

The United Church
Observer



SUNDAY SERVICE

Service #9 - April 2007

CHURCH SERVICE OBSERVER SUNDAY

Opening Reflection: *“...it is not the production of crops that feeds humankind,
but that your word sustains those who trust in you”*
Wisdom of Solomon 16:26b

HYMN: God, Whose Almighty Word (Voices United #313)

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come to us, Holy One, as we gather before you
All: Encircle us in your love
One: Bless us with your sustaining presence
All: Surround us with your grace
One: Draw us into the Spirit of the living Word
All: Bind us to one another as we are bound to you. Amen.

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Glorious God, we come together as your people. We set aside the busyness of the world outside for a while. We open our hearts, our ears, even our very selves to the balm of your Word. Fill our emptiness with the news we need. Grant us serenity of spirit, peace of mind and renewed energy to be your hands in a weary world. Amen.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

One: Peace be with you
All: And also with you.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God our creator, we offer you our darkness so that light may shine upon us, our greed that it might be exchanged for generosity, our irritability that it might be transformed to patience, our sickness that we might be healed and our brokenness that we might be made whole. We offer up the sins of our lives knowing that to recognize them is to confess them. Let the healing spirit of your Word grant us the forgiveness we seek. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE: God’s word is mercy. This is the day that the Lord has made: let us rejoice and be glad in it for we are forgiven! Amen.

CHILDREN’S TIME (SEE ATTACHED)

HYMN: *This is the Day* (Voices United #412)

FIRST READING: Joshua 8: 32-35

ANTHEM (*Please see suggestions at end of this service*)

SECOND READING: Mark 4: 13-20
(Optional Fourth and Fifth Readings: Psalm 33, I Corinthians 12: 27-31)

SERMON WORDS, WORDS, WORDS...

For many, a first “going to the movies” experience was *Bambi*, *The Wizard of Oz* or *Shrek*. For others, it may have been one of the movie versions of the great Broadway musicals of the 1950s and ‘60s: perhaps *The King and I* or *South Pacific*. Lerner and Lowe, Rogers and Hart and the incomparable Mr. Hammerstein offered us so much laughter, music and inspiration. The themes and tunes may be dated but the words linger.

Today’s theme *Words, Words, Words...* may bring back to some the lilting voice of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* as she sings her frustration out after a day spent trying to fulfill the mission given her by Professor Higgins. Now she meets her talkative lover:

“Words, words, words, words, words...I’m so sick of words all day through, first from him, now from you. Don’t talk of love.... show me!”

Today’s scriptural passages tell us about the power of words, and most importantly, about the power of the Word of God. But the passages are not about the sanctity of the word alone. They are about the interpretation of the word that God has given us,

the word as interpreted through our acts: the acts of humankind. Words without action are ineffective.

As Christians, we take the life of Jesus as our model, the life of man made perfect by the touch of the Divine. Jesus is the living embodiment of God's love: Jesus is love. It is as simple as that. His every moment here on earth was filled with love enacted with the accent on the word "enacted." The Gospel reading from Mark speaks of the meaning of the parables, meanings rendered meaningless without the study of the Word and then of those words turned into actions. Grace-filled, faithful love enacted.

We are reminded that focusing on Jesus as audio-visual aid to interpretation of that Word is not about being *like* Jesus. Today we take issue with the question that popped up on pendants and bracelets a few years ago. WWJD: What would Jesus do? Surely, the question is better posed "What would Jesus HAVE ME do?" There is activity implied in the question. The reading of the Gospels is not mere contemplation; it is a spur to action.

Even those of us who feel that the Bible has errors, regard it still as our anchor as it grounds us and as a lamp unto our feet as it enlightens us. We have long since shed any notion of God dictating directly into the appropriate recording device of the day while perched high on some desert rock. Yet we still grant the Word of God its proper respect. As students of theology throughout the world are challenged each year of their studies, so the questing congregation is challenged, too. We ask, "How do the Scriptures become the Word of God?" How do we get from the model of Jesus' life to acting ourselves in Christian charity, love and virtue? How do WORDS, WORDS, WORDS become SHOW ME! "Don't talk of love, show me..."

Today, Observer Sunday, we turn to the pages of our church magazine for this is a mission straight from the masthead of THE UNITED CHURCH OBSERVER. This magazine has been attempting to "show us ourselves" for 175 years. THE OBSERVER is the longest running, continuously published periodical in North America. THE OBSERVER tries to be

a good neighbour to **all** congregations across Canada regardless of location—from Curling, Nfld., Summerland, B.C., Montreal, or just down the street from the actual offices of the magazine on Huron Street in Toronto.

The Words tells us to love our neighbour. It isn't always easy or comfortable. Good neighbours are easy to love. But it is hard to love the bore. It is challenging to greet with a smile the colleague who gets on your nerves. It is not easy to *live the Scriptures*. But it is the task given to us. We are to read the texts and reflect upon their meaning in our life. Then we are to go out and live that life illuminated by the Word: simply, to show our love. We are to try to love those across the street and across the world. Our call is to love our neighbour next door, at work and in the Seniors Centre, to be patient with the bore, kind to the crank and to hold out our hand to the strangers of the world.

For 175 years now, THE OBSERVER has been telling stories of those that do. When the magazine tells those tales it refers to those who are worshipping God versus those who worship the Word. There are strands of Christianity where worshipping the Word as error-free has become more important than acting upon that Word and thus honouring God. That is a dangerous trend. Our faith was founded on *Sola Scriptura* (only the word) to remind us that we are expected to use the gifts given to us. We need to use our reason to enter into dialogue with the Word *personally*, not relying only on interpreters, teachers or ministers but reaching backward to the Word as a spur to personal action.

In its own way, THE OBSERVER has attempted to do just that. It holds a mirror to our beloved Church and shows the best and worst of us so that best might be emulated and the worst avoided. The Scriptures come to be the word of God when we act upon them in keeping with the will of God as enlightened by the reason God gave to us. The magazine tries to show love in action. The congregation and THE OBSERVER use the same resource, the inspiration of the words of our Bible.

The Word does not speak for itself—we speak for the Word. Today's lectionary readings echo this. The word of God is an anchor. At the end of the day, we can review

our actions in peace in that tranquil bay of reflection. We can look again at the words upon the page and see if we lived them out in love. “Don’t talk of love, show me.” And if we are truly honest in reviewing our actions in light of the teachings, then those words will reward us with new meaning. And to God be the glory.

HYMN: *O Radiant Christ, Incarnate Word* (Voices United #84)

OUR MORNING OFFERING

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

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we offer back to you a little of the abundance we have been given. We give you but your own. Let these gifts go where we cannot in the service of your Word. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

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

God of all time and place, we bow our heads in gratitude for the gift and beauty of our world. We thank you for the opportunity to worship together in fellowship among a community of your people. There is a space in our hearts for those who would be with us today if only they could. We raise their names to you (*speaking each one aloud, saying their names in our heads*) and offering our prayers for them up to you. Grant them peace and serenity and freedom from pain and loneliness. We grace this moment with what we learned from your word, saying once again the ancient words of the prayer that Jesus taught us...(The Lord’s Prayer). Amen.

CLOSING HYMN: *Will Your Anchor Hold?* (Voices United #675)

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

All: May we in service to our God act out the living word.

One: Go now in peace and in the absolute and blessed assurance that you go with God as God goes with you.

Hymns throughout are selected from *Voices United*. *More Voices* was in the works but not yet published as this went to press: we urge your congregation to explore this wonderful new resource for suitable hymns.

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 a suggestion:

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky VU-Hymn #509
The Word Words: P. Anderson, Music: D. Owings

Observer Children’s Time: All About Words!

(This works best if you have a whiteboard/chalkboard or easel pad and markers available)

Have you ever really thought about words? We use words every day, but have you ever realized how important they are? We use words when we:

- talk to our friends using our words
- read words in our books
- type words on the computer
- write words in our classrooms
- listen to words on television
- hear words when listening to our favourite songs
- listen to the minister speak words of God at church on Sundays

We also SEE words everywhere, on signs and posters, on TV! Where else do you see words?

Have you ever noticed that certain words can make us smile because they bring back happy memories of good times that we’ve had?

- ‘sun’ and ‘sand’ may make us think of a summer’s day at the beach with our family
- ‘balloons’ and ‘ice cream’ make us think of birthday parties with our friends

These words create a good feeling inside us when we hear them. What are some of your favourite words? Why are they your favourites?

Some words are actually fun to say

- elephant
- hippopotamus
- skullduggery
- squeegee

Can you think of any other words that are fun to say? (heebie-jeebies, baboon, banana, purple).

*Try saying some of these words yourselves. What is it that makes these words fun to say? Maybe it’s because they are not like other words that we use every day or because they make our mouths do funny things when we say them, like *Chihuahua*.*

Words can hurt us, or heal us, they can help us and encourage us, and they can make us feel better when we’re sad. When we don’t do well on a test, or lose a game, we hear our parents saying, “don’t be sad honey, you did the best you could and we’re proud of you!” Those words help to make us feel better. When have words made you feel better?

Jesus used his words in many good ways. What are some words that you have learned from the Bible? Write on white board. (God, Christ, heaven, temple, rabbi...)

Another way we use our words is when we pray to God. Do you say your prayers every day? God hears our words and loves it when we speak. Sometimes we say these words of prayer out loud when we’re kneeling by our bedside, and sometimes these words are a silent conversation just between us and God that can happen anytime.

Let's say a prayer before we go.

Dear God,
Let us use our words in positive ways,
Let us use our words to say, "I love you,"
Let us use our words to ask, "Do you need help?"
Let us use our words to say, "I am here for you,"
Let us use our words to say, "thank you,"
Let us use our words to pray.
Amen

(If you have more time you may wish to add the following or use this in the Church School portion of your Sunday Service):

Did you know there are some words that are spelled the same backwards and forwards? These types of words are called "Palindromes," which is a big word!!! (Use whiteboard)

- racecar
- kayak
- level
- mom
- dad

All these words are the same backwards and forwards, isn't that neat? *Can you think of any other words like this?* (noon, deed, eye, pop, madam, toot, radar, did, peep, wow).

Then there are other words that can make a whole new word when spelled backwards

- reed/deer
- swap/paws
- stop/pots

Can you think of any others? (warts/straw, net/ten, trap/part, step/pets, star/rats)