

MARCH 2021



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"Take Me As I Am"

One of my favourite hymn writers is John Bell. If you're not familiar with Bell, he's a minister in the Church of Scotland and is a member of the Iona Community. My favourite hymn of his is a memorable one. He writes, "Take, O take me as I am; Summon out what I shall be; Set your seal upon my heart and live in me." If you're familiar with the hymn, you're likely humming the tune or singing it in your head (feel free to drift off for a minute—the song is a good one!). I'm drawn to this hymn because it stirs something deep within my soul. We all long for God to accept us as we are. We pray that God might build us up—helping us grow beyond where we are today. And, it is often our deepest prayer that God might choose to take up residence within us. The three lines within the hymn hit all the right notes as the song invites us to dive deeper into the mystery that is God. Whether I'm having a good day or a bad one, this hymn never fails to bring me comfort and hope.

I had the chance to interview John Bell a few years ago. He was speaking at an event here in Southwestern Ontario. His topic that night—Humour in the Bible. As we talked together about those unexpected moments of laughter and hilarity found in

the pages of scripture, I couldn't help but walk away from our conversation feeling better about myself and more at peace with my faith tradition. I couldn't help but think about the hymn John wrote. It's almost as if—without even singing a single note of the song—Bell was able to sing that hymn directly to me. His gracious and welcoming presence was so comforting that it was as if the Spirit was singing in my ear—"I take you as you are. I'll summon out what you shall be. I've set my seal upon your heart because I live in you." Not only was John Bell able to write a hymn that speaks of the nature of God and God's love, but he was also able to live that hymn.



The challenge we face as people of faith is to let our lives sing out those beautiful hymns at the heart of our faith tradition. Sunday mornings serve as a rehearsal for living the Christian life. We sing of the world that we long to make a reality here on earth. We use our voices to cry out those words and phrases that connect us with God's dreams for the world. With God's help, the songs that we sing with our lives will make the world a better place. As we prepare for singing those words of hope into an unknown tomorrow, may this be the prayer that guides us down

the path: "Take, O take me as I am; Summon out what I shall be; Set your seal upon my heart and live in me." Amen.

Rev. Dave



Marilyn Arthur
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In Children’s Worship (what we have called Sunday school for many years now) we are fortunate to be sharing in a 12 week lesson plan with the theme “ Compassion: Learning to Love Like God”.

During the season of Lent we are invited to enter into our own personal journey, into our own wilderness to learn more about our relationship with God. We are called to look inward to discover more about who we are and what God desires for our lives. In this past year we have had to learn to live differently. We have been forced to slow down due to the pandemic, not being able to do everything we are used to doing. We are tempted and anxious to get back to our ‘normal lives’ but we are not able to at this time and we need to exercise compassion for ourselves and those around us. May this season of Lent continue to be part of a journey of slowing down so we can understand what is most important in our lives, and in turn what God is asking us to do in our lives to help us be, and live, our best self.

Compassion is key to how we live and interact in this world. The world needs our compassion more than ever. The children are exploring bible stories in the Old and New Testament helping them understand how people in the bible, and Jesus, shares compassion with those that they met on their journeys.

During our Sunday morning Zoom (video) calls each week with our children, I continue to wonder with them what we can continue to do to be compassionate to ourselves and those with whom we meet. Below are some of the stories and questions we have pondered together.

- Hospitality: The story of Sarah, Abraham and the three visitors is a beautiful reminder that when we show compassion and kindness to other people, we are showing compassion and kindness to God. How could this change the way you see other people in your life, especially those you don’t know very well? (Genesis: Abraham, Sarah and the three visitors)
- Courage: How do courage and compassion go together? (Exodus 1: 15-21, Shiphrah and Puah)

- Grace: If grace means to give something—like our love, care or generosity—to someone who doesn’t deserve it, where are some places you see grace in this story about David and Mephibosheth? Who is someone in your life in need of your grace and attention? (2 Samuel 9: 1-13, Mephibosheth and David)

- Kindness and Mercy: Showing compassion to those who hurt us is not the same as being passive, giving up, or letting them do whatever they want to us. Showing compassion or mercy is an action of love. Where and how do you think you find the strength to take these kinds of actions? (2 Kings 6: 8-23 Elisha and Arameans Army)

- Shepherding: If you were to think of a modern example of a shepherd—someone who guides, protects, and cares—what or who comes to mind? Can you imagine a few ways or people to whom you could be a “shepherd” this week? (Matthew 9: 35-38 Jesus and His disciples travel healing people)

I invite you to reflect on these questions for yourselves during this season of Lent as we learn new skills, and how we can do and be better in this incredible world in which we live. When I listen to the answers to these questions from our young people, I can assure you that the world is in good hands.

With love and care,
Marilyn Arthur





A Riverside Special Feature Sila Joshua and the Worga Foundation

Sila Joshua, his wife Rebecca and their two children Hanna and Joshua became members of Riverside United Church in the summer of 2019. At that time, we learned that Sila and Rebecca were both born in South Sudan and grew up in an Ethiopian refugee camp. What we did not know was that Sila's passion and concern for the welfare of the youth in his home country would evolve into an international concern with his founding of the Worga Foundation. A non-profit organization that provides children with micro-grants, to help them overcome challenges that could force them to leave school. What follows is a modest introduction to his story...

It all started with a couple of youth stomping their way through a forest in Ethiopia doing their best to make a short-cut to school. Sila held the only note book the two would share in class while his friend cleared the path. Sila would learn that years later the small trodden path had become the road that children from his home community in Mabaan used to go to that same school. With his work in the Worga Foundation Sila is now helping to pave the way for children and youth from the Mabaan tribe to gain a level of education much beyond



secondary school. To meet this goal, Sila made the decision to return to South Sudan to continue forging relationships needed to build sustainable options for continuing education in Mabaan.

On July 11th, 2020 amidst a global pandemic, Sila made the long trek to Mabaan County in the South Sudan after having been away for over 10 years. *"I knew I needed to go, and put my faith in God and the strength of my relationships to help me to get there."*

To achieve this goal, Sila needed to engage in many conversations, but not until he had first listened to the personal stories of those for whom his efforts would matter the most. *"During my trip, I listened a lot. I heard stories told by students, by families (families including my own), and children. There were stories told by youth soccer teams, politicians, soldiers, tea shop owners, people with disabilities and so many others. Each person I spoke with inspired me and revealed both the opportunities and challenges facing South Sudan."*

He spent time in Juba, the capital city, and Mabaan County, after getting on an NGO flight to the region (see photo at top page). He felt overwhelmed to be

staying in places that only existed in his childhood memories, Sila recounts, "...especially Mabaan, where my community welcomed me with a homecoming celebration...and asked me to speak at a graduation ceremony...Each moment was special and I am blessed to have been able to have made this trip."

Some of the youth whose education had already been supported by the Worga Foundation got a chance to meet Sila for the first time in person. The conversations he had with these children were revealing, "I know firsthand the challenge of education to these young people, so my goal is really to make sure that these young people get an opportunity to be educated too," he continues, "They shouldn't give up, despite all these challenges they have."

Some of the obstacles Sudanese youth must overcome include securing accommodations, educational resources and programs and finding the money with which to pay for school supplies among other challenges .

With a growing volunteer base across the globe including the United States, Norway, Australia and Canada, Sila has been able to gain financial support to help students cover a portion of their education costs. Sila himself provides mentorship and guidance to youth either by telephone or by social media when available.

Sila returned home on Christmas Eve 2020, having spent almost half of the year in Africa. He landed in London Ontario amidst the lock-down and had to remain in quarantine for the following 14 days after that. A strange and solitary way to spend Christmas, and no little sacrifice on the part of this family to be sure.

"A lot of people know me, know what I did there. So they reflect on me as their hope, you know, and it feels like it's not easy for them to get access to other people," he said. "It's something to do with my affiliation with the community."

Rejoined with his supportive wife Rebecca and their two energetic and playful children, Sila returns to his day job as a case worker at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. However both his passion and commitment to the work of the Worga Foundation are rejuvenated and emboldened having been inspired by the courage, trust and joy of all those Mabaan children and their families.

www.worgafoundation.org





Riverside Council & Office Announcements

Zoom Congregational Meeting: Election of Trustees

The Nominating Committee wishes to inform you of business that will take place on **March 21, 2021** regarding the Trustees. When it comes to the Trustees, a more formal process is required because they have the authority to act in legal matters on behalf of the

congregation. We therefore wish to give you advanced notice that Cheryl Partington and Ken Forbes have been nominated to the position of Trustee of Riverside United Church. We will be **voting on acceptance of their nominations on March 21, 2021 at 1:00.**

Thank you.
Nominations Committee



Helping to Carry on the Work of Riverside!

Volunteers are an integral part of ensuring that the wonderful work of Riverside carries on. Participation in volunteer work is also a great way to meet and connect with people, particularly while most of us are still spending the majority of our time in our homes.

If you feel you'd like to share some of your time and talents with fellow Riverside people, whether it be an hour here and there or something more regular, we'd love to hear from you. Please refer to the Nominating Committee submission in the Annual Report for a list

of committees currently operating (a few are mentioned above) but more importantly, **give us an idea of what your interests are** and we can help you find something that may appeal to you.

While some of the committees may be slow at the moment, there is always room for future planning so we can hit the ground running once our world opens up once again.

If you have interests to share or questions about future possibilities, please email sueanderson@bell.net and Sue will be glad to connect with you.



Jan Shamrock
Administrative Assistant
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Our Church Family:

In Hospital: Sandra Sinker - LHSC, University Campus. Jack Robb - UH.

Please also pray for Mel Finkbeiner who has just recently been released from LHSC, University Campus. If you are aware of anyone in the hospital, please call the church office at 519-472-6071.

The sympathy of the congregation is extended to Pam

Cottingham following the passing of her mother Lorraine MacDonald on February 5.

The sympathy of the congregation is extended to the family of Lois Bloxam following her passing on February 13th.

Communications Announcement: Do You Have a Favorite Hymn? If so, you are invited to share what that song is and why! Please send your submissions to johannrsu@gmail.com. Song choices will be featured in upcoming issues. **Corrections:** 01/28/21 Newsletter, UCW article spelling error for *Stella Finkbeiner*.

A MESSAGE FROM AFFIRM!

Hello to All from your Riverside Affirm Committee! This will be the second March in a row that we will not be observing United Church of Canada P.I.E. Day (Mar. 14), in person, with a taste of pie for you between services! As you might remember, our Affirming congregation stands for our Public, Intentional, Explicit embrace and acceptance of the LGBTQ2+ community. We are a church where we all can be our authentic selves!

On March 14th, perhaps, where you live, you might enjoy a piece of pie, and take a moment to think about how Riverside strives for social justice and inclusion for all as allies and members of the LGBTQ2+ community. To help you along, we have included a pie recipe that is simple and so yummy that you can't leave it alone... really!



BLUEBERRY CREAM CHEESE PIE

- 1 14oz. can Eagle Brand
- 1 8oz. brick of cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 c. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 c. fresh blueberries

Whip cream cheese & gradually add Eagle Brand till blended. Blend in vanilla and lemon juice. Fold in blueberries. Pour into a graham crumb pie crust. Put a few berries (or a lot!) on top. Chill 2-4 hrs. Brenda Benson



Introducing 'your favorite hymns' for the month of March !

"God Will Make A Way" This song came to me in the middle of the night a couple of nights ago and I was singing it all day and even sang it to Doreen on our walk in Springbank Park yesterday! Lois Gilchrist.

My favourite hymn has always been **"How Great Thou Art."** My mom would play that on the piano when I was young and I would belt out the words. This hymn always reminds me of our Lord's awesomeness! Tracy McLennan

I really enjoy singing **"Morning Has Broken."** Cat Stevens performed a particularly impassioned rendition at a concert I attended at Waterloo University and I have loved it ever since. I would choose to have it performed at my funeral. Don Dittmer

My favourite hymn is No. 595 in Voices United **"We are pilgrims."** Two of my sisters, one being my twin, chose it for their Memorial service and I will have it too. We grew up caring and sharing and telling each other almost everything. My twin and I travelled a good part of the world together and then I with my husband the same. My 3 sisters and I sang in choirs all our lives. Claire Fidler

My favourite hymn is **"Great Is Thy Faithfulness."** The reason I love this hymn so much is because it has reminded me over my life that God is guiding me on a daily journey for which I am forever grateful. Marque Smith

My two favorite Hymns are **"Jesus Loves Me"** and **"This is My Father's World."** Marion Dewbury

My fav's are **"Dream God's Dream"** (844) and **"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness"** (Voices United). Love, love these songs! Julie Gray

There are many hymns that I love for many reasons- BUT there is only one that resonates me and has since the first time it was introduced to Riverside. Voices United #509- **"I the Lord of Sea and Sky."** It is such a personal conversation with God. God asks a question and it is up to us to respond, I always want to jump up and down and shout - "Here I am Lord". Mostly I just cry! Sharanne MacDonald

"Morning Has Broken" Voices United #409 This hymn was sung by my sisters at my wedding while we were signing the

register. **"We Are One"** Voices United #402 This was a UCW hymn that we used to sing whenever the ladies got together. It revolves around the UCW purpose. My favorite French carol is #50 - **"He is Born (Il est ne)"** That was one of the first French carols that I learned growing up as a child in Quebec. Linda Britton

23rd Psalm - **"The Lord's My Shepherd"** - Crimond on the organ. **"I Danced in the Morning"** - #352 **"Morning Has Broken"** - #409 Morag Kinchlea

It is very hard for me to pick a favourite hymn because so many bring me closer to God and community when we sing together. But, if I had to choose one right now it would be **"All Belong Here"** written by The Many. The lyrics are raw and real and acknowledge the brokenness in all of us but does not leave us there. The lyrics remind us that we are not alone on this life's journey but that we have a creator and a community that surrounds us, loves us and is here for us. Singing this song surrounded by the Riverside community of faith gives me strength for the journey - even when it's hard. Betsy Exley