

Lent 4 Sunday

March 30, 2025

Organ Prelude: Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life

Ralph Vaughan Williams

***Hymn: Sing a new song unto the Lord**

No. 422

Refrain:

**Sing a new song unto the Lord;
let your song be sung from mountain's height.
Sing a new song unto the Lord,
singing hallelujah.**

1. For God's people dance for joy.
Oh come before the Lord,
play for the Lord on glad tambourines,
and let your trumpet sound.

[Refrain]

2. Rise, O children, from your sleep;
your Saviour now has come.
He has turned your sorrow to joy,
and filled your soul with song.

[Refrain]

3. Glad my soul for I have seen
the glory of the Lord.
The trumpet sounds; the dead shall be raised
I know my Saviour lives.

[Refrain]

Welcome, Announcements & Worship Theme

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Joseph said, “I am your brother... whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves... for God sent me before you to preserve life.” (Gen. 45: 4-5)

We come to worship as persons connected to families in all their beauty and difficulty, joy and pain.

We come to worship as persons in family relationships where we experience gratitude and inadequacy, fulfillment and frustration, happiness and hurt.

We come to worship seeking inspiration from God to initiate positive change and the grace of God to accept what may never change.

ALL: Let us worship God together!

***Hymn: For the beauty of the earth**

No. 434

1. For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

2. For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

3. For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

4. For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

5. For each perfect gift of thine, to the earth so freely given,
graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

Prayer of Approach, Confession & The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven;
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil;
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

The Peace of Christ be with you all;

And also with you

(Children are invited to join in programming following the Passing of the Peace)

Choir: Put peace into each other's hands

Fred Kaan

*1. Put peace into each other's hands,
And like a treasure hold it;
Protect it like a candle-flame;
With tenderness enfold it.*

*2. Put peace into each other's hands
With loving expectation;
Be gentle in your words and ways
In touch with God's creation.*

3. Put peace into each other's hands
Like bread we break for sharing;
Look people warmly in the eye:
Our life is meant for caring.

5. Put Christ into each other's hands,
He is love's deepest measure;
In love make peace, give peace a
chance,
And share it like a treasure.

4. As at communion, shape your hands
Into a waiting cradle;
The gift of Christ receive, revere,
United round the table.

Scripture Readings:

Jennifer Orbanic

Genesis 37: 1-11 (p. 34), 45: 1-4 (p. 42)

Matthew 23: 37-39 (p. 26)

INTRO: Our first reading comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 37, verses 1-11. Jacob the patriarch has 12 sons. The youngest is named Joseph. Joseph is hated by his brothers, for two reasons. First, his father loves him best and his brothers are jealous. But second, even though Joseph is the youngest, he has grand dreams for himself, so much so that he upsets the rest of his family with what they perceive to be his incredible arrogance. Listen:

Genesis 37. 1-11:

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as a refugee, the land of Canaan. ²This is the story of the family of Jacob:

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

5 Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.’ ⁸His brothers said to him, ‘Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?’ So, they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

9 Joseph had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, ‘Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’ ¹⁰But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, ‘What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?’ ¹¹So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. Amen.

INTRO: Our second reading also comes from Genesis. It is now much later in the story of Joseph and his family. His brothers have gotten rid of him because they couldn’t stand to have him around anymore. But rather than die or disappear, Joseph is taken by slave-traders and sold into Egypt where he suffers profoundly. But he survives. And not only does he survive. Through a series of remarkable events where Joseph discovers abilities in himself he doesn’t quite understand he has, he rises up to become a top official in Egypt. But his family know nothing of this. They come to Egypt seeking food in a time of famine and they come before Joseph without recognizing him. And even as Joseph recognizes them and has total power over them, does he have anger and revenge in his heart? Or is it something else? Listen:

Genesis 45: 1-5:

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, ‘Send everyone away from me.’ So, no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the

household of Pharaoh heard it. ³Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. Amen.

INTRO: Our final reading comes from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 23, verses 37-39. Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem for the final week of his life. Is he angry at how he has been rejected by the people as manipulated by the authorities? Or is it something else he feels even more deeply? Listen:

Matthew 23. 37-39

37 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸See, your house is left to you, desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." ' Amen.

We are listening, O God

Speak to us!

Sermon: FAMILY LOVE
(*included below*)

Rev. Dr. Harris Athanasiadis

Choir: I give you a new commandment

Sir David Wilcox

I give you a new commandment:

Love one another, love one another;

As I have loved, as I have loved you,

So you are to love one another.

*I give you a new commandment:
Love one another, love one another.
If there is this love among you,
then all will know, all will know
that you are my disciples, that you are my disciples.*

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Pastoral Concern

***Hymn: Help us accept each other**

No. 632

1. Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
Teach us as sister, brother each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.

2. Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily life
We struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all-- not just for some,
To love them as we find them or as they may become.

3. Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
In living situations to do the truth in love;
To practice your acceptance until we know by heart
The table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.

4. Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
Who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
We need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on:
Renew us with your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!

Benediction

***Threefold Amen**

**Remain seated if you are more comfortable*

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We invite you to join us for coffee hour and some light refreshments in our adjacent hall after the service.

All are welcome!

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OUR PURPOSE AS A CHURCH:

To become the hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ for each other and in the world.



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Coming Events

Sunday, March 30

Lent 4
Intergenerational Band Rehearsal,
12pm

Monday, March 31

Dance Fitness, 10:00am

Wednesday, April 2

Winter Study: The Gospel of John,
7:30pm

Sunday, April 6

Lent 5 Sunday / Intergenerational
Worship
Congregational Field Trip to the AGO,
3:00pm

Monday, April 7

Dance Fitness, 10:00am

Wednesday April 9

Last Session: The Gospel of John,
7:30pm

Saturday, April 12

Palm Cross Making Event, 10:30am

Sunday, April 13

Palm Sunday

Monday, April 14

Dance Fitness, 10:00am

Thursday, April 17

Maundy Thursday Service: Readings,
Prayers and Holy Communion,
7:30pm

Friday, April 18

Good Friday Service: Mediations on
the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the
Cross, 10:30am

Sunday, April 20

Easter Sunday: Proclamation of the
Resurrection!

Friday, April 25

Youth Group: Bowling,
7:00-8:45pm

Sunday, April 27

Spirituality & Politics Discussion with
Walter Dorn



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"Discover the vitality of faith"

FAMILY LOVE

Genesis 37: 1-11; 45: 1-4; Matthew 23: 37-39

Our most important and fulfilling relationships are found here, but also, our most disappointing and troubling ones. We experience the greatest joys here, but also the deepest hurt and sadness. We experience our greatest meaning and purpose here, but also real distress, bitterness and helplessness. All this and more are lived in and through our families. Families are our greatest gift and our greatest challenge.

We don't choose our families. We're born into them. We can choose how to negotiate our family relationships. But we're also deeply enmeshed in them finding it difficult to extricate ourselves from all the dynamics, tensions and issues. Choices are made for us in our families. We benefit from them, depend on them and build on them. But we also carry the burden and the failure of them too. How do we find our way to life-giving love, God's love, as we ponder how to love better in our families?

Let's delve into our scripture reading for some wisdom and revelation. Our Old Testament reading is an early story in the bible about the founding family of Israel. Even though the family is important, it doesn't mean it's healthy. In fact, this family is as dysfunctional as they get. There is secrecy, hurt and betrayal. There is anger, revenge and murder. There is backstabbing, gossip, malice and deceit. So why is this family the chosen one? Why is God working God's purposes through such a bad network of relationships? Let me offer three points.

1) First, it's not in our control. The families we're born into and grow up in are outside our control. There is chance here, and randomness. Some of us are really lucky, others of us less so. Where we're born as

much as the families into which we are born are not our choice. But where there is chance, randomness and little control, there is also grace. What is grace? Grace is gift and grace is love. Grace is the gift of love. To be alive is grace. It is a gift because it has nothing to do with what we earn, deserve or achieve. And the gift is to be loved simply because we are, flaws, limitations and all.

But do we experience our families as gifts of love? For many of us, it's easy to cherish our families as gifts of love. But not for all of us. For some of us, the love is so rich and real for all our families' limitations and imperfections, that we feel the grace of it all vividly. For others of us there is pain, hurt and disappointment, and these are obstacles to grace. To find the goodness and love is difficult. Keeping our distance may be safer and sometimes we need to develop healthier patterns in our lives outside a family system that is bad for us. But at some point, we need to find our peace with it all. And at some point, we need to find the grace somewhere, to see something good, something of value.

So it is with Joseph and his family. God keeps at it with them despite huge disappointments. There is grace and promise even at points when it's hard to see any. Family is a gift, as spoiled as the gift can get at times. It is worth the investment, as limited as the returns on the investment may be. To love our families is a gift of love we choose to give. It is grace. And when the family is so dysfunctional, the grace must be even greater. God's love must reach into some really dark and painful places in order to find a way. What about our love? How committed are we to finding a way to love creatively in our families? How committed are we to recognize and live the grace?

2) And this brings us to our second point. The way to love creatively in our families, the way to recognizing and living the grace, is a journey.

What needs to happen on the journey? Let's ponder Joseph's journey for some revelation. Joseph starts off as a young boy being the centre of his world. But he is betrayed and rejected. He must learn some tough life lessons. He must also learn how to care about others beyond himself. Finally, he must learn how to heal and find reconciliation with his family.

The story begins with Joseph at 17 years old. He is the youngest, he is spoiled and treated as the favourite of his father. All his brothers know it. Joseph is also self-absorbed. His world revolves around himself. He is totally ignorant of how his actions and what he says affect those around him. He gives bad reports of his brothers to his father without thinking about how this will make them feel. Joseph is also arrogant. He has dreams about how he is as the youngest is destined to rule the rest. It's only a dream so it must be harmless, right? Even his father is upset by Joseph's thoughtlessness and insensitivity telling his dreams openly as if this wouldn't have a negative impact on the family relationships. The distance between Joseph and his brothers only widens.

And all this sets up what happens next. Jacob has vast lands. The brothers are farming the land and managing the herds. Joseph as the youngest is given the job of taking food and supplies to them and checking on whether they need anything. At one point in the story, Joseph comes upon them at a distant place. The brothers are all dealing with their upset at Joseph in different ways. One group are so angry with him, they want to kill him. The oldest wants to protect him even though he's upset with him too. A middle brother wants to spare him but have him taken away by traders. That's what ends up happening in the end. Joseph ends up in Egypt, a servant in the household of a government official. The brothers tell their father Jacob Joseph has been killed by some wild animal. He will be sad, but he'll get

over it they say among themselves. At least they won't have Joseph around to upset them anymore.

Through many twists and turns, Joseph grows up. He experiences what it's like to be vulnerable, mistreated and betrayed. He also learns what it means to think beyond himself to the welfare and well-being of others. Through his innate abilities and a faith in God's purpose for him, Joseph not only survives, but becomes a great success. He becomes so successful and trusted, in fact, that he is made a top official in the Egyptian government. He helps the government plan ahead for years when drought may come and decimate the crops. He organizes the storage of excess crops in good growing years for those years when crops may fail and people go hungry. So much food is collected and stored, in fact, that peoples from other parts of the world come to Egypt to buy food.

And this brings us to the last part of the story. There is drought all over the land. Jacob and his sons must figure out how to survive. They have money but no food. They hear about the wise planning that has taken place in Egypt and how there is food there to be bought. Jacob sends his sons. I won't get into the details of the story, suffice it to say that the brothers come several times over several years to buy food. Even when they see this great official standing before them who is their brother they don't recognize him. He looks so different and goes by a different name. Years have come and gone. But Joseph is a different story. He not only recognizes them. He feels deep pain. But his pain is not anger. It is grief and sadness.

We read: "And Joseph wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it and the household of Pharaoh heard it." Even though Joseph has made such a success of himself after so much adversity, and even though he

has so much wealth, power and favour, he feels a vast emptiness within himself. Something is unfinished, incomplete, absent, lacking.

Once his brothers recognize him, though, they are terrified. What will Joseph do to them? But this is what Joseph tells them: “Do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” Joseph has found his purpose. But his purpose now has to include his family. He will think of their welfare. Beyond his own hurt and sense of betrayal, healing must involve reconciliation for a greater good. From being a self-absorbed young man, Joseph has become a caring human being able to see goodness and value in the welfare of others. He is also able to see the grace in his family past his personal hurt.

3) And this brings me to the last point, and a point which brings out a key element in Joseph’s journey. In order to move to a place where we see the gift of love that our families are, in order to move to the grace of it all in spite of failings, limitations and hurts, there is something that must happen in us. There is a vast difference between carrying anger and carrying grief. God, we’re told in scripture, carries anger for a moment, but mercy and grace forever. God, we’re told, moves through hurt and disappointment past anger and judgement into grief. In our gospel reading Jesus voices it: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” These are not words of anger and judgement, but of grief. The difference between anger that’s held and anger that turns to grief is an openness to love, to healing, even to reconciliation with others and with life. God will find a way in Jesus to open a door to healing and reconciliation even if so much damage has been done to the relationship over so long. God will not give up trying to find a way and make a way. Grief opens a way to

love. Anger does not. It just stays there and keeps us stuck in resentment, judgement and bitterness.

So it is with Joseph, and so are we called to do in our family relationships. How do we find an opening in us to change our anger into grief? And how do we find the inspiration to turn our grief into constructive love that reaches out creatively, again and again? How do we come to accept what cannot be changed, change what can and should be changed and the wisdom to discern the difference? How do we learn to speak truthfully but also adjust our expectations, finding the grace of what is as it is in our families?

Joseph finds a way as God has worked in him over many years and many life experiences. The God Jesus reveals and embodies seeks a way with Israel and with all people. How are we going to find new ways to engage our families and especially those places of pain, discord, brokenness and disappointment?

Let us pray: Shine your light on us, O God... Thank you for all you have given us through our families... Inspire us to find the grace beyond disappointment, peace beyond the inadequacy, and comfort beyond any pain... Amen.