

**Northern Lights Presbytery**  
**July 24, 2011**  
*Prepared by Ruth Lumax*  
*from First United Church in Wetaskiwin, AB*

**GATHERING IN MUSIC & COMMUNITY**  
**WELCOME - NEWS OF INTEREST**  
**COMING CLOSE TO THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

*Breathe deeply of the Spirit's presence.*

\* **GATHERING SONG #145 MV** - *"Draw the Circle Wide"*  
*[Please be seated]*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God sings in the dance of the clouds, the smell of hot summer days, the gurgle and slap of waves on the shore.

**May we be still and know God again.**

Christ joins us with the laughter of friends, the embrace of a loved one, the fragrance of a treasured memory.

**May we be still and know God again.**

The Spirit is present in the rush of children playing,  
the aroma of coffee, the greeting of old and new friends,  
The thoughts and decisions which crowd into our minds.

**May we be still and know God now.**

Consider the ordinary, present moment,  
And name it holy as God does.

or

In the seed that lies unseen, resting, cold and still,  
God is ...**and life grows.**

In the possibilities that await us, unknown, unimagined,  
God is ... **and life grows.**

In our hurt and emptiness, masked, buried, overlooked,  
God is ... **and life grows.**

In this time of worship, singing, praying, be-ing,  
we come to know this God who is... **And we grow.**

or

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

This day, like all other days, belong to God.

**May we grow in God's likeness.**

This land, in fallow and in harvest, belongs to God.

**May we grow in God's likeness.**

In worship and work, in rest and renewal,

We belong to God.

**May we grow in God's likeness.**

This day and all days, may we be faithful stewards of God's abundant love.

**GATHERING PRAYER** [*a say what I say and do as I do prayer*]

God you are always waiting for us. [*arms out, palm up*]

We do not see you at work [*cover your eyes with your hands*]

We are afraid. [*clench your hands*]

Fill us with your peace. [*open your hands to a "cup"*]

Teach us to trust you. [*touch hands with the person beside you.*]

Amen.

Or

**Glorious God, we have forgotten Your wonder. The gift of Your presence is buried within us and around us. May this time of worship awaken us to Your Mystery. In the pauses between our breath draw us to You. Fill us with courage to follow and trust in Your guiding. We would be disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**OR**

**God of seeds and soil, our time is in Your hands. Till our lives and soften our hearts. Sift the stony places of our soul till there is room to grow. Pour out Your Spirit upon us in this time of worship. Together may we create a place where all are welcome, in Jesus' name. Amen.**

\* **HYMN #361 VU** "*Small Things Count*"

OR

\* **HYMN #69 All God's Children Sing**

*"Growing in God's Way"*

Or

\* **HYMN #291 VU** - "*All Things Bright and Beautiful*"

**CHILDREN'S CIRCLE  
THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**SCRIPTURE READING** Psalm 105 p.756 VU with Refrain

Romans 8:26 - 28

Matthew 13:44 - 46, 51 - 53

\* **HYMN #176 MV** "*Three Things I Promise*"

or **#703 VU** "*In the Bulb There is a Flower*"

or 556 VU "*Would You Bless our Homes and Families*"

**MESSAGE**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

**MINUTE FOR MISSION**

**SHARING GOD'S GIFTS WITH OTHERS**

**\* OFFERTORY #79 MV** *"Spirit, Open My Heart" verse 1*

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

**\* HYMN #642 VU** *"Be Thou My Vision"*

or

**\* HYMN #580 VU** *"Faith of Our Fathers"*

**\* CHANGING THE LIGHT**

*Now wherever you go, the Light of Pentecost goes with you.*

**\* SENDING FORTH**

Look.	<b>Wait.</b>
See?	<b>Listen!</b>
Can you Hear it?	<b>God calls us,</b>
Into the world.	<b>Listen!</b>
Wait.	<b>Look!</b>
Can you see?	<b>Christ calls us to love.</b>
Listen!	<b>Wait.</b>
Can you feel it?	<b>The Spirit sends us,</b>
Into the world.	
<b>Ordinary people with an extraordinary calling.</b>	
<b>Thanks be to God! Amen.</b>	

Or

Go into the world as signs of God's blessing.

**We are ordinary people with an extraordinary calling.**

May the God of all blessing grant us the grace to be like fruitful trees, greening in the God's presence, rooted in Christ's life-giving water, and bearing fruit by the Spirit's power. **Amen.**

**\* COMMISSIONING SONG** **#212 MV** *"Sent Out in Jesus' Name"*

## Children's Circle

God is good ... **all the time**

All the time ... **God is good!**

Talk about seeds growing underground... nobody notices...

What do they need to grow ...

Talk generally... oh, did you notice that?... you changed.

Yes you did I know you did. You grew...

Oh did you hear that? Something's happening in this room... even though we can't see it. All of our hearts are beating,,  
Without us telling them

oh. ... did you feel that? We all changed... we all took a breath, and we didn't even feel the oxygen move from our lungs  
into our blood stream but it did.

So many things happen in our bodies and we don't even notice. whether we're resting or awake... Everyday we grow,  
although some of us are growing down instead of up...

Sometimes it's like that with the kingdom of heaven. It's happening all around us, but we don't always notice. You're  
going to hear a story about the kingdom, that wasn't like any kingdom we've ever visited.. But it happened all the same,  
and some people noticed it and wanted to be part of it. And it grew.

One of the ways we help our relationship with God grow is to talk with God... there are lots of different ways and places  
that we do that, but sometimes we pray all together, and we even use the same words... it's like one big heart of faith  
beating to keep our church alive and healthy... please join me in the words of the Lord's prayer. If you're just learning  
these words, they'll be up on screen to help you along.

## Prayers of the People

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Giver of life, breathe new hope into us. We give thanks for your steadfast care and presence. May we find rest in the  
embrace of your love... we pray in the silence of our hearts for your wisdom in the decisions we face....

*[time for silent prayer 2 minutes at least]*

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Sheltering God, you are a refuge and a welcome home too all those in need. We pray for those in our community and  
beyond whose lives are troubled, whose spirits are weary, for ....*[Name current world or local prayer concerns]* We name  
in silence those people and places who journey through the valley of the shadow of death....

*[time for silent prayer ... ]*

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Seed of blessing and joy, you call us to grow in wonder and in love. Turn our words from criticism to praise, from  
anger to understanding, from fear to trust. Reveal your glory to us, and work through us that we may praise you and

Speak of your faithfulness.

Through Christ's healing touch, make us whole. Amen.

Or

### **Prayers of the People**

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Soil tilling God, we have heard your promises of abundant life and we have been afraid to believe them. We grow impatient when life does not unfold as we plan. We miss Your living presence in the surprises of life. Renew us by turning our trust to You again. We pray for the faith of mustard seeds and mountains....God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Sheltering God, you are a refuge and a welcome home too all those in need. We pray for those in our community and beyond whose lives are troubled, whose spirits are weary, for those people and places who journey through the valley of the shadow of death, we pray for *[name local or global concerns]*, for the leaders of the international community who have the resources to sow seeds of hope and new life, for the volunteers and workers both globally and locally who share their time and talent generously

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Seed of blessing and joy, you call us to grow in wonder and in love. Turn our words from criticism to praise, from anger to understanding, from fear to trust. Reveal your glory to us, and work through us that we may praise you and speak of your faithfulness. Help us to be seeds of your love, that we too might grow in faith and witness to your vision of hope and justice for all creation. God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Through Christ's healing touch, make us whole. Amen.

Or

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Holy Mystery, Your love knows no bounds, hear us as we pray. You know the situations of our living, the wounds of our existence, the joys and hopes which give us meaning. We give thanks for your steadfast presence, for the many people who let your love flow through them, and for the wonder and beauty of your world.

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Christ who blesses children and lepers, help us to touch gently the hurts that need healing. We pray for those who are grieving, for those who feel abandoned, unloved, for those mocked or belittled because of difference. We pray for those who wonder and question. May we all seek to know you better. Deepen our faith. Increase our understanding. May our living be a blessing in this weary world.

God of grace ... **root us in your love.**

Spirit who disturbs our complacency, we pray for people in conflict situations, in our community, our country and around the world. We pray for mediators and negotiators, for people who listen to the hurt, for those who speak out against injustice. Remind us there is always more to life than our limited vision offers. We pray especially for Grant them courage and wisdom.

God of grace ... **root us in your love.** That your kingdom come and your will be done. Amen.

### **Sharing God's Gifts with Others**

Seek and you shall find, love beyond measure, grace beyond merit. In gratitude and joy we share our tithes and offering with the world.

### **Prayer of Blessing**

Giver of all good gift, you have shown us the meaning of generosity in the beautiful diversity of creation, in the overflowing love of Jesus Christ, and in the never ending gift of the Holy Spirit. Receive these gifts, and all that we are. May our generosity reach out and touch those in need. In the name of the living Christ, we pray. Amen.

Or

Spirit of God, we are so often caught up in our getting and spending. We live in a world which tells us bigger is better. We forget that it is people, in day to day actions and simple gestures of love and justice which bring about your kingdom here on earth. So with our offerings ,we pray that you will multiply our service in your Kingdom. Amen

**“Planted to Grow”** - Matthew 13:31-32 *prepared by Ruth Lumax, minister at First United Church in Wetaskiwin, AB*

*Prayer “May the meditations of my mouth, and all of our hearts, be acceptable to God, our rock and our redeemer. May we grow together in faith and create a welcome place for all. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”*

You can adapt this to fit your theme!

I The kingdom of heaven is like...

Once there was someone who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things... that people wanted to be around him... as they gathered, they heard him speak of a kingdom, but it wasn't like any kingdom they'd ever lived in... it wasn't like any kingdom they'd ever visited. It wasn't like any kingdom they'd ever even heard of... so one day they couldn't stand it... they just had to ask him.. What is the kingdom of heaven like?

Well if you'd asked ME that question some days, I'm not sure you'd like the answer. Not because I was tired or too busy, or part of too much sorrow or frustration... but because for awhile I forgot the realm of God was already around me and within me.

II Planted to grow

Do you ever have those times?

When no matter how hard you try things just seem to get worse?

When you have amazing dreams and plans and they just get bogged down in the dirt and mess of human living?

Perhaps you've felt yourself pulled in many directions, so many possibilities, all of them good, but not nearly possible with the time you have?

Or perhaps you've been very clear about your purpose and goals... only to accomplish them and find them not nearly so satisfying as you'd thought...

Wouldn't it be nice, to just be a seed? To be planted and know that your sole purpose is to grow?

Sounds pretty straightforward doesn't it?

I wonder what on earth Jesus was thinking about when he compared such a tiny, insignificant thing to the kingdom of God?

Well I won't pretend to know much about how Jesus' mind works,... I'm still trying to figure out my own, but I do have a basic grasp of seeds and growing things. My family alternately joke, threaten and plead with me about keeping the greenery in our house to a minimum.

So take this tiny seed... somewhere inside, without access to internet or unlimited texting, without

help from financial advisors, or all the personal products we think we need to survive, this tiniest of seed contains within itself an amazing inner secret. It knows its purpose. It is to grow. And it will grow, through the cracks in the sidewalk, in the tiniest pile of dirt on the edge of a windswept cliff or in the most lush of gardens. Not only does it know TO grow... it knows into WHAT it will grow. A mustard seed does not grow into an oak, any more than an acorn grows into a stalk of wheat. Yet in its growing, in doing what it knows it is to do, Jesus says, the kingdom comes close. The mustard seed grows into a shrub - birds find a place to call home; shade is offered, more seeds generated.

### III - Our Purpose?

I wonder what might happen if we were so clear about our call to be disciples? So committed to fulfilling our purpose as - \_\_\_ United Church?

We are called to grow in God's way. And yes, sometimes we forget who we are, or why we're here. And so we gather for worship and study to hear ourselves into being, choosing to feed our faith, not our doubts... knowing that what is fed will grow. In this community we find the safe space to put down roots, that anchor us through drought or cold. We find rich soil that lets us go deeper, searching out more nurture that enables us to grow more fully into the people God intends us to be.

And in our growing.. amazing things happen. We reach out in service to others, not out of duty, but in joy, wanting to share the wonder of God active in our lives... Not because our purpose is to choke up people's time with more work or more meetings, but because our groups and committees provide the basis to welcome others, to offer shelter and comfort. Our sharing ideas, generates more seeds to fertilize the soil.

*Use an illustration about growth in your congregation or pastoral charge ...*

And in our branching out... the kingdom of heaven touches not only our daily lives, but the lives of those around us. Not because we fill every waking moment with activity, but because in the ordinary tasks of sowing seeds, mixing yeast, we open ourselves to the wonder of the kingdom of God around us and within us. In the attitudes we bring to our book clubs or coffee groups, in the ethics we bring to our work table or bridge table; in the belief that small things count and we do make a difference in our service groups and families and friends, .. the kingdom comes and grows,... and life is never the same.

There will always be people who tell you something won't grow, or how this can't work, or we've never done that before... but we won't know unless we sow the seeds. I like to think growing the kingdom is a bit like the child walking along the beach at low tide. Every time she found a starfish she would pick it up and carefully carry it back to the water. A stranger noticed this seemingly futile activity, and stopped to talk with the child. Why do you bother? he asked. You can't save all the starfish. There will just be more tomorrow, what difference does it make? And the child stooped to pick up another starfish, carried it carefully to the water, looked at the stranger and said, I just made a difference with

that one.

God calls us to persist, to sow seeds and trust God's growing season, not always knowing the results. And from time to time, often when we least expect it, in those times when the soil is watered with tears, or our hearts parched with emptiness we are for one another, the one who goes out to sow, the one who plants the seed of hope. We remind and are reminded of that amazing inner secret... of this God who loves us, and plants us here to grow.

I am blessed by many friends, but one or two, in particular who doesn't settle for the way things are, when I'm with them I believe all things are possible through God. My apathy and weariness is washed away in the life-giving water of faith and hope. I wonder if you've ever come close to such a one? I wonder for whom God is calling you to be that one today?

#### IV sheltered in God's realm

The kingdom of heaven is like when someone plants a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds, and it grows to become the greatest of shrubs, and the birds come and make their nests in it.

The good news is the Kingdom of heaven has already been planted and is being planted, the growth has happened and is happening... and you are as welcome to its shelter and comforts as those you welcome.

Remember our purpose, as seeds planted in God's realm; find shelter in the outstretched branches of God's love. Live that others might know the kingdom come, God's will be done.

Once there was a church that said such amazing things and did such wonderful things, people wanted to be part of it...

May it be so. Amen.

**“God’s Presents”** Romans 8:26, Matthew *Using the parables as different ways to understand God.*

Jesus and Moses went golfing. Jesus was about to hit a shot and said, "Hey Moses, watch this! Just like Arnold Palmer!"

Moses said, "Jesus, you can do anything, don't try to be like Arnold Palmer."

Jesus said, "No, just like Arnold Palmer!"

Well, Jesus hit the ball in the water so Jesus asked Moses to retrieve the ball. Moses parted the water and got the ball. This continued for about 15 minutes. Finally, Jesus hit the ball in the water for the 7th time. "Please get my ball for me," Jesus asked Moses.

Moses said, "No, I told you to quit trying to be like Arnold Palmer, so I'm not getting it this time."

So Jesus walked across the water, reached down and got his ball. While he was doing this, a couple of kids rode by in a cart and said, "Who does he think he is? Jesus?"

Moses said, "NO! He thinks he's Arnold Palmer!"

I wonder who you think God is?

In his book “The Shack”, William P. Young focuses on the relational qualities of God, the three-in-one, God is portrayed as female, black, Jesus as a hispanic labourer, and the Spirit, when she holds still long enough for the character to get a look at her, is perhaps Asian. When the main character comments to the effect that God is not at all who he expected, God just laughs and says that’s a good thing.

Scripture also provides us with a variety of images that both comfort and disturb, reminders of God’s persistent refusal to be captured in our limited understanding... God is likened to various parts of nature such as a whirlwind, a cloud, and a pillar of fire and to such animals as a hen, an eagle, and a lion. God is pictured as a tower, a shield, and a garment. God is described using social roles and activities including creator, potter, shepherd, father, birthing mother, and bridegroom. God is assigned human qualities and responses such as intelligence, will, memory, anger, and forgiveness. God is spoken of as possessing human form, with eyes, arms, and hands, as walking around, and speaking with a voice.

In the second century, Tertullian began to write about the Trinity, as a way to help the early church understand who God was, three persons of the same substance - understood by how they related to one another, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It is perhaps the more traditional and comfortable understanding of God, although when I ask people to talk about the three aspects of God during marriage preparation, few of them seem to have the words. More recently I wondered about imagining the Trinity as a mobile with God the supporting branches, Jesus the strands/love that connects all the pieces and the Spirit/wind that move it into beauty and wonder.

We are drawn to particular images at certain times and for certain reasons. When we are young, we need those concrete images of God to make the holy mystery tangible. Picturing God in such a way that we can relate to God is what makes religious life important. God is a loving father or mother, in those times we want to trust ourselves to God completely. God is a friend or confidant when we feel safe to share our deepest longings with God in prayer. God is judge and avenger, in those times we look at the sin and injustice of the world and hope for a divine reckoning. It's not that God changes. God is all that is, but as we grow and change our understanding deepens, different images of God draw us closer and deeper in our relationship with the sacred.

I remember a friend talking about teaching a Sunday School class, and each Sunday as they closed with the Lord's prayer one of the young boys would fall silent, his face angry and his body withdrawn. One day another leader started the prayer, Our mother, who art in heaven ... and the boy began to cry quietly, then joined in. My friend found some time over the next few months to sit with the boy, and commented on what she'd seen, inviting him to talk about it with her to help her understand. He said he never really liked God, the father. Father was someone who had beat him and abandoned him and his mom. When someone talked about God the mother, it opened up a whole new relationship for him.

I wonder what images of God have helped you grow in your faith?

J. B. Phillips, once wrote a book with a title *Your God Is Too Small*. Phillips's message was right on target, for his context and also for ours. It doesn't matter how smart you are, how good you are, or how attractive you are. It doesn't matter how much you read the Bible, how much you pray, or how much you give to church and charity. It doesn't matter what your culture is, what your gender is, what your skin color is. It doesn't matter who your relatives are or who you know, where you went to school or where you live. Your God is too small.

Some people make God so small that God actually vanishes from their lives. These people assume that, since it seems unlikely anything conclusive could ever be known about God, if God even exists, it is best not to bother trying to get to know God at all. In Christian circles, it is more common to encounter people making God too small through believing that they fully understand God and God's motives. They create or absorb an image of God that is probably related to the Bible and reflective of their local community's culture of Christian belief. But then they allow this image to take the place of the actual God, relating to the image exclusively rather than using the image to relate to a God who breaks all images. Worst of all, they often speak proudly about who God is and what God wants, as if they were the one speaking from the eye of the storm. And they sometimes speak in a way that is desperately limited by superficial understanding of the Bible and very limited self-awareness.

The problem arises when we begin to think that our favorite image of God is the only one or the best

one. We lose track of the contrast between God's infinity and our finite humanity. This tendency may be part of the human condition, but it is a trap that mature Christians in every generation learn to avoid. Unfortunately, the history of Christianity is filled with examples of people, sometimes very influential people, who have not reached this level of maturity.

Jesus told parable after parable to invite people into different ways of understanding God and God's realm... the kingdom of heaven is like a seed that grew, a measure of yeast, a treasure buried in a field. Just like God, there's always another side to a parable. We believe in God, and we also believe there is more to God than we could ever know. We follow Christ trusting that discipleship helps us by grace to craft lives that are pleasing to the God who is both known and unknown to us, and in fact is known partly as unknown. We can treasure our God images, but we need to remember they are too small.

The good news is that God is big enough to forgive all limitations.

Like the man who discovers the treasure buried in the field, God works deep within us to uncover gifts and abilities that we or others may have overlooked. No matter that we place limits on ourselves or our understanding of God. God continually finds ways to tease us out, to draw the circle wider and wider, until we can trust, not only in God's presence here and now, but inviting us into that great unknowing. Perhaps others may even catch a glimpse of God in our words and actions.

As you go about your week, know that you are treasured by God. God knows us by the names we call ourselves and by the name that only God speaks. Before the words are on our lips, the Spirit has spoken on our behalf. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.