

LETTER TO KNOX CHURCH FAMILY

JUNE 12, 2020

GREAT NEWS!

We are going to begin worshipping together in our sanctuary on June 21, 2020 at 10:30 am. The last time we met in person was March 15. Time has passed and we are anxious to start up again. I for one, am excited to see you again. We are going to begin next Sunday by celebrating **EASTER!!!!** That may seem strange to some, but we weren't able to celebrate it in April so here we are now. In reality, we celebrate our Lord's resurrection every Sunday. We will come together to rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour and we will celebrate communion together as well.

What a time of rejoicing that will be!

Your Session has met, and they have approved the following guidelines for our worship together.

- As we gather, you should only attend worship services as you feel comfortable. You should not attend if you have health concerns or are feeling unwell.
- There is no pressure on anyone to attend.
- The Session will continue to send sermons and pray for church family members.
- There will be one entrance to the building other than the elevator. Everyone will use the Wellington Street entrance. There will be someone available at the elevator to assist those in need.
- We will re-arrange the seating in the sanctuary to accommodate physical distancing. We will stagger the seating in the sanctuary. There will be stickers/signs to mark where you may sit.
- Members of the same household do not need to be separated from one another and may sit and worship together.
- Hand sanitizers will be available for use at the entrance.
- Masks will **not** be required but will be left to the discrepancy of the individual. There will be some masks available at the entrance.
- Collection will not be taken up as usual. Instead collection plates will be placed at the back of the church and at the front entrance to the sanctuary.

- Handshaking will be forbidden, and physical distancing must be respected. Let's wave and smile at each other.
- The nursery will not be available. We will have activity books and crayons for little ones to use during the service. Do not worry about noise!!!!
- There will be one washroom available for use. We will use the small one at the top of the Wellington Street entrance stairs.
- There will be no bulletins. All scriptures and hymns/songs will be on the screen at the front. All Bibles and Hymnbooks will be removed from the pews. Everything will be on the screen at the front.
- Singing is allowed as we will be seated far enough apart to avoid infection.
- When you leave the building, please respect physical distance requirements.
- There will be no Coffee Hour for the foreseeable future. But if you want to bring your own coffee, go ahead!

COMMUNION

- Small individual cups of juice and bread will be available as you enter the sanctuary. If you choose please bring your own. The Elders will not serve you.
- You are encouraged to take time and not feel anxious during the service of communion. You may choose to refrain from taking communion without judgement.

In conclusion, this may be a lot to consider but we want to make sure we are adhering to the guidelines set out for us. We would hate to have to close down again because we are not doing our best to keep everyone safe.

Please pray over the next week for our opening and for our first worship service.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the church or me at 519 365 7557.

I have also included a statement of injustice that has been approved by the Knox Session. I believe that it is imperative that we take a stand on the issue of injustice.

Take care and God bless you.

Barb

A STATEMENT ON INJUSTICE

The elders of Knox Presbyterian Church would like to direct the attention of the Knox family to the Bible as it speaks truth to the current affairs of the world. Prayerfully we focus our attention on the racial injustice and inequality against people and communities of colour and diversity, including African Americans, Black Canadians, Indigenous people, and other historically oppressed/disadvantaged groups.



We encourage our congregation to stand against injustice with mercy, humility, and action.

Proverbs 4:7 "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."

CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 133

A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord God, you who created us and redeemed us and sustained us, we rejoice that You have chosen us to be Your own and that You visit us and dwell with us and open to us the way to abundant life. We are full of awe and wonder at what You have done and what You continue to do. By Your Word the heavens and the earth were made. By the bounty of Your mercy in Christ Jesus, we have been born to new life. Your Spirit fills the whole world with Your loving kindness and gives us the power we need to be Your witnesses and to lift up Your Holy Name. Blessed are You, O God, and blessed are all who live in You. Help us today to joyfully proclaim our faith and to worship You as You deserve. Bring us closer to You and to one another and in our prayer and our thanksgiving, our hearing and our speaking, and our giving and receiving make us more completely thine. We ask it in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore.

Amen

Scripture: [Galatians 3:23-29](#)

THE MESSAGE

²³⁻²⁴ Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for. ²⁵⁻²⁷ But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise.

In Christ’s Family

²⁸⁻²⁹ In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous “descendant,” heirs according to the covenant promises.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

Children of God

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

SERMON: WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST

The poet Allan Ahlberg wrote a poem called “Picking Teams.”
When we pick teams in the playground,
Whatever the game might be,
There’s always somebody left till last
And usually it’s me.
I stand there looking hopeful

And tapping myself on the chest,
But the captains pick the others first,
Starting, of course, with the best.
Maybe if teams were sometimes picked
Starting with the worst,
Once in his life a boy / girl like me
Could end up being first!

We've all experienced the playground selection process from childhood. But being sorted into categories doesn't stop when the recess bell rings. As children, we're sorted according to our academic ability, our grade level and into school districts. And after graduation, society sorts us into umpteen categories: according to race and ethnicity, according to gender, according to age, socioeconomic status, our political leanings, or whether you are a Blue Jays fan or a Tigers fan.

Our reading today from Galatians captures a sorting process that confronted the first-generation Christian Church. What should they do with the Gentile believers? The fledgling church found its origins within Judaism. The very first believers had all been Jewish. But as Christianity spread geographically, it experienced more and more converts from Gentile backgrounds.

A great divide separated Jews from Gentiles. Devout Jews followed a holiness code. It kept them ritually clean before God. This included kosher laws and Sabbath laws and most especially circumcision for men. Circumcision was the defining ritual for a Jewish man. It was THE central mark of their identity as a Jew.

These holiness laws were deeply cherished by Jews. And in transitioning to become Jewish followers of Jesus, they took their Jewish holiness customs with them. It was just a natural thing and they didn't even think about it. It was just who they were and how they lived in the world.

But then, the Gentiles started showing up! Their presence posed a crisis for the church. Do "we" let "them" in? And if "we" do let "them" in, do "they" have to become like "us?" There was a strong voice insisting that the Gentiles did need to adopt Jewish customs, especially circumcision. These Jewish customs were so central to their core identity, they couldn't distinguish between these customs and their new identity as Christians.

This old separation between Jew and Gentile was hard for some to overcome. The lifestyle of the Gentile was completely abhorrent to them. They couldn't imagine that such a lack of holiness could be deemed acceptable. If they were going to become Christians, then they first had to give up their Gentile lifestyle and live like Jews.

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes a situation that occurred in the city of Antioch. Antioch was located in what's now Syria. It was Paul's home congregation. Peter had come from Jerusalem to visit the congregation. When it came time to eat, Peter ate with everyone gathered, both Jews and Gentiles.

But later on, some more visitors arrived from Jerusalem. They were from the more conservative camp who held closely to their Jewish traditions. Dinnertime came around. But now Peter no longer sat down to eat among the Gentile Christians. He separated himself and ate only with the Jewish Christians. *Us and them.*

Paul had started many mission sites in cities throughout the region of Galatia. Ancient Galatia was located in what's modern day Turkey. The church there was predominantly made up of Gentile believers. But then some Jewish Christians began asserting that the Gentile converts all needed to adopt Jewish ways, especially circumcision. Without this practice, they could not be Christian. It created an atmosphere of confusion and anxiety. And it separated the community into *Us and Them.* Paul writes this letter expressly to address this situation head on.

For Paul, this is no peripheral issue. This gets at the core of our Christian identity! Where is our hope located? Where do we find salvation? For Paul, it's located in one thing and one thing only: the life and power of Jesus Christ our Saviour! To place our hope in anything else is to let this mighty gift slip through our fingers. Paul writes boldly to the Galatians. He doesn't soften his tone even slightly. For him, everything precious about our faith rides on this issue. To let this go is to lose everything. He writes: "If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that person be accursed!"

Where do we place our hope? Is the center-focus of our faith in the saving actions of our Lord Jesus Christ? It's surprising how other things can creep in to dilute that faith! "Well...yes...Jesus is important...BUT...it's also important to be a good person!"

It's so difficult to leave everything up to Jesus! Certainly, there's something WE must have to do as well! It's faith in Jesus Christ...AND following God's law,

right? Those people who don't live like good Christian people, certainly they're not right with God! Why, they haven't been to church since they were confirmed; not even on Christmas!

It's so hard for us to embrace that Christ has accomplished everything to reconcile us with God. Isn't there something, some little thing that we have to do? Surely there is!

This was precisely the problem with the early Christian church, and it's still our problem today. Before the Jewish followers of Jesus had become Christians, the Law of God, the Torah, had been the center of their religious devotion. It was everything!

But for Paul, Christ is the perfection of the Law. He is God's Torah made flesh in our midst. And through His life and death and resurrection, He has fulfilled and completed God's law. He has completely lived out God's good intentions for humanity. He has absolutely perfected it! For the Law manifests God's will. It shows us all the life and all the goodness of God. And Jesus, in His living, and especially in His perfect dying, Jesus has absolutized all the life and goodness of God.

He has paved the way. He has perfected all things. He has gathered and brought all things into harmony with God! We are righteous because He is righteous. We have life because He is life! We are made perfect because He has perfected God's good law.

And so, to say that there is ONE MORE THING, one more little thing that's necessary is to completely deny all that Christ is and has done. That one little thing, no matter what it is, carries more weight than Christ.

It cannot be, says Paul! It's Christ and only Christ, or it's not the Gospel! And Gentiles in Galatia, if anyone tells you that you need one more thing, they are misleading you!

This new life in Christ has completely reorganized everything. The old distinctions that once separated us have disappeared like the morning's dew. Jew and Greek; no longer relevant. Slave or free; that distinction doesn't apply under Christ. And male and female! Even here, we are one in Christ. These old categories that once separated us have faded into nothingness. There is no longer *Us and Them!*

Aiden Wilson Tozer was a 20th Century minister and author. He wrote an inspirational book entitled "The Pursuit of God." In it he reflected on how being one with Christ automatically unites us with one another. He writes:

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers together, each one looking to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be.”

Christ makes us one! We are one in Christ Jesus!

Our faith in Christ attunes us to Him, the living Torah of God. It matters not the colour of our skin. It matters not where we live or who our friends are. We are brothers and sisters in Christ! In this world set apart by racism and division, let us reach out to our neighbours in love for one another.

- Faith unites us with Christ and so makes us of one mind with Christ.
- Faith allows us to see with the eyes of Christ.
- Our hearts beat with the compassion of Christ.
- Our arms reach out with the strength of Christ.

Through Christ Jesus we are united. One in faith, one in baptism, one through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, by sending Your only begotten Son into the world and pouring forth upon us the Spirit of Love You have revealed to us the mystery of Your own life and established it as the living pattern for our own. Sustain our faith and fill us with Your love and peace, that joined together in the communion of Your church we may bless Your holy and glorious name and with Your light shine upon the world.

Father of us all, Loving Creator, the Stars and the Sun and the Moon and all that are below them reveal the wonder and the greatness of Your power and Your majesty. We pray O God that we might always have a Spirit of thankfulness and give to You the honour and the glory that are Yours. May we never lose the sense of awe Your work inspires within us, and may we, as Your servants, as one's made in Your image, joyfully point to You as the source of all that is good.

Lord Jesus, You who are the only begotten Son of God. You who took on flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and set us free from the power of sin and death, Wonderful Lord, we thank You. We thank You for coming among us and revealing to us the fulness of God's love for us. May we open ourselves to accept

Your love and follow You in the path You set before us. May we never forget the cost of that love nor how freely it was poured out upon us and may we, as Your brothers and sisters, as Your chosen family, live and teach all that You have commanded us to live and teach.

Holy Spirit, You who are the breath of God within us and the wind of God that blows among us; You who are our daily strength and the source of wisdom for the living of our days, we thank You. We thank You for the life You give, for the message that You speak, for the comfort You bestow and the fruit that You grow in our lives as we hear and accept Your testimony to the Father and to the Son. May we never forget why You have been poured out upon us. Bless us and Your whole church with the gifts You give us for our life together and for the mission You call us to complete in Christ's name.

Father God hear all our prayers this day; the prayers we have made for ourselves and for the work of Your church, Your people and the prayers that we now make for those who are part of Your family and for those who are not.

We pray, O God, for those who have not heard the word of Your love through Christ, nor seen it displayed by Your people. Bring them a messenger of Your grace and help them to surrender their lives to Your transforming love.

We pray, O God, for those who hunger in the midst of plenty and who thirst despite the abundance of drink You have made available. May there be a just sharing of all that Your creation affords us.

We pray O God, for each one today who is homeless and each one who is alone that they may be part of the family You have given us and have a place to call their own here on this earth as well as in heaven above.

And we pray O God for those individuals and those situations You have placed especially upon our heart today. We pray with thanksgiving and with hope.

We pray especially for this broken world in which we live. We ask that peace and calm may reign and that justice for all will prevail. Move our governments and our corporations that they may act with wisdom and compassion in the world. Be with the leaders of each country that wise decisions will be made.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray these words:

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 and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace and love and care for another in the name of Christ Jesus and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, both now and forevermore.

Amen