Put our plastics, cans, glass and paper into the blue bin!!
- Your ideas...

*Just like that bike we borrowed, we have to give this world back in good shape. Let us say a prayer before we go.*

God of the earth and air and moon

God of bikes and swimming pools and skates

God of the recycling bin and the lunch bag and the whole world

We just want to help keep it a good earth

Please show us how. Amen

Hymns throughout are selected from *Voices United*. *More Voices* is now available: we urge your congregation to explore this wonderful new resource for suitable hymns. Here are some that are suitable for this service :

- #37 *Each Blade of Grass*
- #98 *Like a River of Tears*
- #154 *Deep in Our Hearts*
- #209 *Go, Make a Difference*

ANNOUNCEMENTS/THE LIFE AND WORK OF THIS CHURCH are not listed as part of the Order of Service as congregational approaches to the placement of these is an individual decision: please adapt as needed.

ANTHEM: Individual choirs/organists vary greatly in their approach to this portion of the service: we offer the following as suggestions:

- Walk with Me*                      *Hymn 649- Voices United Church*
- Jesus Saw Them Fishing*        *Hymn #113 - More Voices*