

SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2021
2ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUNDAY

Call to Worship

Leader: Christ calls us to be the church.
People: Let us together sing praises to God.
Leader: Christ has brought us into this congregation.
Leader: Let us serve one another in Christ's name.
Leader: Christ gives light to our lives.
People: We come to the light that shines in the darkness.

Prayer of Adoration

God our protector and comforter, our shield and defender, hear our glad praises as we speak of your goodness. We are here as witnesses to your redeeming grace; we worship in response to your embracing love. We pray now for your light to shine on our darkness, so we may discern your will for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 448 *O God, beyond all praising*

Prayer of Confession

O God, in times of change when what we know seems to slip away, and we are unsure of the future, you are our strength and our rock. Forgive us for not trusting in your guidance when we hold tight to our own way and refuse to trust your way. You are our rock, O God. Forgive us for not following your way. Grant us courage to accept your forgiveness, for we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the good news! God is full of grace and mercy.
P: We are open to the truth of God's graciousness.
L: Friends, believe the good news!
P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Hymn 704 *Teach me, God, to wonder*

Mission Capsule - Rockland Community Church

With support from Presbyterians Sharing, Rockland Community Church in Ontario – established initially with a focus on youth ministry – is transforming through family-style worship and mission that truly brings out the gifts of people of all ages. As their name suggests, “community” is at the heart of this Christian family of faith, where everyone belongs. The

congregation celebrates the contributions made by each member, and everyone is committed to sharing their gifts with others, whether it's by inviting a neighbor to a home group gathering or weekly coffee house, or by organizing a Living Nativity for the wider community during Advent. Presbyterian Sharing welcomes people into the family of God.

Readings

Deuteronomy 5:12-15	Keeping the sabbath Holy.
Psalms 81: 1-10	God appeals to a stubborn people.
2 Corinthians 4: 5-12	Treasures in clay jars.
Mark 2: 23-30	Jesus speaks about the Sabbath.

Hymn 250 *Lord of the dance*

SERMON: DANCING ON THE SABBATH!

My mother once told me a story about dancing. It was, as I remember, in 1937 when she would be fourteen years of age. The young people in Big Bras d'or –Millville community were holding a social and dance one Saturday evening. The event was taking place at the Big Bras d'or ferry wharf. It was a warm August evening and the group was having a wonderful time when something happened to change everything.

The United Church minister, Rev. James Fraser, who lived very close to the ferry, arrived on the scene wearing his clerical collar. The one who was playing the fiddle was from Little Bras d'or. It is perhaps important to point out that Big Bras d'or was mainly Protestant while Little Bras d'or was mainly Roman Catholic. The minister approached the fiddle player and said: **“You have one minute to put that fiddle away and leave! There will be no dancing on the eve of the Sabbath day.”**

The fiddle player looked up at Rev. James Fraser and, in not so friendly a tone, said: **“You wouldn't be so brave if you weren't wearing that clerical collar.”** With that, James Fraser pulled the collar off and threw the fiddle player with his fiddle into the water.

Rules were meant to be kept. In the book, **Diary of Kenneth MacRae**, Mac Rae, who was minister of Stornoway Free Church of Scotland on the Isle of Lewis from 1931 to 1964, writes:

“Had meeting of Presbytery today. I agreed to approach Woolworth's in connection with the opening of their establishment in Stornoway, with a view to prevention of any risk of Sabbath work, as had happened under similar circumstances elsewhere.”

Rules must be kept. The commandments of the Lord must be observed.

Jesus faced problems with rules. One day a number of Pharisees who, very strong on Sabbath rules, saw Jesus and his disciples walking through a field of ripe grain, and as the disciples were making a path they pulled off heads of grain. The Pharisees quickly went to Jesus and said:

“Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!”

And Jesus, taken by surprise, says to the Pharisees: **“Really? Haven’t you ever read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching – holy bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat- and handed it to his companions? The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren’t made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of man is no lacky to the Sabbath. He’s in charge.”**

Jesus then dances his way into the synagogue. There, for everyone to see, was a man with a withered and crippled hand. There was no doubt that Jesus could heal this man, but there was no clear rule about healing withered and crippled hands.

Compassion is necessary and human need are important, but you cannot let the worship of God get side tracked. At least that’s what the Pharisees feel. To have people milling around on such a holy occasion is not on.

So as Jesus enters, he is watched closely. What will he do here? Jesus, on seeing the man with the withered and crippled hand, calls him over. Then turning to the assembled gathering he says:

“What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless? He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion.”

With that said, Jesus healed the man with the withered and crippled hand. Then, as Mark tells us, **“The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod’s followers and ruin him.”**

In other words, stop the dance, no more singing, **“I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame. The holy people said it was a shame. They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high, and they left me there on a cross to die.”**

The conflict between Jesus and the rule keepers lies at the heart of Mark’s gospel. What the authorities accept as God’s law is not what they see Jesus doing, and, therefore, Jesus cannot be acting on God’s authority. What they did not grasp was the fact that Jesus learned his dancing steps from God. They also didn’t know that God does not allow the music to be unplugged for any longer than three days. They destroyed Jesus but the tomb was empty, and ever since Jesus has danced a resurrection two step, inviting us to join in the dance.

“They cut me down and I leapt up high; I am the life that will never never die; I’ll live in you if you live in me. I am the Lord of the dace said he.”

The children’s book, **“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,”** has a scene in it where the evil white witch discovers her power is slipping. The land of Narnia has been under the grip of a perpetual winter, yet as Aslan the Lion comes to Narnia, the snow begins to thaw. Then the grass turns green, the sky is blue and primroses blossom.

This is no thaw, said the dwarf to the witch. This is spring. What are we to do? Your winter has been destroyed. I tell you! This is Aslan’s doing. The witch responds with evil threats. But the coming of the Christ figure, Aslan, signifies that a whole new creation is at hand.

In Mark’s gospel this is the essence and the invitation of the gospel. The music of resurrection seeks a response.

A woman whom we will name Jill went into a nursing home and nobody believed she would ever walk again. She spent her days watching t.v. in the common room. It was hard to get her to do much else. One day the activity director said to Jill, **“we’re going on a bus trip.”** To this invitation, Jill responded, **“I don’t want to miss my t.v. programs.”**

The director convinced her they would be back in time for her programs. Now, actually that wasn’t true, but it got Jill on the bus. They put her walker beside her on the bus. Soon the bus took the residents to an arts and music festival with hundreds of people present. At the end of the day the director, who had 25 residents on the bus, could now only account for 24. Jill was missing.

A search began until finally they found her walker near the bandstand. Then someone spotted her. There she was dancing with a man half her age. “Jill,” shouted the director, **“What are you doing?”** **“It’s the polka,”** Jill replied. **“But what about your legs?”** said the director. Jill replied: **“When I heard the music I couldn’t stop my toes from tapping.”**

Jill became so caught up in the dance, the life-giving dance, that she forgot the rules, which hemmed her in. It was a glimpse perhaps of what God requires of us. So the daring dance of Jesus and his kingdom goes on, with or without us. Do we as a church want to dance? **Amen.**

Prayers of the People

Almighty God, you set aside one day in the week as a day of rest for our re-creation. Help us to see, O God, that to keep the Sabbath is not a legalistic duty, but a liberating message keeping us from becoming enslaved by it. Save us, we pray, from countless regulations, and help us to treat the Sabbath as a defense against the exploitative, pragmatic, and greedy tendencies of the world. Help us to model all our days on this one you call holy. As the disciples plucked heads of grain, give us the bread we need to sustain ourselves. Keep us, O God, from wanting and craving after things that weigh us down and, in time, demand so much attention. Help us in this

pandemic world to be content with the simple necessities of life, and enable us to share our abundance.

As Jesus healed the man with the withered and crippled hand, we pray for the healing of those who are in need of healing today. We pray for the families who have lost loved ones to this pandemic; to those who are in hospital undergoing treatment, not only for covid-19, but for whatever illness keeps them confined to medical care.

We pray for the church at large and for the church we work in, the Presbyterian Church in Canada. O God, may your spirit be upon those commissioners who this week meet via zoom to discuss and decide on matters pertaining to the future direction of this church.

Make us, O God, as servants of the one who came to serve, ones who call others to righteousness, and alarms that sound when the rights of others are disregarded. Help us to search out injustice; make us quick to praise goodness wherever it occurs. On this holy day, re-create in us a sense of urgency to be about your business, in and through Jesus Christ, through whom we pray as he taught us saying.....the Lord's Prayer

Hymn 590 We have this ministry

Commissioning/Benediction

Love generously, care compassionately, love unselfishly, serve justly, love faithfully, listen carefully, pattern your love on Jesus Christ and know God's blessing. Amen.