

Membership Sunday

June 21, 2026

Prelude: Prelude in C major

J.S. Bach

pianist Mila Ionkova

***ProceSSIONAL Hymn: Morning has broken**

No. 814

1. Morning has broken like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken like the first bird;
praise for the singing, praise for the morning,
praise for them springing fresh from the Word.

2. Sweet the rain's newfall sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall on the first grass;
praise for the sweetness, praise for the morning,
sprung in completeness where his feet pass.

3. Mine is the sunlight; mine is the morning;
born of the one light Eden saw play;
praise with elation; praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day!

Welcome, Announcements, Worship Theme

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We come to worship as people with many commitments.

We come to worship as people who also long for greater freedom.

How may we balance our freedom with all our commitments?

How may we distinguish commitments we need to keep and even deepen, from commitments we need to let go?

Meet us where we are in our lives, O God, and help us find greater freedom and deeper fulfillment in our commitments.

ALL: Let us worship God together!

***Hymn: She comes sailing on the wind**

No. 403

Refrain: She comes sailing on the wind,
her wings flashing in the sun;
on a journey just begun, she flies on.
And in the passage of her flight,
her song rings out through the night,
full of laughter, full of light, she flies on.

1. Silent waters rocking on the morning of our birth,
like an empty cradle waiting to be filled.
And from the heart of God the Spirit moved up on the earth,
like a mother breathing life into her child.

2. Many were the dreamers whose eyes were given sight
when the Spirit filled their dreams with life and form.
Deserts turned to gardens, broken hearts found new delight,
and then down the ages still she flew on.

[Refrain]

3. To a gentle girl in Galilee, a gentle breeze she came,
a whisper softly calling in the dark,
the promise of a child of peace
whose reign would never end,
Mary sang the Spirit song within her heart.

4. Flying to the river, she waited circling high
above the child now grown so full of grace.
As he rose up from the water,
she swept down from the sky,
and she carried him away in her embrace.

Refrain: She comes sailing on the wind,
her wings flashing in the sun;
on a journey just begun, she flies on.
And in the passage of her flight,
her song rings out through the night,
full of laughter, full of light, she flies on.

5. Long after the deep darkness that fell upon the world,
after dawn returned in flame of rising sun,
the Spirit touched the earth again, again her wings unfurled,
bringing life in wind and fire as she flew on.

[Refrain]

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,**

for ever and ever. Amen.

The Peace of Christ be with you all;
And also with you.

Welcoming New Members into the Body of Christ

Questions to new members and baptizands:

- 1) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to personal growth in renouncing what is wrong and embracing what is right in your life and in the world? **I do.**
- 2) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to becoming a closer follower of Jesus Christ in his ongoing ministry of compassion and healing in the world by the way you care for all life around you? **I do.**
- 3) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to the way of forgiveness with an open heart? **I do.**
- 4) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to pursuing justice and truth in a spirit of openness to reconciliation rather than retaliation? **I do.**
- 5) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to growing spiritually as a part of this congregation, its worship, fellowship and service, offering yourself and your substance, as you are able? **I do.**

Question to Congregation:

Do you, on behalf of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture our new members, by word and deed, with love and in prayer, encouraging them to follow the way of Christ in the world? **We do.**

**A CHRISTIAN CREED BASED ON THE APOSTLES' CREED
FROM: IONA, SCOTLAND; Modified for AHPC**

We Believe in God above us,
Maker and sustainer of all that lives,
Of sun, moon and stars,
Of water, air, and earth,
Of male and female,
All genders, colours and cultures.

We believe in God beside us,
Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
Born of a woman's womb, servant of the poor.
He was tortured and nailed to a cross.
He bore the suffering of others, but died himself forsaken.
He descended into the earth to the place of death.
On the third day he rose from the tomb.
He ascended into heaven to be everywhere present,
And his reign will come on earth.

We believe in God within us,
The Holy Spirit of transforming flame,
Life-Giving breath of the church,
Energy of healing, justice and forgiveness,
Source of resurrection and life everlasting.
Amen.

(Children are invited to join in programming following baptisms)

Choir: Bulgarian liturgical setting (words from the thief on the cross)
soloist Mila Ionkova; conductor Radostina Borisova

Scripture Reading: Ruth 1: 1-18 (p. 241)

Jim Nasmith

INTRO: Our scripture reading this morning comes from the biblical book called Ruth, chapter 1, verses 1-18. The story it tells takes place a long time ago. Listen:

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶ Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered God's people and given them food.

⁷ So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.

¹⁰ They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³ would you then wait

until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.” ¹⁴ Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ So Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶ But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you,
to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die,
and there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!”

¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. Amen.

We are listening, O God;

Speak to us!

Sermon: FREEDOM OR COMMITMENT?

Dr. Harris

Solo: Song of Ruth (Wherever you go)

Kevin & Bethany Paige

soloist Erin Stone

*Wherever you go, I shall go
Wherever you live, so shall I live
Your people will be my people,
And your god will be my god, too.*

*Wherever you die, I shall die;
And there shall I be buried beside you
We will be together forever,
And our love will be the gift of our life*

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Pastoral Concern

***Hymn: Spirit of Gentleness**

No. 399

Refrain: Spirit, Spirit of gentleness,
blow through the wilderness calling and free.
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness,
wind, wind on the sea.

1. You moved on the waters; you called to the deep;
then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep,
and over the aeons you called to each thing:
wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings. [**Refrain**]
2. You swept through the desert, you stung with the sand,
and you goaded your people with a law and a land,
and when they were blinded with their idols and lies,
then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes. [**Refrain**]
3. You sang in a stable; you cried from a hill;
then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still,
and down in the city you called once again,
when you blew through your people on the rush of the wind. [**Refrain**]
4. You call from tomorrow; you break ancient schemes;
from the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams;
our women see visions, our men clear their eyes;
with bold new decisions your people arise. [**Refrain**]

Benediction

***Threefold Amen**

Postlude: Prelude in D minor

J.S. Bach

pianist Radostina Borisova

**Remain seated if you are more comfortable*

~

We invite you to join us for refreshments and fellowship in our adjacent hall after the service.

All are welcome!

~

OUR PURPOSE AS A CHURCH:

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

For more about who we are and what we do,
visit us at: armourheights.org



Thank you for all the ways you contribute to our Armour Heights Community.

Scan here to make a donation through CanadaHelps:



Minister
Ministers-in Association
Minister Emeritus
Clerk of Session
Administrator & Manager of Community Engagement
Christian Ed. Coordinator
Music Director
Live Stream Tech & Custodian

The Rev. Dr. Harris Athanasiadis, hathan1964@hotmail.com
The Rev. Dr. Carol Loudon, The Rev. Dr. Pam McCarroll
The Rev. William Middleton
Michael Nettleton, clerk@armourheights.org
Erin Stone, estone@armourheights.org
Kim Stanbury, education@armourheights.org
Bruce C. Nasmith, brucenasmith@gmail.com
Kome Abel

Coming Events

Sunday, June 21

Baptism & New Members
Sunday
Father's Day BBQ, 12pm

Monday, June 22

Dance Fitness, 10:00am

Tuesday, June 23

Book Club: "Finding Flora" by
Elinor Florence, 7:30pm via zoom

Wednesday, June 24

Study: Jesus' Sermon on the
Mount (Part 3), 7:30pm in person
and online

Sunday, June 28

Pride Sunday
Pride March, 3pm

August 20-24

Ministry Team in Calgary

Summer Sundays:

July 5, 12 – Dr. Harris
July 19 – Hannah Athanasiadis
July 26 – Rev. Harry Klassen
August 2, 9, 16 – Rev. Dr. Nick
Athanasiadis
August 23 – Rev. Harry Klassen

Staff Holidays:

Erin : June 25 - July 10
Dr. Harris: July 13 - August 17



Armour Heights Presbyterian Church

105 Wilson Avenue, Toronto M5M 2Z9
Church: (416) 485-4000, estone@armourheights.org
Website: www.armourheights.org
"Discover the vitality of faith"

FREEDOM OR COMMITMENT?

Ruth 1: 1-18

Freedom is a big word... So is commitment... What do you need freedom from or more freedom from? Is it freedom from some commitment? Do commitments complicate your life and weigh you down? Are some commitments worth it even if they do weigh you down? Or, do you need more freedom and simplicity in your life, period?

Well, one of the things I did to prepare for this sermon is google “simplicity as a lifestyle.” Here’s what I got:

“Simplicity as a lifestyle... is the practice of intentionally reducing physical possessions, commitments, and distractions. Simplicity as a lifestyle aims to minimize stress and consumerism, redirecting your time and energy toward deep relationships, personal growth, and experiences that truly matter.”

And what are the benefits of choosing simplicity as a lifestyle:

- **More Mental Clarity:** removing excess choices and physical clutter helps eliminate decision fatigue and everyday anxiety.
- **Financial Freedom:** Spending less on non-essentials reduces the pressure to work excessive hours, giving you greater control over your time and finances.
- **Deeper Focus:** A slower, more intentional pace allows you to be more fully present and mindful of the everyday moments that bring joy.

And what are some practical ways to adopt simplicity as a lifestyle:

- Digital Minimalism: Audit your screen time. Turn off non-essential notifications, unsubscribe from newsletters you don't read, and limit social media.
- Declutter Your Space: Adopt a "one in, one out" rule for clothing and household items to keep your environment calm and manageable.
- Simplify Your Schedule: Learn to say "no" to commitments that do not align with your core values or goals. Leave white space in your calendar.
- Single-Tasking: Dedicate your full attention to one thing at a time rather than constantly multitasking, which reduces stress and improves quality and effectiveness.

And here's a concluding statement taken from 2 websites: becomingminimalist.com and balancethroughsimplicity.com:
"Adopting a simple lifestyle is not a step backward, but rather a step toward living a life guided by your own inner compass rather than external noise."

OK, so what do you think? For me personally, all of this is wonderful and highly needful advice and counsel. I definitely need to adopt more simplicity in my lifestyle. But the one thing I also noticed from checking some of the websites and descriptions on simplicity as a lifestyle more thoroughly, is a bit of confusion with the words "freedom" and "commitment." While it is clear that there are many things we need freedom from, it is not always clear what we need freedom for. Is open space, simplicity and less stress enough? And while it is clear that too many of us have too many commitments in our lives we need to let go, what commitments are worth keeping and what commitments are worth taking up even if they may complicate our lives, make demands on us and even add stress to our lives? If the fulfillment, meaning,

purpose and joy also come with the demands, complications and stress, are such commitments not worthwhile?

There is a wonderfully funny and thoughtful film that came out 15 years ago, a Hollywood blockbuster starring George Clooney called: “Up In The Air.” Has anyone seen it? Do you remember it? Clooney’s character: Ryan Bingham, plays a corporate downsizer – someone whose job it is to fire people on behalf of various companies. Ryan is always on a plane travelling all over the world meeting people face to face in order to fire them. But Ryan also sees his work and his life constantly “up in the air” going from place to place and seeing people he will never see again. It has become a lifestyle for him. He has no serious commitments to family, friends or even the people he is firing. The problem, though, is that his life is empty and meaningless. No serious commitments to people, to values and relationships that bind you and root you makes of your life something superficial and always “up in the air.”

In the end, this all catches up to Ryan, and this is what makes the movie impactful. Commitments make life meaningful, but also demanding and complicated. You can’t have one without the other. We may need fewer commitments in our lives, but we need deeper commitments in our lives too. If freedom simply means the freedom to do whatever you want whenever you want to do it, this is definitely going to collide with your commitments if such commitments have substance. Commitments pin you down, and if a person you are committed to is going through a rough time or if a situation you are committed to working through is complicated and stressful, you can't just opt out in order to live more simply and less stressed.

OK, fair point preacher. So how do we discern what commitments are worth making and what commitments simply burden our lives and weigh them down with needless stress and complexity?

Well, let's dive into our scripture reading in search of revelatory wisdom. The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories in our scriptures. And it is a story all about commitment. There is a Hebrew family who out of economic necessity become refugee-immigrants in a foreign land called Moab. Thankfully, Moab doesn't reject them because they are anti-immigration. And even though they make it economically with hard work and contribute much to the local economy, tragedy breaks the family apart. At first, it is the loss of the patriarch of the family, a man named Elimelech. But rather than weaken the family, surviving mother and sons deepen their commitment to their new homeland by marrying local women and more fully integrating themselves with the local population. But then, there is more tragedy as not only one but both sons die. Now, there are three women left, and for the mother of the family - Naomi, a special vulnerability of being an old woman in a foreign land.

So what to do? Naomi feels her only choice is to return to Israel and her hometown. There she will be taken in by the community and find, perhaps, some consolation for her staggering loss and misfortune. But despite her grief, Naomi is also gracious and generous with her daughters-in-law. Rather than burden them with the care of a mother-in-law, she wants to release them from any obligation, freeing them as young women to rebuild their lives in their own country and among their own people.

The scene of this exchange between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law is beautifully poignant. Clearly there is a lot of love within this family unit even as they come from very different cultures and

nationalities. The one daughter-in-law agrees, reluctantly and with many tears, to do as Naomi tells her and leave. She will go off and seek to rebuild her life. She has given herself fully and completely but is now free of any existing commitments.

Ruth, on the other hand, will hear none of it. Let's listen again to her incredibly beautiful response to Naomi who tells her to leave and be free:

"Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge;

Your people will be my people and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

Wow, what commitment! Even as Ruth has been urged to claim her freedom and her chance to rebuild her life, she chooses to commit herself to Naomi and whatever fate awaits her in this commitment. Now, is this a smart or sensible decision for Ruth? No. Is she choosing to step back from all the tragedy and misfortune and choose her freedom to rebuild her life again? No. Her commitment to Naomi and whatever will come to be will make incredible demands on her and bind her to uncertainty, stress and great vulnerability. Ruth is a young woman going into a foreign land with an old woman who has lost everything and has little standing or resources. It's nothing short of stepping into disaster!

And yet, why does this story so deeply touch us at the heart level? Because we feel that giving up our freedom for deep commitments, loyalties and values that include great demand and sacrifice at times, make of our lives something profound and richly meaningful. The story of Ruth teaches us that true meaning and joy in our lives cannot come

simply by freedom. No. It's our commitments that truly make our lives richly rewarding.

But what commitments exactly? For Ruth and Naomi, it is about commitments to people who become family well beyond blood. But what are the values behind and within such commitments to persons whether human, non-human, the earth under our feet or the quality of the air we all share?

Here I'd like us to reflect a little on our membership questions. Rather than rules for behaviour or beliefs about doctrines, they are all about commitments, commitments to values and very practical, everyday values. And these commitments to specific values are anything but easy or uncomplicated. This is why each and every one of our five questions begin with these words: "With the enabling of God's grace." Grace is the gift of love, love as energy, and it is God's Holy Spirit embodied in Jesus that carries such gift-love into our hearts. Without such gift-love, without such grace as energy given to us each and every day, through each and every situation, relationship and episode in our lives, we cannot fulfill the commitments we are choosing to embrace.

And what are these commitments? It's about praying for discernment to choose what is right and resist what is wrong in our lives and in the world. It is about seeking to learn what it means to follow Jesus and become his hands, feet, voice and heart for each other and in our world. It is about choosing the way of forgiveness even when it's the hardest thing. It's about choosing the way of truth and justice with a commitment to reconciliation if possible and resisting the demon of vengeance and retaliation so deeply possessing people in our world. Finally, such commitments can only be supported within community, a particular community we are called to commit to practically and spiritually.

All of this is a lot. It demands a lot. It can become complicated living according to such commitments when so much of the current in our world wants to push us away from such commitments and into a freedom to do what we want, to whomever we want, and whenever we want to do it.

Yes, we need to simplify our lives and get free of commitments or distractions that suck the spiritual life out of us. But we also need to figure out what commitments are worthwhile. And then we have to plant some deep roots with such commitments so that we won't be so buffeted by the storms of life. Even as we may get blown here and there in times of crisis, our commitments remind us of where the light is and how we may find our way back after the grief, the anger or the confusion. And as we commit and re-commit ourselves to values that are worthwhile, we grow stronger and life becomes more abundant, even alongside the scars of hurt and loss.

Do you believe this? What are your commitments: to people, to values? What most deeply roots you? Where may God in Jesus and through the Spirit energize you with the grace that enables you to climb the highest mountains and traverse the deepest valleys?

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, come... empower us to fulfill your call to us to honour commitments that can truly provide abundance and peace in our lives.

Amen.