

Greetings, everyone.

First, let me start with some exciting news. Many of our local ministers and churches have been doing services during this time through Facebook, Zoom, or other means. So far, we've opted for these weekly newsletter emails... but that might change in the future. However, we're planning a special event for Pentecost, May 31st. All ten United Church congregations on the West Island (plus Wesley in NDG) will participate in a shared service, with all clergy participating, as well as greetings from the chairs of each congregation. The service won't be live, it will be pre-recorded, and made available that Sunday morning. You can watch it then, or anytime that's convenient for you. You will be invited to click the link through email, our website, and Facebook. More news about that next week!

This Sunday is the last in the Easter season. It feels weird, because we haven't been together for worship since the second week of Lent. Given that, and the beautiful weather, I must admit that I'm feeling a bit... giddy? I think if we were together in our building this Sunday, the sermon would be very relaxed. So, let's have some fun.

I pray daily, with gratitude, knowing that God is with us. In all things. Through all things. In this weird, scary, uncertain, calm, connecting, anxious time, as always. And so I've been thinking about the descriptive phrase for God that appears throughout the Bible: "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." It refers to our relationship with God, and the covenant made with Abraham, renewed with the next two generations, Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob. It is a promise that we share with our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers that draws us together as a faith community living with God. The significance of that statement is great. For me, it reflects the nature of our relationship with God; our God who is with us through all things.

The covenant is made first with Abraham (Genesis 12). Abraham and Sarah enter into a new relationship with God. The promise is made. You are mine. I am yours. And through that promise we know that God will be with us. Always.

We'll skip a generation for a minute and look at Abraham and Sarah's grandson, Jacob. The covenant is renewed with him, and his relationship with God helps us define our own experience. Jacob was the guy who stole the birthright from his older twin brother, Esau (the hairy twin, for you crossword fans). Years later, Jacob has the opportunity to meet up with his estranged brother. The night before their meeting, Jacob is stressed... understandably so... not knowing what to expect. He wrestles all night long with an angel. Now, maybe we've never literally wrestled with an angel all night, but we certainly know the feeling. In the end, the angel renames him Israel, meaning "wrestles/struggles with God." (Then Jacob goes to meet Esau, who greets

him with a hug, so that all worked out.) Jacob's part of this story reminds us that God is with us even (or perhaps especially) in the struggle. In all of those difficult times, wrestling with the big and little stuff, God is right there with us.

Now, back to Isaac. When Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90, they had Isaac. When they heard about the upcoming pregnancy, they thought it was inconceivable (hee-hee), and they laughed. Isaac's name means laughter. And some Biblical scholars have re-examined the Genesis stories about Isaac and see humour in his life. Isaac's part of this story reminds us that God is also with us in laughter.

The God of Promise, Laughter, and Struggle.

Hallelujah.

So, today, if I may, I'd like to spend a little time laughing together. There's enough of the other stuff all around us right now, I think a little laughter is in order. It's good for the soul. Here we go. These jokes might not make you laugh, they may cause you to groan... but by the end of the list, those groans may grow into a chuckle. Or at least your heart might be lighter. Ready?

Why do cows wear bells? Because their horns don't work.

Why does a chicken coop have two doors? Because if it had four doors it would be a chicken sedan.

What do you call a magic dog? A labracadabrador.

What did the pirate say when he turned 80? Aye matey.

I told my wife she was drawing her eyebrows too high. She looked at me surprised.

The Lord said unto John, "Come forth and you will receive eternal life." But John came fifth, and won a toaster.

Someone stole my mood ring. I don't know how I feel about that.

Did you hear about the new restaurant called Karma? There's no menu: you get what you deserve.

Where are average things manufactured? The satisfactory.

How do you drown a hipster? Throw him in the mainstream.

What do you call a parade of rabbits hopping backwards? A receding hare-line.

(One for your kids) How do you make a tissue dance? Put a little boogie in it.

And finally (hurray!), my favourite... I invented a new word: plagerism.

Phew.

Share a laugh today. It's a way to thank God. In laughter, as well as in struggle, we live the promise that we are not alone.

God is with us. Thanks be to God.

Talk to you soon.

Peace.

Rev. Steve