

FROM ASHES TO FIRE

THE ROADS OF WITNESS, RECKONING, AND RENEWAL

LENTEN LITURGIES
FOR USE IN
TWO SPIRIT & LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES
AND THE WIDER CHURCH

From Ashes to Fire:
The Roads of Witness, Reckoning, and Renewal

These paired liturgies trace two roads that converge in the light of Easter: Queer communities' road of witness and healing, and the wider Church's road of repentance and renewal. Rooted in the United Church of Canada's 2025 Apology to Two-Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, this journey moves from lament to courage, from apology to action, from ashes to fire - an invitation to live resurrection as ongoing love made visible.

Dedication

For all who walked this road before us -
the ones who were silenced, dismissed, or denied,
who loved the Church even when the Church could not yet love them back.

For the saints of courage and conviction -
drag performers, activists, ministers, and mentors
who dared to show us what resurrection looks like in sequins and sweat,
in protest and prayer.

For those who stayed to wrestle,
and those who left to survive.
For every name spoken and every name erased.

And for the wider Church still learning how to live its vision of inclusion -
that its entirety may one day become the safe, wild, and radiant Body
that Christ always intended it to be.



***Author's Note**
This work was born from the tension between heartbreak and hope.

For years, my own journey of faith and identity felt divided – at times fenced behind fear, silence, and the wounds inflicted by those who spoke of love but withheld it. Like so many others, I learned to survive by building fortresses around what was most tender.

Yet the Spirit kept whispering through the cracks: that vulnerability is not weakness, that truth is a kind of prayer, and that healing begins the moment we dare to listen - to ourselves, to one another, and to God's unrelenting love.

These liturgies are, in part, my own way of listening. They rise from years of walking beside others – as clergy, as chaplain, as a faith-based trauma mentor, as a friend and companion - a witness to grief and grace within the queer community and within the Church that both wounded and formed us.

In writing them, I hoped to create a space wide enough for lament and laughter to coexist - where dust meets glitter, and where the sacred can once again be felt in the body.

The words contained on these pages are not an attempt to close a chapter. They are a testament to courage: the courage to return, to tell the truth, and to believe that apology can become an act of resurrection.

To every soul who has walked away and every heart still daring to stay, may these words be both balm and call - a prayer that we might keep living into inclusion, until every table is truly open, and every life is seen as holy.

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"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." - John 1:5
And still we rise, glittered with grace.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This series was born from the meeting place of pain and promise - a Church learning to tell the truth, and a people still daring to believe in restoration.

It unfolds alongside the United Church of Canada's 2025 Apology to the Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities, yet its scope reaches far beyond a single moment in time.

Here, Lent becomes not only a journey of repentance, but a pilgrimage toward wholeness - for those who have carried the Church's wounds in their own bodies, and for the wider Church that must now bear the labour of repair.

Each liturgy is both mirror and map: a mirror for reflection, naming the scars and the beauty of life in diverse Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities; a map for transformation, guiding communities of faith toward justice embodied in worship, policy, and relationship.

Through poetry, prayer, and proclamation, these pages trace the movement from ash to light, from silence to song, from apology to action. They invite us to live into Easter not as a single day, but as an ongoing act - the slow and sacred work of becoming the body of Christ that truly includes every body.

FOREWORD

Journeying Toward Wholeness

Queer Lament, Church Repentance, and the Hope of Resurrection

A Shared Pilgrimage

This series of parallel liturgies invites both Queer communities and the wider Church to travel the Lenten Road together - not in identical steps, but in shared rhythm.
Each week pairs two liturgies rooted in the same Scriptures:

- one for Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities - personal, contemplative, healing, and reclaiming,
- and one for the wider Church and allies - communal, prophetic, repentant, and transformative.

Together, these pieces trace the wider Church's history of its walk toward inclusion and its ongoing call to live into apology - to move from word to witness, from regret to repair and restoration.

This Lenten collection invites us all into a shared pilgrimage through the wilderness of the Church's history - a journey of confession, courage, and grace.

It follows two intertwined paths:

- For Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities - prayers for personal contemplation and spiritual reclamation, speaking healing into wounds left by exclusion, silence, and fear. These liturgies honour Queer holiness and affirm that love - in all its diversity - has always reflected the divine image.
- For the wider Church and its allies - prayers of communal reflection, repentance, lament, and transformation, naming complicity, confessing harm, and seeking the courage to make the changes necessary until all feel heard and seen and a part of the body of Christ.

Together, these paths trace one sacred movement - from ashes to resurrection, from denial to truth, from separation to shared belonging.

Historical Grounding

Between 1984 and 2025, the United Church of Canada has been learning - slowly, painfully, faithfully - what true inclusion demands.

In 1984, the Church first publicly acknowledged its persecution of homosexual persons and called for repentance. By 1988, it affirmed that all are welcome in membership and ministry - even as fear organized under the name Community of Concern, dividing congregations, families, and friendships.

These debates unfolded during the AIDS crisis, when queer people were dying – both inside and outside the shelter of the Church - and when a few courageous souls risked everything to bring comfort, dignity, and love.

From those ashes came new light: the rise of Affirming Congregations, the ordination of openly gay and lesbian ministers, and, decades later, the 2025 Apology - an act of repentance still unfolding into healing.

The work is not done. Anger and grief still live among us. Trans, Two-Spirit, Queer and BIPOC voices remind us that inclusion remains incomplete.

These liturgies hold all of it - lament, gratitude, complexity, and hope, in gentle, yet candid hands.

Rhythm of the Journey

Each week's paired liturgies follow a similar rhythm - a pattern of breath and response:
Call to Gathering – opening the heart to prayer.
Poetic Meditation – weaving Scripture and Church history into a contemplative reflection.
Sermon Starter – a brief theological or pastoral entry point for preachers or facilitators.
Reflection Prompts – questions for personal journaling or small group dialogue.
Prayer – a communal or individual response.
Blessing / Sending – words of hope and commissioning.
***Optional Music** – to enrich worship, meditation, or printed presentation.
Bridge Reflection - At the end of each liturgy for the Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities and the liturgy for the wider Church, sits a reflection meant to weave both liturgies together, capturing the tension and the dialogue between the two.

This rhythm is meant to invite slow reading, deep listening, and communal participation - where tears, silence, and song are all forms of prayer.

***Using the Musical Resources**
Integrating Voices United, More Voices, Then Let Us Sing, and Songs for the Holy Other

Music is the heartbeat of this journey - carrying lament into hope, confession into courage, and silence into song. Each liturgy in this series includes suggested pieces from the United Church's core and companion hymnals - Voices United and More Voices - as well as selections from the new resource Then Let Us Sing, Songs For the Holy Other, and optional Taizé or instrumental meditations.

These resources are meant to serve flexibly, not prescriptively. Worship planners, musicians, and facilitators are encouraged to choose pieces that resonate with their community's story and sound. Pair a familiar hymn from Voices United with a contemplative chant from Taizé; weave in newer songs from More Voices, Then Let Us Sing, or Songs For the Holy Other to embody the continuing story of inclusion and renewal in the Church's life.

Where Queer communities' liturgies often highlight songs of healing, tenderness, and resilience, the wider Church selections tend toward lament, repentance, and public commitment - yet both move toward the same crescendo: resurrection as renewal, and love made audible.

Above all, let the music be prayer - for healing, for courage, for justice, and for joy.

Suggested Use

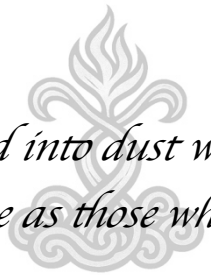
Personal Contemplation: Daily or weekly reading with journaling, art, or music.
Worship Settings: Combined or alternating readings, ideally featuring queer voices and allies in shared leadership.
Study Groups or Retreats: Each week's reflection prompts can serve as discussion starters or journaling invitations.
Public Witness Events: Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter pieces work powerfully for vigils, affirming worship, or ecumenical services surrounding the Apology.

Purpose and Posture

This collection is not meant to reopen wounds for the sake of pain, but to uncover truth for the sake of healing. These are not liturgies of triumph but of tenderness - a space where repentance and belovedness hold hands, where lament is sacred, and where hope, though fragile, still rises like the dawn.

These liturgies ask both the wider Church and Queer communities to travel the road together - to acknowledge what was lost, to honour those who bore the cost of change, and to move forward with courage, humility, and renewed faith in God's inclusive grace.

It is hoped that these prayers and reflections accompany you through this Lent - as a Church seeking to become more honest, as a community learning to love without fear, daring to forgive and be forgiven, and as a people courageous enough to believe that resurrection is not only a promise, but a practice, not a metaphor, but a way of life.



"From dust we came, and into dust we speak our truth again –
Not to vanish, but to rise as those who remember who we are."

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Road of Belovedness / The Road of Accountability

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 6 : 1–6, 16–21 - Jesus calls his followers to humility in prayer, generosity, and fasting - faith lived from the heart, not for display.
Theme: repentance; belovedness; the beginning of living apology

These paired liturgies open a shared Lenten journey of truth-telling, repentance, and healing. They are written as two voices in one conversation, each distinct yet interwoven. These liturgies remember the years 1984 – 1988 in the United Church of Canada's story: the first naming of harm, the rise of the *Community of Concern*, and the shadow of the AIDS crisis when love was most needed and too often withheld. They honour the faces of courage - queer and allied - who risked vocation, belonging, and safety to speak love aloud, and they remember those who died waiting for the Church's embrace.

- ***The Road of Belovedness*** - invites queer communities to remember that the dust from which we come is already holy - not a mark of shame, but of belonging. It speaks of ashes not as condemnation, but as reclamation: a remembering of what was broken and a reclaiming of what has always been loved.
- ***The Road of Accountability*** - calls the wider Church to an honest reckoning with its own dust - the ashes of exclusion, silence, and complicity. It is a summons to humility, a first act in a long repentance that becomes tangible only when lived.

The ashes of *belovedness* and the ashes of *accountability* meet on the same forehead, reminding us that repentance and restoration are not separate journeys but one movement of grace. Together they remind us that repentance and love share the same root: both return us to what is real. As you experience these words - alone or together - may they open space for lament that is honest, gratitude that is fierce, and hope that endures beyond every ash-streaked horizon.

🌈 Ash Wednesday – The Road of Belovedness

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: Matthew 6 : 1–6, 16–21
Jesus invites us into the quiet places where truth is felt, not performed - a return to the sacredness of our own belovedness. He calls us into the hidden places where our spirits can

breathe - beneath every mask we learned to wear.
Historical context: 1984–1988: The wider Church begins naming its complicity in harm, while fear gathers in opposition; the AIDS crisis rages, and those on the margins become the face of both stigma and sacred resilience.

Call to Gathering – ***When Dust Speaks Truth***
Come, beloved of God,
come as you are, dust and breath, scar and song.
You who have walked through the valley of denial and called it faith,
you who have borne the Church's silence as a second skin.

Come with the ashes of memory upon your brow -
the grief of friends buried too soon,
the courage it took to keep loving anyway.

Lay down the armour that once kept you alive.
This day we stand in the soft ache of being human –
marked not for shame, but for remembering.

The Holy does not turn from these ashes.
The Holy kneels beside you in them and whispers,
"*Even now, you are dust my beloved".*

Breathe …

The Holy waits, not in your perfection
but in your pulse …

Poetic Meditation – *The Ashes Between 1984 and 1988*
The ashes know.
They remember the times you were told
your body was wrong, your love misplaced,
your spirit somehow outside God's embrace.

The Church once said '*repentance*' -
a word heavy with centuries of shame.
A tremor of honesty after decades of silence.
Still, we carry the weight
of the silence of the Church in our bones
Having learned to survive on fragments of blessing.
But whose repentance was needed then?
Not ours, for loving as we were made,
but theirs, for calling that love unholy.

Between 1984 and 1988,
fear grew organized.
It called itself a *Community of Concern* -
a name that sounded pastoral,
but masked the terror of hearts
unwilling to let Love widen the circle.

As committees debated Scripture,
we buried our lovers.
While reports were written,
we held the dying in our arms.
There were those who stood beside us,
yet many grieved alone
as ashes fell
clinging to our skin like a new liturgy.

Beneath the grief
a quiet holiness burned.
People lit candles in church basements,
sang hymns at bedside vigils,
and dared to believe that
resurrection might still come.

They were the brave ones -
the faces of risk and grace.
Their faith was costly;
their courage, contagious.

We stand in their dust tonight -
not as victims, but as inheritors
of a fierce and tender gospel.
From these ashes we do not shrink.

We rise, remembering that even sorrow shines
when the Spirit breathes through it.
Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.
Let our hearts return to the treasure they once hid:
the certainty that we are holy in our wholeness.

Sermon Starter – When the Church Debates and Love Still Burns
Ash Wednesday names the place where repentance becomes reversal.
In 1984–1988, the Church wrestled with what it meant to be faithful, while the world outside burned with loss.

A sermon might explore how queer faith survived this tension - how love and grief became sacraments when institutions faltered.
Those who preside might hold the paradox: the Church was arguing about inclusion even as Christ was dying again in hospital wards and closets.
What does it mean that ashes - death, decay, denial - were the soil from which courage and belovedness rose?

Reflection Prompts

- What personal or communal "ashes" still cling to your spirit?
- Who were the "faces of courage" for you - those who embodied love in the midst of fear?
- How does remembering the AIDS years shape your faith and compassion today?
- What would it mean for you to wear the ashes this year as a mark of resistance as well as remembrance?

Prayer – For the Ones Who Would Not Disappear

Holy Presence,
we bring before You the ashes of our history -
the residue of pain, the dust of dreams deferred,
lovers unnamed, friendships erased,
the harm done in Your name.
We do not repent of who we are;
we lament the harm done
to our becoming.
Forgive the silence that cost lives.
Forgive the Church that turned from
its own wounded Christ.
Bless the ones who stayed,
who prayed through anger,
who sang through tears,
who carried hope like a fragile flame in cupped hands.
Where walls were built,
teach us again to trust the sky.
Where our stories were silenced,
teach us to sing our names in prayer.
Let these ashes become anointing -
a sign that grief and grace share the same dust.
Breathe into us new breath,
that we may rise again – with courage,
not rebuilt -
but revealed …

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
May the ashes on your brow remind you
of the saints who kept vigil through the longest night.
May they become the doorway through which grace enters
and remind you that even what has been broken still belongs.
Go into this Lent not to deny yourself
but to claim yourself as beloved,
And may you feel beneath your feet
the solid ground of a Love that never left you.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Ubi Caritas et Amor" – **Taizé**
"Bless the Lord, My Soul" - **Taizé**
"Come and Find the Quiet Centre" - **Voices United** 374
"Throughout These Lenten Days and Nights" – **Voices United** 108
"Spirit, Open My Heart" – **More Voices** 79
"We Are Not Alone" – **More Voices** 176
"When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides" – **More Voices** 169
"Ashes and Light – **Instrumental**
"Beloved Dust" - **Intstrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " **- Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Ash Wednesday – The Road of Accountability

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church
Scripture focus: Matthew 6 : 1–6, 16–21
Jesus exposes the difference between outward religion and inward veracity. This is the call to honesty. Jesus invites the faithful to step out of performance and into truth - to let humility become the doorway back to love.
Historical context: 1984–1988 - The Church's first words of repentance awaken resistance; the Community of Concern organizes to oppose inclusion; the AIDS crisis exposes the Church's silence as moral failure; yet some stay, speak, and light candles against the dark.

Call to Gathering – Ashes and Memory
Come, people of the Church,
you who inherit both faith and failing.

We gather not to perform piety,
but to face what we have feared to name.

Lay aside your certainties and take up humility.
These ashes we bear are not only symbols of our mortality –
these ashes carry more than dust …
They carry memory
of what we have done and left undone:
the memory of our words that wounded,
our silences that killed,
our sanctuaries that locked their doors
when love asked for shelter.

The Spirit calls us to remember,
not to despair, but to mark the place
from which to begin again.

Poetic Meditation – The Ashes of Our Denial
In 1984, the Church said repentance.
We spoke of turning toward justice,
and the words rose like smoke
from a long-unacknowledged fire.
But fear rose to meet us as well.
It cloaked itself in theology,
called itself the Community of Concern,
and its voice echoed through our pews -
polite, devout, trembling with the conviction
that love could still be legislated.
And while its path was narrow,
its wounds were deep –
and many just allowed it to happen.

As some in the wider Church
argued about welcome,
the world outside was burning.
In hospital rooms and city streets,
the AIDS crisis raged.
While bodies wasted,
we squandered breath debating worth.
We prayed for mercy,
but withheld it from those
who needed it most.
We preached compassion,
but feared contamination.

We called exclusion care,
and silence prudence.

Still - in basements and borrowed rooms,
a few refused the comfort of complicity.
They prayed at bedsides,
held the dying as sacraments,
stood beside those who struggled,
grieved with partners and friends.
and whispered a gospel too tender for policy.

These were the faces of courage -
the saints who stayed,
the prophets who would not let the light go out.
Here we confess,
not to wallow in our guilt
but to make room for change.
Ashes mark the beginning of repair.

The ashes we wear tonight
are not only signs of our mortality,
but of our history.
They are the soot of burnt bridges,
the residue of apologies too long delayed.

Yet the Spirit does not shame us;
the Spirit breathes through the ruin,
calling us not to erase our past,
but to transform it into soil for new compassion.
From this dust let accountability take flesh.

Sermon Starter – When Repentance Opens itself to Commitment
Ash Wednesday invites the Church to move beyond symbolic sorrow into active repentance. The years 1984–1988 laid bare the tension between fear and faith, doctrine and love.
A sermon might ask:
What does repentance look like after silence has done harm?
How can memory become moral fuel for change?
The ashes on our brows are not only reminders of mortality - but they are also the mark of our moral responsibility. True repentance begins when lament becomes commitment, and apology becomes repair.

Reflection Prompts

- What fears or theologies once justified exclusion in the Church?

- How did silence function as harm during the AIDS crisis - and how does it linger today?
- Who in your faith community risked belonging to speak truth or offer care?
- What might it mean to treat remembrance as an act of justice, not sentiment?

Prayer – For a Church That Cannot Forget
Merciful God,
we wear the sign of ashes
for the wounds we have caused Your beloved.
We confess the comfort we mistook for faith,
the fear we baptized as doctrine,
the silence we defended as neutrality.
Forgive us for our complicity.
Forgive us for our convenience.
Forgive the arrogance that called exclusion holy.
We remember the lives lost in our absence,
the courage of those who stayed when others fled,
the grace of those who forgave what we had yet to understand.
Teach us to listen without defense,
to act without delay, to love without condition.
Do not let these ashes fade without change.
Let them stain our conscience
until repentance becomes repair,
and our worship becomes justice lived aloud.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go into this Lent marked by truth.
May these ashes not fade from our minds
when we leave this place.
Let them cling –
a reminder that we are capable of harm and healing
and that resurrection begins with honesty.
Go now into Lent carrying both humility and resolve,
that the dust of our past may yet become the soil of compassion
to become, by grace, a Church that blesses every body it once wounded.

Optional Music Suggestions
"Kyrie Eleison" (Christe Eleison) - **Taizé**
"Wait for the Lord" – **Taizé**
"In God Alone" – **Taizé**
"O God, How We Have Wandered" – **Voices United** 112
"Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive" - **Voices United** 364

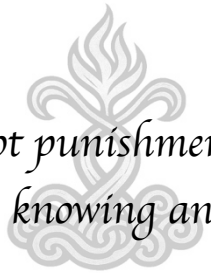
"Dust and Ashes Touch Our Face" – **Voices United** 105
"Sunday's Palms are Monday's Ashes" – **Voices United** 107
"If I Have Been the Source of Pain" - **More Voices** 76
"Because you Came" - **More Voices** 64
"Lament for the Church" – **Instrumental**
"Turning Again" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿 Bridge Reflection – Between Belovedness and Accountability

The ashes of belovedness and the ashes of accountability are not opposed; they are two ways the Spirit draws us toward the same fire - the fire of truth-telling, repentance, and renewal. Between these two truths, a sacred conversation can begin.

Ashes mark us all, though they speak differently to each heart.
For some, they carry the ache of erasure - the longing to be seen, held, and healed after years of silence. For others, they mark the weight of complicity - the realization that love was withheld and harm baptized as holiness.
The journey that begins here is not one side's story alone. It is the story of a people learning again what it means to be the Body of Christ: to share one dust, one breath, one call to become more whole than we have yet dared to be.
May these twin pathways - of healing and repentance - guide us through the wilderness together, until the Church and her queer beloveds find themselves at the same table once more, hands still marked with ash, hearts turned toward resurrection.

1984 – 1988 In the beginning was silence
and dust whispered names we'd forgotten to bless



The desert is not punishment but passage -
where hunger becomes knowing and silence becomes song.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

The Road of Promise / The Road of Wilderness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 4 : 1–11 - Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where he faces temptation and learns what truly sustains life. The wilderness reveals what we cling to and what we are called to release - a place where identity is tested, and truth begins to take root.
Theme: Wilderness; testing; perseverance; temptation; identity; faithful resistance; beginnings of transformation
Lent begins in the wilderness. In the wider Church, the period surrounding 1988 was a time of both promise and exile.

- ***The Road of Promise*** - honours the queer experience of testing and survival - those desert seasons where identity can be challenged, denied, or refined in the heat of struggle. It speaks to the holy work of becoming oneself in a world that has too often demanded disguise.
- ***The Road of Wilderness*** **-** invites the wider church to face its own temptations: power, comfort, self-preservation. It recalls the wilderness of 1988 - the vote, and the division, and calls the church to confront what it sacrificed in the name of safety.

Together they remind us that wilderness is both wound and womb - the place where God whispers, "You are mine," and where we learn to live it. Together these liturgies remember the courage of those who stayed, the grief of those who left, and the Spirit who refused to abandon either. May they guide all who engage them, toward a faith that trusts the wilderness - not as penance - but as the place where new beginnings can take root.

🌈 Lent 1 – The Road of Promise

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: Matthew 4:1–11
In the wilderness, Jesus meets every voice that tries to diminish him and chooses the truth of who he is. We walk this road too: resisting the lies, reclaiming the light.
Historical context: 1988 – General Council 32 votes to affirm that all people are welcome in membership and ministry sparking deep division and exile for many. Congregations divide. Ministers are shunned. Families fracture. And yet, in the wilderness that follows, courage begins to take root.

Call to Gathering – Led into the Wilderness
Come, beloved wanderer.
The path ahead is rough with memory

strewn with stones of what has been said and left unsaid.
The Spirit who called Jesus into the desert
has called you here -
not to test your worth,
but to teach you what has always been true.

This is not penance.
it is pilgrimage.
Here, among the stones and the silence,
you will find the pieces of yourself
that survived even that which tried to erase you.

Poetic Meditation – The Wilderness of 1988
We have known this wilderness.
It was not made of sand and sun
but of silence and side-eye.
Of doors that closed
and pulpits that emptied …
We remember 1988 -
the vote that cracked open the Church
and split hearts like dry wood.
The decision was made: "All are welcome."
And the wilderness answered, "Prove it!"
Welcome was not yet home.
Whole congregations left.
Ministers packed their offices in tears.
Friends stopped speaking.
Families prayed for our deliverance -
from ourselves.

In the streets, AIDS still raged.
While we were fighting for ordination,
we were also fighting for breath.
The Church, though stumbling toward inclusion,
often turned its eyes away
from the suffering right before it.

Some of us found courage
While others found exile.
Some heard their names whispered in prayer, others in gossip -
The wilderness after 1988 was vast.
Those who stayed found themselves
caught between love of Church
and the ache of being unloved within it.

Still, the Spirit led us forward –
Into a landscape both holy and hard.
We learned to pray in sighs,
to lead worship as refugees,
to build community from fragments of faith.
We learned that in that desolation,
wilderness is not abandonment -
the Spirit did not depart.
She hovered over our hunger,
turning survival into sacrament.

While the Church wandered,
we learned steadfastness.
When belonging felt impossible,
we discovered one another.
When silence thundered,
we sang anyway.
We remembered that our worth
does not hinge on anyone's comfort.
And the Spirit whispered:
"You are not forsaken. You are becoming."

This, too, is holy ground:
the wilderness where identity becomes calling,
and dust becomes dawn.

Sermon Starter – When Welcome Costs Everything
The first Sunday of Lent invites reflection on what happens when faith leads into discomfort.
The Church's 1988 decision was a step toward justice - and a fall into wilderness.
A sermon might explore how courage and desolation can coexist: how saying "yes" to truth often means walking away from what has always been.
Jesus was led by the Spirit, not by his own will - as we, in the United Church of Canada were in 1988, drawn toward a freedom that would cost us dearly.
How might the wilderness itself become revelation?

Reflection Prompts

- Where do you still carry the wilderness of rejection or loss in your spirit?
- What sustained you - or those before you - when the Church divided?
- What might have sustained you, had you been present then?
- How does your own wilderness experience shape your understanding of God?
- What voices of courage do you still carry with you from your wilderness journey?

Prayer – For Those Who Stayed in the Wilderness
Holy One who never abandons,
we remember those still wandering
between memory and hope,
we remember those who stayed
when it would have been easier to go,
and those who left when staying meant
losing themselves and their community.
We remember the courage it took
to keep believing in Love
when the Church could not.
You know how deep the wounds go.
You were with us in the breaking -
in the pews gone empty,
in the pulpits gone quiet,
in the tears we hid to survive the next Sunday.
You are with us still,
in the fragile hope that this wilderness
is not a tomb,
but a threshold.
May this wilderness become
not a place of punishment but of purification
where shame falls away
and the soul learns to trust its own song
once again.
Teach us again the language of belonging.
Feed us with the bread of enough.
And let the angels of mercy
find us where we stand,
still waiting for dawn.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go gently, beloved.
The wilderness is long, but it is not forever.
You walk a sacred path through desolate places.
Carry with you the memory of those who kept faith
when faithfulness meant exile.
And may every barren place
become, in time,
a garden watered by courage.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Within Our Darkest Night" – **Taizé**
"In the Lord I'll be Ever Thankful" – **Taizé**
"Nada Te Turbe" (Let Nothing Disturb You) - **Taizé**
"Jesus, Tempted in the Desert" - **Voices United** 115
"I Danced in the Morning" – **Voices United** 352
"In the Quiet Curve of Evening" – **Voices United** 278
"Throughout the Lenten Days and Nights" – **Voices United** 108
"Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom" – **More Voices** 10
"Draw the Circle Wide" - **More Voices** 145
"On the Willows" (from Godspell) – **Instrumental**
"Desert Song" – **Instrumental**
"Wilderness Prayer" – **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Lent 1 – In the Wilderness of Repentance

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church

Scripture focus: Matthew 4 : 1 – 11

The wilderness tests identity and loyalty. It reveals what is false and what endures. Here the Church confronts its temptations - power, image, comfort - and listens again for the voice that calls it toward justice.

Historical context: 1988 - The Church votes to affirm that all people are welcome in membership and ministry. Joy and relief for some; fear and fury for others. Congregations divide. Pastors resign. Families and friendships fracture. The wilderness opens, and the Spirit waits there.

Call to Gathering – Where Faith Meets Fear

Come, people of the Church,
come into the wilderness of our own history -
come to the place where conviction and confusion share the same breath.

The Spirit has led us here - not to condemn,
but to show us the truth of our hearts.
We bring with us the memory of 1988:
the courage to affirm, the heartbreak that followed,
the exiles we created and the grace we denied.
We are the Church that once said yes and no in the same sentence.

We are the ones who wrestled love into policy,
who turned gospel into debate.
Come, and bring your unease.
Bring your gratitude.
Bring your grief.
For even in our divided wilderness,
God has not turned away.

Poetic Meditation – The Church in the Wilderness of 1988
The wilderness is not just a story –
It is a place that we created …

The vote was taken.
A simple motion.
A sacred tremor.
"All persons, regardless of sexual orientation,
are welcome in membership and ministry."

And the wilderness began.

We watched as beloved siblings
were driven out into the heat of public scorn -
their ministry, their belonging questioned.
Some of us rejoiced that day,
Some left in anger,
their faith shaken like dust from their feet.
Some stayed and wept,
clutching scriptures like lifelines.
Sanctuaries turned into battlegrounds;
families held vigils for their certainty.

Fear called itself faithfulness.
Love called itself heresy.
The Church learned that saying 'yes' to God's justice
can expose every hidden 'no' within us.

The Gospel says that Jesus hungered.
Perhaps we too were hungry –
for certainty, for approval, for control.
But the wilderness is where false nourishment fails.
Here the Spirit teaches us to hunger for what will endure –
for reconciliation that will cost us something …

The Spirit lingered whispering courage into the ones who stayed.

In the loneliness of divided congregations,
she taught mercy that outlasts ideology.
The wilderness revealed what comfort had concealed:
that faith is not proved in agreement
but in the willingness to keep walking together
when the path disappears.
We were tested then - and we are tested still -
to trust a gospel larger than our fear,
and to let the desert become the classroom
where love learns perseverance.

Sermon Starter – Testing, Truth, and Transformation
This week's Gospel and history converge:
Jesus in the wilderness, and the Church facing its own temptation.
Tempted by fear to preserve control, tempted by pride to claim righteousness, tempted by power to guard privilege.
A sermon might ask:
What happens when the Spirit leads the Church where it does not wish to go?
How do we recognize "the devil's voice" when it speaks in the language of caution and concern?
The wilderness is not punishment - it is revelation. Here we learn whether we truly believe love is stronger than fear.

Reflection Prompts

- What fears shaped the Church's response to inclusion in 1988?
- Where do those fears still echo in us or our institutions today?
- What does repentance look like when the wilderness feels endless?
- How did your church live out "inclusion of all"?

Prayer – For the Church Still in the Desert
Holy and Restless Spirit,
You led us once into the wilderness,
and we are still finding our way through.
Lead us now through the landscapes of our own resistance.
Forgive the harm our fear has done –
the fear that turned inclusion into exile
and the pride that kept us from admitting our harm.
Forgive the arrogance that mistook power for faithfulness.
Forgive the comfort that kept us silent.
Teach us the humility to listen,
the courage to stay,
the patience to begin again.
Give us wisdom to listen to the voices we once silenced,
To seek guidance from those who left

And to keep re-building what has been broken.
May our repentance be more than sorrow -
may it become solidarity.
May our confession bear fruit
in honesty, in welcome, in joy.
Let this Lent be a wilderness we do not flee
but inhabit – until humility grows roots
and justice takes breath among us.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go now into the wilderness,
not as wanderers but as witnesses.
Do not despise the barrenness -
for there, the Spirit still speaks.
And may the wilderness teach us what comfort never could.

May every step of repentance
become a path toward reconciliation,
and every remembered wound
become the seed of compassion.

May we leave this place carrying
not our shame, but our resolve.
And may every step toward honesty
become a step toward home.

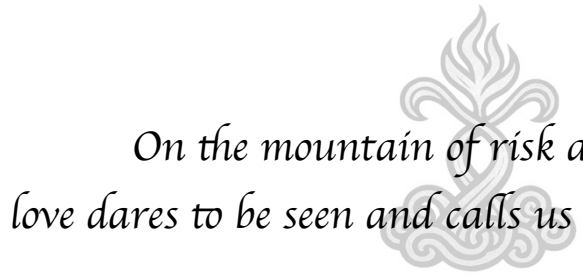
Optional Music Suggestions

"Jesus, Remember Me" – **Taizé**
"Stay With Me" – **Taizé**
"The Lord is My Light" - **Taizé**
"Forty Days and Forty Nights" - **Voices United** 114
"Jesus, Tempted in the Desert" – **Voices United** 115
"Lead Me, God" – **Voices United** 662
"When We are Tested" - **More Voices** 65
"Come, O Holy Spirit, Come" – **More Voices** 23
"Adagio for Strings" (Samuel Barber) - **Instrumental**
"The Long Walk Home" – **Instrumental**
"Courage in the Dust" – **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿 Bridge Reflection – Between Becoming and Repentance

The wilderness was never one-sided.
We each entered it from different directions - some driven out by exclusion, others led there by conscience and the slow work of awakening.
For those who loved and lost community in 1988, the wilderness became both exile and holy ground.
For the Church, it became testing - a season of unlearning certainty, a place where the Spirit's voice could finally be heard beneath the noise of fear.
Between these two journeys lies one truth: the Spirit did not choose sides. She remained with the wounded and the bewildered, weaving paths of grace through a scorched landscape.
If we listen closely, we can still hear the echo of that desert wind - a voice that calls both beloved and broken alike to keep walking, to trust that the wilderness, though fierce, is not the end of the story.

1988 – The long Lent of inclusion begins:
some stayed, some fled, all were changed



On the mountain of risk and revelation,
love dares to be seen and calls us to listen without fear

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

The Road of Daring / The Road of Listening

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 17: 1 – 9 - Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John; the voice of God calls them to listen and not fear. On the mountain, divine light meets human hesitation - daring and listening intertwine as revelation breaks through
Theme: Courage; revelation; visibility; accompaniment; recognition; connection

By the early 1990s, the first Affirming ministries began to rise from the rubble of division. The first affirming congregations were in 1995 - Augustine United Church in Winnipeg, Bloor Street and Trinity St. Paul's in Toronto. In 1996 Kamloops United in Kamloops and Bathurst Street in Toronto became Affirming. Some dared to stand fully in the light - their very visibility a gospel of courage. Others were called to listen - to recognize the light as revelation rather than threat.
These paired liturgies hold that sacred tension:

- ***The Road of Daring*** **-** honours queer visibility as a form of discipleship - to shine when silence would be safer. It calls the Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities to shine - to risk visibility, to claim the glory that has too long been hidden; the courage to stand in full light, radiant and unashamed, even when the world trembles at transfiguration.
- ***The Road of Listening*** - calls the wider Church to move from awe to accompaniment - challenging the wider Church to hear what has been revealed through those it once silenced, to see holiness where it feared to look, and to recognize that God's voice may sound most clearly through the ones pushed to the margins.

Together they proclaim that transfiguration is not spectacle but relationship - the meeting of courage and humility in shared light. Together they remind us that revelation is not a private privilege but a shared awakening - the light of one, becoming the vision of all.

🌈 Lent 2 – The Road of Daring

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: Matthew 17 : 1–9
On the mountaintop, the veil falls away and glory shines through ordinary skin.
This is the radiance we know - the courage of being seen, and the blessing that follows.

Historical context: Early 1990s - The first openly gay and lesbian ministers are ordained; Affirming congregations begin to form. Visibility becomes witness; holiness takes the shape of courage.

Call to Gathering - Come and See
Come, beloved,
travel the road to the mountain
where the light changes everything.
Come with the weariness of the wilderness still in your bones.
Come with your longing, your hesitation, your hope.
For in this place the veil thins,
between what is hidden and what is true.
Here, the face you have hidden from the world
shines with the same radiance that once filled the mountain air.

The Holy does not ask you to dim your light.
The Holy says, "Rise, and be seen."

Poetic Meditation - The Courage to Be Seen
After the wilderness of 1988,
a few dared to climb the mountain.
We were told we were too much,
too visible,
too dangerous to the Church's fragile peace.
And yet … we stood.

We stood before interviews and ordination committees,
and said out loud what cost them everything:
"I am who I am - and I am called."

Some congregations whispered their affirmation,
others closed their doors …
Tim Stevenson was the first
and a movement began - slow, luminous, unstoppable –
resurrection after decades of struggle.

We blessed the bread and broke it open
with trembling hands,
sang hymns that turned shame into sanctuary,
held one another in the radiance of becoming.

Transfiguration was not a single event.
It is the daily decision to shine anyway.

There, in the blinding brightness of truth,
we saw our reflection in Christ's face -
and it was good.

Sermon Starter - When Visibility Becomes Witness
Transfiguration is not only about glory; it is about revelation - the courage to be seen as one truly is, and to keep shining even when the world looks away.
In the early 1990s, queer ministers and Affirming congregations became living parables of this story.
A sermon might ask:
How does divine light dwell in the body the world calls unworthy? What does it mean to stand in that light without apology?
What does it mean to stand in that light without apology?
Ultimately, the mountaintop is not a hiding place. It is the moment when truth shines unfiltered, when identity is named in the light so it can be carried into the shadowed places below. Jesus is revealed so he can return to the world with clarity. The disciples are dazzled so they can learn to see differently.
And so too with the Church's story: when queer ministers and Affirming communities stepped into the light, it was not escape from struggle - it was a calling to witness, a sending to live that truth boldly where it had long been denied.
The mountain reveals; the valley requires. The light given above becomes the courage needed below.

Reflection Prompts

- What light in you has longed to be seen?
- Who in your faith story embodied that first act of daring visibility?
- How do you balance the joy of shining with the cost it sometimes carries?
- In what ways is your faith community still being transfigured by courage?

Prayer - For Those Who Dare to Shine
Radiant Christ,
You who were revealed in unguarded light,
be with all who stand exposed by truth.
We remember the ones who climbed that mountain before us -
those first ministers, those first congregations,
who risked livelihood and belonging to say: Love is holy.
Bless their names, their trembling, their joy.
Teach us to keep our faces turned toward the light,
even when the world averts its eyes.
Transfigure our fear into faith,
our survival into song,
our visibility into a witness that sets others free.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go now, beloved of God,
you have seen the mountain glow.

Carry its light down into the valley -
where healing is needed,
where justice waits,
where your shining might be the only sermon
someone hears today.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Within Our Darkest Night" – **Taizé**
"Christie Lux Mundi" (Christ the Light of the World) – **Taizé**
"Nada Te Turbe" (Nothing Can Trouble) - **Taizé**
"Jesus on the Mountain Peak" – **Voices United** 102
"Spirit of the Living God" – **Voices United** 376
"We Have This Ministry" – **Voices United** 510
"Behold, Behold I Make All Things New" – **More Voices** 115
"Love Knocks and Waits" – **More Voices** 94
"Shining Moment" – **Instrumental**
"Courage Unveiled" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " **- Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Lent 2 – On the Mountain of Listening

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church
Scripture focus: Matthew 17 : 1 – 9
On the mountain, the Holy radiates through the human, and God's voice whispers the ancient command: "Listen". The Church is summoned to listen anew - especially to those it once refused to hear.
Historical context: Early 1990s - first openly gay and lesbian ordinands, the birth of Affirming congregations. Many watched from a distance, uncertain whether this light was safe or true. The Church stood in awe but was called to listen.

Call to Gathering - The Voice in the Cloud
Come, people of God,
to the place where light reveals
what we feared to see.

Come with the questions
that have kept you silent,
the wonder that has kept you watching.

A voice calls from the cloud:
"These are my Beloved; listen to them."
The command has not changed.
The only way down the mountain
is through the ears of our hearts.

Poetic Meditation - The Church That Watched the Light
We remember the early 1990s –
when light fell on faces we had
not been taught to trust.
In 1992, a door opened and fear quaked.

There were ordination services
where the Spirit spoke louder than the polity,
sermons that split congregations and mended souls.
Some of us stood at a distance, hands over our eyes,
afraid of what truth we might hear
and how that might change us.

We called it caution, but it was trepidation.
We called it discernment, but it was delay.

Still - the light did not retreat.
It poured through stained glass and policy alike,
until the Church had no choice but to see.

Some heard the voice and followed.
Some heard and fled.
And some are still learning how to listen
without trying to explain.
The mountain is not a moment of spectacle.
It is a lesson in humility.
We are called to listen until the light no longer blinds us,
but shows us ourselves anew.

Sermon Starter - From Awe to Accompaniment
Transfiguration is not meant to be admired from afar.
It calls the Church to move from awe to accompaniment - to bear witness to the Transfiguration by learning to listen, to trust queer voices, to move from awe to action, to

hear the Spirit speaking through voices we once dismissed, and to trust that divine light is not confined to familiar faces.
A sermon might ask: What does it mean to listen as an act of repentance?
How do we make space for stories that disrupt our comfort yet reveal Christ?
When we come down the mountain, will we walk beside those who brought the light, or keep them at a safe distance?

Reflection Prompts

- When have you heard truth spoken by someone the Church once feared to trust?
- How is your community learning to listen differently to queer and marginalized voices?
- What does it feel like to be transfigured by someone else's light?
- Where is the Spirit still calling you to step from awe into action?

Prayer – For the Ears of the Heart

Listening God,
You spoke once from a cloud
and we are still trying to hear You.
Forgive our fear of voices we do not understand.
Forgive the times we have admired the light
but refused its direction.
Teach us to listen until we are changed.
Let the sound of courage and compassion
reshape our worship and our witness.
And when the mountain glow fades,
send us down with open ears,
ready to hear Christ in every voice
that still waits to be believed.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending

Go from this mountain
not to capture the light,
but to carry its resonance.

May your listening
be braver than your certainty,
your welcome wider than your comfort,
and your faith as bright
as the voices you once feared to hear.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Laudate Omnes Gentes" – **Taizé**

"Stay With Us, O Lord Jesus" – **Taizé**
"The Lord is My Light" – **Taizé**
"Open My Eyes, That I May See" – **Voices United** 371
"God Who Touches Earth with Beauty" - **Voices United** 310
"Listen, God is Calling" – **More Voices** 97
"Be Still and Know That I am God – **More Voices** 77
"Let Us Build a House" (All Are Welcome) – **More Voices** 1
"Echo of Light" – **Instrumental**
"Listening Ground" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿 Bridge Reflection – Between Daring and Listening

Light reveals: it does not discriminate. The same brilliance that exposes our wounds also shows us one another anew.
For some, the mountain of transfiguration was the call to dare - to stand in truth when the world was not yet ready to see. For others, it became the call to listen - to let go of fear and learn to recognize holiness in faces once dismissed.
Both acts are sacred. Visibility without listening can become loneliness; listening without courage can become delay.
But when the two meet - when the light of daring meets the humility of hearing - the Church begins to glow from within. It is then that transfiguration becomes not a moment, but a movement: a slow, radiant undoing of shame, a communal remembering that the image of God has always been plural, and Love has always spoken more than one name.

1992 — A door opens
The Spirit dares the Church to step through



At the well of the world's edge,
thirst speaks truth, and water answers by naming us beloved

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

The Road of Thirst / The Road of Encounter

Introduction

Scripture: John 4 : 5–42 - Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well and offers her living water - truth, belonging, and freedom. At the well, conversation becomes communion; truth-telling becomes transformation. Living water flows where walls once stood.
Theme: Revelation through conversation; breaking boundaries; holy recognition.

By the mid-1990s, new voices began to surface in the Church's story - Two-Spirit, trans, bisexual, and queer people whose lives expanded what "image of God" could mean.
The paired liturgies hold this widening encounter:

- ***The Road of Thirst*** - invites Queer communities to see themselves mirrored in the woman at the well - named, seen, and empowered to tell the truth of love.
- ***The Road of Encounter*** - calls the wider Church to receive revelation through those once pushed to the margins - to hear living water flowing from unexpected lips.

Together they remind us that living water cannot be contained by custom, and that God still meets us at the edge of what we think we know.

🌈 Lent 3 – The Road of Thirst

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: John 4 : 5–42
Historical context: Mid-1990s - emerging Affirming congregations, public ordinations of queer leaders, Two-Spirit and gender-expansive voices rising in witness and song.

Call to Gathering - Come to the Well
Come, beloved of God,
to the place where thirst meets truth.

Here there is no bucket deep enough
to contain the living water of your becoming.
Here, every boundary you have crossed to get this far
becomes a doorway to grace.

Come - with your thirst, your story, your names.

Come - to the well where the Holy waits,
not to question, but to converse.

Poetic Meditation - The Courage to Speak Our Names
We remember the years when our names were whispered,
mispronounced, erased, debated in meetings
by people who had never met us.

We remember when "gender" and "orientation"
became battleground words instead of blessings,
and when theology was wielded like a weapon.

Still - we came to the well.

Two-Spirit elders sang creation back into us.
Trans and non-binary prophets re-imagined flesh as holy scripture.
Bisexual and pansexual believers claimed space
in pews that had never expected them.
Lesbian and gay pastors kept breaking bread
with hands that shook from exhaustion and hope.

At the well,
we told the truth that saved us:
that love is not theory, but thirst made visible.

The Holy did not turn away.
She asked for water from our hands.
She told us that our story,
our whole story,
was already part of hers.

And we gathered at wells of living water -
places where the thirsty are not turned away but welcomed with song.
Affirming Congregations rose like oases in the desert,
their banners shimmering with every colour of belonging.
Here, stories once silenced became sacrament;
here, the Church learned to drink again from the truth of who we are.
And here the Spirit whispers: this, too, is holy ground.

We ran - back to towns that once condemned us -
carrying the news that God's voice sounds a lot like ours.

Sermon Starter - The Well as Threshold

The Samaritan woman's courage to speak mirrors the testimony of queer and trans people whose stories have called the Church back to the heart of its Gospel - a love that does not ask permission to flow.

A sermon might explore the meeting at the well (John 4:5–42) as a queer story of revelation - where love crosses boundaries and the truth of one's being becomes living water.

It could reflect on how Affirming Congregations have become modern-day wells: places where the Church learns again to listen, to see, and to celebrate the image of God in every body.

How does the story of the Samaritan woman invite us to see affirmation itself as holy encounter?

What does it mean to build "wells" - communities of deep welcome - within and beyond the Church?

How have you seen affirmation lead to healing or transformation, in yourself or others?

Where might the living water of inclusion still need to flow more freely?

Reflection Prompts

- Recall a time when you experienced genuine affirmation - not tolerance or welcome with conditions, but the full embrace of who you are. What changed in you?
- How have Affirming Congregations served as wells of living water in your own journey?
- When have you, like the Samaritan woman, shared your story in a way that revealed something of God to those listening?
- How might the living water of affirmation become a wellspring of courage for the wider Church?

Prayer - For Those Who Safeguard the Well

Holy Presence,
thank You for those who guard the well -
who make space for stories too long untold.
For every Two-Spirit elder who taught belonging,
for every trans disciple who kept creating themselves in Your image,
for every queer believer who refused to go thirsty,
we give thanks.
Let this living water continue to flow -
not for survival alone,
but for joy.
Bless our gathering, our naming, our persistence.
May the world come to drink and find that You were here all along.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go now with water still shining on your hands.
Tell what you have seen and heard:
that love meets us in the heat of the day
and asks nothing less than truth.

Go as well-keepers,
as storytellers,
as bearers of living water.

Optional Music Suggestions
"Stay with Me" – **Taizé**
"Come to Me, All Who Thirst" – **Taizé**
"Jésus le Christ, Lumière Intérieure - **Taizé**
"Come Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love" - **Voices United** 574
"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" - **Voices United** 626
"Like a Deer Pants For Water" – **Voices United** 766
"Draw the Circle Wide" – **More Voices** 145
"Like a River of Tears" – **More Voices** 98
"Water Flowing From the Mountains" – **More Voices** 87
"Water's Edge" – **Instrumental**
"Flowing Mercy" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Lent 3 – The Road of Encounter

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church
Scripture focus: John 4 : 5 – 42
At the well, Jesus breaks open boundaries with love. The Church is invited to follow - to meet those pushed aside with dignity, truth, and welcome without conditions.
Historical context: Mid-1990s - Queer and trans voices begin to speak publicly within the Church; Two-Spirit elders invite reconciliation between spiritual and cultural identities; affirming ministries grow in number and confidence

Call to Gathering - Listening at the Well
Come, people of the Church,
to the place where stories once silenced rise again.
Here, at the edge of custom,

the Holy waits - not in the temple,
but beside the well of human thirst.

Come ready to listen.
Come willing to learn.
For revelation still happens in conversation.

Poetic Meditation - When the Church Listens to the Stranger
We have often come to the well
with our buckets full - of answers, of doctrine, of distress.
We have drawn water for others,
but seldom sat down to ask, "What do you thirst for?"

In the 1990s, new pilgrims arrived:
Two-Spirit elders, queer ministers, trans theologians.
They spoke in voices we were not accustomed to hear.

They told us that the water we guarded
was not ours to own,
that living water cannot be rationed.

Some of us turned away,
afraid that their truth would stir the sediment of our faith.
Some listened from a safe distance.
But some - just some - set down the bucket
and asked to share a drink.

And when we did,
the taste was sweeter than we remembered.

The Gospel had not changed.
We simply discerned its accent.

At the well, we discovered that holiness
sounds different when spoken by the once-forgotten,
and that revelation, when shared,
makes the whole body of Christ less thirsty.

We come to the well, still learning how to listen.
The water we draw is shaped by the vessels we bring -
and too often, ours have been too small.
Some among us have dared to craft larger cups,
to paint them with every colour of grace.
Affirming Congregations began this widening work -

oases where the Church could finally taste its own redemption.
Here, we learn again what living water means:
that inclusion is not a policy but a way of love.

Sermon Starter - Conversation as Conversion
A sermon might explore how the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman calls the Church to encounter those it once treated as "other."
It could draw parallels between that moment of revelation and the ongoing journey of Affirming Congregations - communities that have chosen to embody repentance through welcome.
How do our communities still limit the flow of living water by controlling who draws from the well?
In what ways has the Affirming process transformed not only congregations but the Church's theology of belonging?
What would it mean for the wider Church to become a well of affirmation, not only acceptance?

Reflection Prompts

- Who has been the "stranger at the well" for your community?
- What fears or assumptions have kept you from listening deeply?
- How can your congregation become a place where living water flows freely?
- Recall a time when your congregation - or you personally - encountered a truth that expanded your understanding of welcome.
- How might affirmation differ from tolerance? From inclusion?
- Where is your community still thirsty for courage, listening, and change?

Prayer – For Ears Made New
Holy Listener,
You meet us not in thunder but in conversation.
Forgive us for guarding the well,
for mistaking silence for respect
and control for care.
Teach us to draw near without fear,
to ask questions that open hearts,
to hear truth even when it unsettles us.
Let every well become communion,
every conversation a resurrection.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go now, Church of the Listening Christ.
Go to the wells of this world -

the coffee tables, the protests, the late-night vigils -
and hear what the Spirit is saying through voices once ignored.

May your listening become living water,
and your speech a reflection of the love you have received.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Laudate Omnes Gentes" – **Taizé**
"Veni Sancte Spiritus" – **Taizé**
"Bless the Lord, My Soul" - **Taizé**
"Crashing Waters at Creation" – **Voices United** 449
"Be Thou My Vision" – **Voices United** 642
"By the Well a Thirsty Woman" - **More Voices** 117
"Spirit God, Be our Breath" – **More Voices** 150
"My Soul is Thirsting for You" – **More Voices** 109
"Meeting Waters" – **Instrumental**
"Ripples of Grace" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

Bridge Reflection – Between Encounter and Witness

At the well, two movements meet. One comes bearing truth and story, the other comes to listen and learn. Together they draw from the same deep source.
Queer communities have long kept the wells of faith flowing - even when the Church turned away. Now the Church is called to drink from that same grace, and to let thirst become teacher.
Between encounter and witness flows a river of renewal. Here, belovedness and accountability join hands; healing and repentance become one motion of the Spirit.
Those who came thirsty leave carrying water for others. Those who came certain leave changed by what they've heard.
And the well itself - once a place of separation - becomes the centre of community, where God is known in the sound of shared voices and the taste of living water.

1991–1994, Affirm United finds its voice and name.
Living water flows from the margins & we drink each other's truth



The light breaks not to blind but to reveal -
eyes washed with mercy see all things made holy

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Road of Seeing / The Road of Recognition

Introduction

Scripture: John 9 : 1 – 41 - Jesus heals a man born blind; through conflict and revelation, sight becomes insight.
Theme: Seeing differently; public clarity; the cost of truth.

This is the road where seeing becomes believing - and believing becomes justice. It is the moment when hidden truth demands to be named.

- ***The Road of Seeing*** - honours the queer experience of seeing clearly after years of distortion - of claiming the power to name injustice and to speak truth in daylight.
- ***The Road of Recognition*** - calls the Church to confess its chosen blindness and to act on what it finally sees - that justice is not optional once revelation occurs.

Both declare that sight is not about certainty but courage: that seeing Christ in the marginalized means following Christ into the streets.

🌈 Lent 4 – The Road of Seeing

For use within the Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: John 9 : 1 – 41
A man born without sight encounters healing and refuses to deny what he has seen. We too have learned to trust our vision, even when others resist its truth.
Historical context: Late 1990s – early 2000's - visible advocacy for same-sex marriage; trans and Two-Spirit leadership emerging in theology, ministry, and activism with the ordination of Rev. Cindy Bourgeois in 2010; the Church beginning to face its public witness.

Call to Gathering - Come into the Light
Come, beloved,
not because it is safe,
but because it is true.

The world still prefers its miracles quiet,
its prophets unseen,
its justice gradual.

But the Spirit says,
Open your eyes.
See who you are.
See who we are,
together - a people whose sight
has been hard-won and holy.

Come to the place where love no longer hides.

Poetic Meditation - The Gift of Seeing Plainly
We were told not to look too closely –
at ourselves,
at the Church,
at the systems that named some light "sin."

But we looked anyway.

We saw our friends dying while silence wore a collar.
We saw pulpits tremble when truth took the microphone.
We saw that compassion without courage is only pity.

Once, they said we were invisible -
but God kept seeing us.
And we began to see ourselves - queer, trans, Two-Spirit, radiant –
as the reflection of a God who refuses to be partial.
The scales fell from our eyes in stages:
first the fear,
then the shame,
then the need for permission.

Until finally, there was only light - and each other –
and a gospel that tasted like freedom.

Now we walk into that light knowing it will cost us something.
Visibility is not vanity; it is vocation.
To see clearly is to act justly.
And we are called to both.

Sermon Starter - When Seeing Becomes Witness
John 9 is not about private healing but public confrontation. The healed man's clarity threatens the order of things.
A sermon may trace this same pattern in queer and trans witness: how revelation demands response, how truth once seen cannot be unseen.
What does faithful sight require protest, policy, pastoral care?

The story of Rev. Cindy Bourgeois's ordination can serve as a living parable for this text - a moment when the Church's eyes were opened to the truth that God has always seen trans bodies as sacred.
The question is no longer, 'Who sinned?' but rather, 'Who will we see?'"
Who are today's prophets saying, "I was blind, and now I see," and what happens when the Church must face that light?

Reflection Prompts

- When did you first begin to see yourself clearly in the light of God's love?
- What injustices became visible once you did?
- How does it feel to know that your body, just as it is, bears the image of God - not despite its difference, but through it?
- Where have you witnessed others' courage help the Church to see more clearly?
- How has your "sight" changed the way you move through community or Church?
- What light still frightens you - and what freedom might it hold?

Prayer – For Eyes Uncovered by Grace
Holy Light,
You opened our eyes when the world preferred we stay quiet.
Thank You for vision that sees through pretense,
for courage that refuses comfort,
for the gift of clarity that births compassion.
Keep us awake, God.
Do not let us turn away when truth is too bright.
Let our seeing become service,
our clarity become change.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go with eyes unshadowed.
Walk toward the light, not away from it.

Where others flinch, you will bear witness.
Where others look down, you will raise your gaze.

And in your seeing,
may others learn that love was never blind - only waiting to be recognized.

Optional Music Suggestions

"Ubi Caritas" - **Taizé**
"O Lord, Hear My Prayer – **Taizé**
"In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful" – **Taizé**
"Amazing Grace" – **Voices United** 266

"Jesus Lover of My Soul" – **Voices United** 669
"Open My Eyes, That I May See" - **Voices United** 371
"God of the Bible (Fresh as the Morning)" - **More Voices** 28
"Like a Healing Stream" – **More Voices** 144
"Beyond the Beauty and the Awe" – **More Voices** 80
"Light Breaking Through Dust" – **Instrumental**
"Vision of Grace" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Lent 4 – The Road of Recognition

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church

Scripture focus: John 9 : 1 – 41
Sight is restored, and revelation unfolds - yet some cling to blindness.
The Church is asked to see clearly: the truth it once feared, the people it overlooked, the grace waiting to be recognized.
Historical context: Late 1990s – early 2000's - the Church begins to confront public justice: affirming ministries expand; conversations on marriage equality and trans inclusion begins to reshape witness as Rev. Cindy Bourgeois is ordained.; advocacy becomes discipleship.

Call to Gathering – Learning to See Again
Come, people of the Church,
to the place where light exposes truth.

Once, we were sure of what was holy
and who was allowed to see it.
Now the Spirit has opened our eyes -
and asks whether we will look or turn away.

Come, not to admire the miracle,
but to practice vision.
Come, and see what grace reveals.

Poetic Meditation - The Church That Chose to See
For too long we preferred the comfort of shadow.
It was easier to keep the peace
than to question our sight.

We called injustice "difference of opinion,"
and prejudice "prudence."
We said, "We cannot see clearly yet",
while those around us lived in the dark we created.
But revelation has a way of finding us.
Through queer prophets, trans disciples,
Two-Spirit elders, and allies brave enough to listen,
the light kept breaking through.

Once, the Church mistook blindness for faith -
but Love kept anointing our eyes with truth.
In 2009, the Spirit whispered again: trans bodies are holy.
In 2010, Rev. Cindy Bourgeois took her place at the table -
not as exception, but as revelation.
And we began, at last, to see what grace had long revealed.

Now we can see the faces we ignored -
and with sight comes responsibility.
To see is to undertaking.
To recognize injustice is to repair it.
To look upon the beloved and still delay
is to choose blindness all over again.

We are not done learning how to see.
But we are learning to stop looking away.

Sermon Starter - Sight as Responsibility
John 9 reveals that healing leads to accountability.
Once the Church sees, it must decide what to do with its vision.
A sermon might ask:
How has the Church benefitted from selective sight?
What does repentance look like after revelation?
How can our new vision become advocacy rather than sentiment?
The healing of the blind man becomes an allegory for institutional repentance - the moment when the Church learns to see what has been before it all along.
Reflect on the 2009 and 2010 milestones: what shifted when trans lives were no longer theological abstractions but visible, embodied ministries?
Invite the congregation to see justice not as an optional ministry, but as the proof that sight has been restored.

Reflection Prompts

- What truths has your community recently begun to see more clearly?
- Where are you still tempted to look away?

- How can your congregation use its "restored sight" to change systems, not just hearts?
- What does faithful seeing demand of you in public life?
- Where do we still fail to see the fullness of God in those we deem unfamiliar?
- What new sight might repentance grant the Church today?

Prayer - For Eyes Made Brave
God of Radiant Truth,
You have opened our eyes once again.
Forgive the times we looked away from pain,
or used doctrine to dim Your light.
Forgive the comfort that kept us blind to our siblings' suffering.
Let this new sight unsettle us until it moves us to justice.
Make our clarity cost something.
Turn our vision into solidarity,
our seeing into service.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending
Go as people who have seen and cannot forget.
Do not let the light fade for fear of what it shows.

May your eyes stay open to injustice,
your hands ready for repair,
and your hearts anchored
in love that sees clearly
and still chooses to stay.

Optional Music Suggestions
"Ubi Caritas" – **Taizé**
"Wait for the Lord" – **Taizé**
"The Lord is My Shepherd" - **Taizé**
"Open My Eyes, That I May See" - **Voices United** 371
"Be Thou My Vision" – **Voices United** 642
"We Are Pilgrims" – **Voices United** 595
"Christ Has No Body Now But Yours" – **More Voices** 171
"Deep in Our Hearts" – **More Voices** 154
"God of the Bible (Fresh as the Morning)" - **More Voices** 28
"Illumined Path" – **Instrumental**
"Awakening Sight" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿 Bridge Reflection – Between Seeing and Being Seen

Sight changes everything. Once the world turns toward the light, nothing looks the same.
For the queer community, seeing clearly meant reclaiming beauty long denied.
For the Church, being seen by that same light meant facing truth without disguise.
Between them, a new vision is forming - one that no longer separates the see-er from the seen.
To see is to be accountable.
To be seen is to be affirmed.
Together, these are not opposites but one revelation: the Body of Christ learning, at last, to look itself in the eye.
May our seeing and our being seen become a single act of love - justice with compassion, clarity with tenderness, sight that leads to action and vision that never forgets the faces that first taught us to see.

Late 1990' s – early 2000's
Light falls where it had never been allowed to shine



From bones to breath, from silence to song,
the Spirit gathers what was scattered and calls it whole again

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Road of Awakening / The Road of Reconstruction

Introduction

Scripture: Ezekiel 37 : 1–14 & John 11 : 1–45 - Jesus calls Lazarus from the tomb, revealing that love's power is stronger than death's hold.
Theme: Resurrection · Re-membering · Renewal through movement

This is the threshold between endings and beginnings - where grief becomes courage, and the Church is called to unbind what love has already raised.
At the turn of the millennium, a new breath entered the Church's bones. After years of wilderness and weariness, the Spirit gathered courage into community.
In 1982, Affirm: Gays and Lesbians in the United Church formed to support queer members. In 1984, Friends of Affirm arose alongside them. By 1991, the Affirming Congregations Program began - a network of churches declaring, you are welcome; you are whole. In 1994, Affirm and Friends of Affirm merged, and by 1995 they bore a new name: Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble. In 2000, the United Church officially endorsed the program, urging every ministry to join in the work of affirmation.
Through these movements the Spirit exhaled renewal: justice made public, love made visible, and courage turned to community.
These paired liturgies hold that breath of resurrection:

- ***The Road of Awakening*** - gives voice to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities rising from exhaustion into new purpose - the miracle of collective resurrection.
- ***The Road of Reconstruction*** - calls the wider Church to keep breathing that same Spirit into policy, advocacy, and love-made-flesh.

Together they proclaim that resurrection is not escape from the world, but the rebuilding of it - a gospel of justice that begins in our own bones.

🌈 Lent 5 – The Road of Awakening

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Scripture focus: Ezekiel 37 : 1–14 & John 11 : 1–45
At the tomb, Jesus calls life out of death, summoning hope from places sealed away.
Queer resurrection has always begun here - with love daring to call us by name.
Historical Context: 1982 – 2001 Affirm: Gays and Lesbians in the United Church, forms to support queer members (1982). Friends of Affirm follows (1984). In 1991, Affirm establishes

the Affirming Congregations Program, creating a network of congregations publicly celebrating people of all sexual orientations. In 1994, Affirm and Friends of Affirm merge, becoming Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble (name agreed 1995). In 2000, the United Church officially endorses the Affirming Congregations Program, encouraging all ministries to participate. These years saw the spread of Affirming Congregations, and the United Church's advocacy for education equity, civil recognition of same-sex partnerships, and legislative justice (Bill C-23; first legal same-sex marriage, 2001); 2010 - Cindy Bourgeois is ordained, the first openly transgender minister in the United Church; 2012 - Gary Paterson is elected Moderator, the first openly gay leader of a major Christian denomination; 2012 - United Church partners with Rainbow Refugee Canada to sponsor 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees.

Call to Gathering – Come, Breath of Life
Come, beloved -
from the long night of striving,
from the ache of near surrender.

The Spirit who once asked Ezekiel,
Can these bones live?
asks us again:
can this Church, this country, this people
love as I have loved?

Come, breath and body, memory and hope.
Come and feel the bones shift beneath the soil of despair.
For Love is breathing again.

Poetic Meditation – When Movement Became Breath
There was a time
we thought the Church had spoken its last word.
Too many vigils, too many farewells,
too many doors quietly closed.
But then - something stirred.

In 1982, a group called Affirm: Gays and Lesbians in the United Church
formed to hold space
when there was none.
In 1984, Friends of Affirm gathered beside them -
allies who knew that silence
could no longer stand for faith.
In 1991, Affirm dreamed a new thing:
the Affirming Congregations Program -
churches who would say aloud what heaven had known all along:
"You are loved. You belong."

By 1994, Affirm and Friends of Affirm merged,
and by 1995, the name was blessed - Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble.
The bones were beginning to knit together.
In 2000, the wider Church caught its breath -
officially endorsing the Affirming Congregations Program
and urging every ministry to take up the work of welcome.
And still, the Spirit moved -
through classrooms and courtrooms,
through hymns and hearings,
through bills that changed laws and hearts alike.
(Bill C-23, the redefinition of "spouse,"
the recognition of same-sex partnerships and marriages -
a gospel made visible in public life.)

In the valley, bones became movement:
minutes from meetings, signs from marches,
choirs of courage, petitions signed with trembling hands,
and a church learning to dance once more.

The sound was awkward, holy, human.
And then came breath.
We began to sing again –
in sanctuaries, on courthouse steps,
in living rooms where allies and elders met for the first time.
We began to dance again –
not to forget the pain, but to remember the joy.
Resurrection looked like laughter
after long exhaustion.
It looked like Reverend Cheri DiNovo, 2001, standing at an altar,
speaking vows the world had said could not be spoken.
Love declared lawful, holy, and alive.
And it looked like Reverend Cindy Bourgeois in 2010 -
a trans woman ordained at last,
her very presence in the pulpit a rising of its own,
a sign that resurrection keeps breaking through the stones we thought immovable.

Resurrection begins quietly - sometimes in the lift of a voice,
sometimes in the trembling yes of a call answered.
In 2012, Gary Paterson stepped forward - not as anomaly, but as blessing -
the first openly gay leader of a major Christian denomination.
In that same year, the Church opened its doors wider still,
partnering with Rainbow Refugee Canada to welcome those seeking safety.

The Spirit moved in every border crossed, every table expanded -
and the long work of reconstruction found breath again.
These are our dry bones, breathing ...
This is our movement made flesh.

Sermon Starter – The Sound of Bones Rising
Ezekiel's vision is not fantasy; it's movement.
This week's call to awakening mirrors the Church's moments of resurrection - leadership that dared to rise, and love that reached across borders.
A sermon may trace how despair gave way to organization: from mourning into advocacy, from ashes into affirmation.
How does resurrection happen in a people rather than a tomb?
Where is the Spirit still assembling scattered bones - movements, congregations, communities - and calling them to live?
How do such acts of visible inclusion awaken hope within communities still exiled or afraid?
Resurrection, here, is not an event; it's a decision we keep making together.

Reflection Prompts

- What personal or communal "valley" did you rise from in those years?
- Reflect on a time when someone's courage to lead helped you believe renewal was possible. Who breathed life back into you when hope ran out?
- Where in your own journey have you witnessed love crossing borders - literal or spiritual?
- How do you recognize the Spirit moving now in your community's advocacy and celebration? Where do you feel new bones forming - new connections, new courage?

Prayer – For Breath That Builds Community
Holy Spirit, Wind of Renewal,
You breathed life into a weary people and called them "beloved."
We give thanks for Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble,
for the congregations that became sanctuaries of courage,
for those who stepped up and took the lead,
for every policy, every protest, every song
that turned despair into direction.
Keep breathing in us, O God.
Where fear still lingers, bring movement.
Where exhaustion weighs heavy, bring song.
Where bones rattle alone, bring connection.
Let our hope be contagious.
Let our joy be public.
Let our resurrection continue.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending -
Go forth, you who have learned the language of resurrection.
Carry the rhythm of the valley - that steady percussion
of bones becoming bodies,
movements becoming miracles.
May your courage breathe life into institutions,
your faith rattle dry doctrines awake,
and your joy remind the world that Love never runs out of breath

Optional Music Suggestions

"In Resurrectione Tua, Christe" - **Taizé**
"Veni Sancte Spiritus" – **Taizé**
"Breathe on Me Breath of God" – **Voices United** 382
"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" – **Voices United** 375
"God Who Touches Earth with Beauty" - **Voices United** 310
"There is Room for All" – **More Voices** 62
"Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom" – **More Voices** 10
"Oh A Song Must Rise" – **More Voices** 142
"Wind Over Bones" – **Instrumental**
"Awakening Light" - **Instrumental**
" - " - **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Lent 5 – The Road of Reconstruction

For congregational or small-group worship in the wider Church
Scripture focus: Ezekiel 37 : 1–14 & John 11 : 1–45
A stone is rolled away and life is unbound.
The Church is called to join this work - to release what fear has confined, to nurture what love has already raised.
Historical context: 1982–2001 - The Church begins to rise from its own silence.
Affirm: Gays and Lesbians in the United Church (1982) and Friends of Affirm (1984) build a network of solidarity that culminates in Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble (1994/1995).
In 1991, the Affirming Congregations Program begins - and by 2000, the United Church officially endorses it, urging all ministries to participate. General Council calls for inclusive education, fair recognition of queer partnerships, and advocacy for equality under law; Gary Paterson is elected Moderator, the first openly gay leader of a major Christian denomination;

United Church partners with Rainbow Refugee Canada to sponsor Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ refugees. The Spirit breathes - not only comfort, but responsibility.

Call to Gathering – Rise, Church of New Breath
Come, people of God,
to the valley where your own bones lie waiting.

Come with the dust of past silences,
the ache of apologies not yet lived out,
and the hope that still stirs beneath the rubble.

The Spirit is here -
not to shame, but to restore.
Come, and breathe again.

Poetic Meditation - The Church That Is Learning to Breathe
The Spirit carried us to the valley,
where our own bones lay scattered.

We saw the harm our silence had done -
families estranged, callings denied,
whole generations of queer saints exiled by our fear.

And yet, there was sound -
the rattle of hope rising from the margins.
We saw Affirm forming in 1982,
Friends of Affirm joining in 1984,
and the first Affirming Congregations daring to say aloud,
"We will love without condition."
By 1994, they had become one voice -
Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble,
and the bones began to gather.

In 2000, the Church itself took a breath:
officially endorsing the Affirming Congregations Program,
urging ministries to learn, to listen, to act.
We called for education that honours queer students,
for laws that name all love as equal,
for civil recognition of same-sex partnerships.

We appeared before Parliament,
spoke before committees,
and though we should have done,
could have done more,

in the face of opposition -
we watched
as the first same-sex marriage in all of Canada
was performed in 2001.
What had begun as policy and petition
breathed into sacrament -
love declared lawful, holy, and visible.
It was resurrection in public:
the bones of fear transformed into covenant.

And resurrection rose again in 2010,
when Rev. Cindy Bourgeois was ordained -
the first openly transgender minister in our denomination -
her calling a sign that the Church could finally begin
to honour the bodies it once refused to see.
A new breath entered the valley that day.

Awakening is never abstract –
it is made of hands and names and yes.
In 2012, the Church's vision widened again:
Gary Paterson, openly gay
and unashamedly faithful, became Moderator,
a living parable of grace and courage intertwined.
That same year, the Church joined hands
with Rainbow Refugee Canada -
a sign that reconstruction begins
with shelter, with safety, with solidarity.
Each act of welcome rebuilt a fragment of what had been broken -
and the blueprint of hope took shape again.

And we learned this truth:
to breathe again as Church
is to let go of the breath we hoard.
The Spirit's air is meant for everyone.
The valley began to hum with life -
banners lifted, choirs sang, justice spoken aloud.
And the Spirit whispered …
"The work is not finished. There are bones yet to rise."

Sermon Starter – From Policy to Personification
The vision of Ezekiel invites the Church to see repentance as reconciliation and reconstruction. This week's text calls us to see resurrection as reconstruction - as the rebuilding of systems and relationships through justice.

A sermon might explore how institutions come back to life only when they breathe with the Spirit of justice.
How do leadership and compassion together form the architecture of a living Church?
What does it mean to let the Spirit rebuild the Church from its own bones?
How has advocacy become worship in our time?
Where must we still speak breath into dry systems and tired hearts?

Reflection Prompts

- What part of the Church's body still feels lifeless or resistant to change?
- Where has your community experienced resurrection through advocacy or partnership?
- In what ways can your congregation be a place of refuge and renewal?
- What does leadership in the Spirit look like when it is grounded in vulnerability and justice?
- What does the Spirit's breath look like in policy, not only prayer?
- How can you join the ongoing work of restoration begun by those who rose first?

Prayer – For a Church That Breathes Justice
Breath of Life,
You have called us from the silence of our own undoing.
Thank You for prophets who rose before us -
for Affirm United / S'affirmer Ensemble,
for Affirming Congregations that claimed courage over caution,
for teachers, pastors, Moderators, activists and allies
who refused to look away.
Breathe in us now the same Spirit of restoration.
Where our structures creak with age, make them supple again.
Where our hearts grow weary, fill them with the rhythm of hope.
May every word of inclusion
become flesh in our public witness.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending -
Go now, Church of renewed breath.
Go as people who have inhaled the Spirit's justice
and cannot exhale anything less.

Let your bones remember -
that resurrection is never private,
that repair is holy,
and that every breath you take
is borrowed from the same wind that raised you.

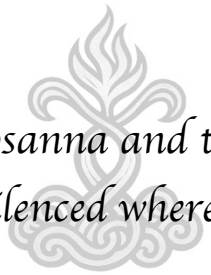
Optional Music Suggestions

"Veni Sancte Spiritus" – **Taizé**
"Ubi Caritas et Amor" – **Taizé**
"Stay With Me" - **Taizé**
"Spirit of Gentleness" - **Voices United** 375
"Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart" – **Voices United** 378
"Breathe on Me, Breath of God" – **Voices United** 382
"Draw the Circle Wide" - **More Voices** 145
"Like a Healing Stream" – **More Voices** 144
"Reconstructing Grace" – **Instrumental**
"Bones Made New" - **Instrumental**
" - "- **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿 Bridge Reflection – Between Desolation and Renewal

Hope does not erase the valley - It transforms it.
The bones of exclusion become the scaffolding of solidarity.
The breath that once gasped in isolation now fills a whole people with praise.
The queer community rose first - breath by breath, banner by banner.
The Church followed, learning to inhale the Spirit's courage and exhale justice.
Now the valley sings. What was scattered is connected. What was silenced speaks in harmony.
But the work of restoration is never finished. Each generation must breathe again - a little deeper, a little braver, until every body knows the rhythm of resurrection.

1984 – 2012 Refugees find a home in a church reborn
And Love blooms in the wilderness



The crowd shouts hosanna and the stones still speak -
truth cannot be silenced where love walks openly

PALM SUNDAY

The Road of Witness / The Road of Reckoning

Introduction

Scripture: Matthew 21:1–11 · Luke 19:28–40 - Jesus enters Jerusalem to shouts of "Hosanna!"; the city stirs with hope and fear as empire trembles. Palms and protest meet in the streets - the road that leads to liberation is also the one that leads to the cross.
Theme: Joy that dares to be seen, truth that demands to be faced. A meditation on public courage and the costly joy of being seen.

There are roads that shimmer with celebration and roads that ache with memory - sometimes they are the same road. Palm branches waving, sequins flashing, laughter carried on the wind. Joy that dares to be seen. This is the road of witness. We remember Jesus entering Jerusalem - a procession of hope and defiance, the poor and the joyful lining the way, the anxious watching from the sidelines. The air heavy with expectation, with danger. A song of liberation swelling through a city that would soon turn on its own voice.
And we remember, too, the parades of our time - Pride marches, drag performances, vigils, and protests where bodies, glittering or grieving, move through streets still learning how to hold us. Where "Hosanna!" is sometimes met with slurs or silence. Where holiness still wears high heels and heartbreak.
This Sunday, we stand again on that threshold between praise and peril.

- ***The Road of Witness –*** speaks to queer communities of the courage to be seen, to bring colour into a world that once demanded grey, to dance as a form of prayer.
- ***The Road of Reckoning*** – calls the wider Church to examine every cheer, every policy, every pulpit that has blessed the parade while ignoring the pain.

The procession continues. The crowd still chooses how to respond.
Will we shout "Hosanna!" only to fall silent when the cost of love becomes too high? Or will we walk beside one another - trans, queer, ally, wounded, forgiven - toward a city that may yet learn what the Realm of God truly looks like?

🌈 Palm / Passion Sunday - The Road of Witness

For the use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Communities
Scripture Focus: Matthew 21:1–11, Luke 19:28–40
Jesus enters the city to the cry of "Hosanna," a protest and a prayer at once. We hear our own stories in that road of witness - courage rising in the open air. The story of Palm Sunday

is a story of visibility - a moment when praise and protest are one. Christ rides in not as conqueror, but as a companion to courage. The theme for this day calls us to recognize our own processions: the roads where we have marched, sung, wept, and dared to be seen.
Historical Context: By 2016, the journey of inclusion had turned toward public advocacy. The Church supported Bill C-16, ensuring that gender identity and expression would be protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. What had begun as affirmation within congregations now became a witness beyond their walls - the Gospel spoken in policy, not only in prayer.
The church and Affirm United host a dialogue on Global Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ rights with global ecumenical and civil society partners. That same Spirit of courage carried into 2017, when the United Church and Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble launched Iridesce: The Living Apology Project. Across the country, queer and trans people shared stories once silenced - testimonies of harm and hope gathered like palms laid before a new kind of procession. It was a parade of truth-telling and transformation: the Church learning to walk the road it had once resisted.
The palm branches of celebration became banners of protest, then prayers of persistence. Throughout our history, drag performers and activists had been preachers of another kind, proclaiming a gospel of survival and beauty in defiance of despair. In their laughter, makeup, and movement was a word the Church had forgotten how to speak: Hosanna - save us.
This liturgy stands in that tension - between palms and protest, blessing and betrayal. It honours those who refused to disappear, who made art out of grief and sanctuary out of their own bodies. Their procession was never safe, but it was sacred. Every drag show, every pride march, every defiant dance of joy has been its own kind of Palm Sunday - a witness to the Christ who rides in not on power, but on love that refuses to hide.
Each story became a hosanna - not to power, but to love that rises, unashamed, in the public square. And so we take our place along the road - voices lifted, stories raised - each of us a palm unfurled in the wind, testifying that love will not be silenced, and hope still walks beside us.

Call to Gathering – An Invitation to Hallowed Visibility
Come, beloveds
of every colour, pronoun, and possibility -
those who have walked streets lined with both cheers and curses,
those who have known the weight of being seen,
and those who still tremble at the thought.

Come, bring your stories and your scars,
your glitter and your grief.
We gather with palms of courage,
to celebrate a Love that rides in among us
not to conquer, but to companion.

The Holy One is coming - not in might, but in mercy.
Come, let us bear witness

to the God who delights in every face.
This is our procession.
No borrowed robes of righteousness,
no cloaks of respectability - only our own skin,
our truth shimmering beneath
the sun of a God who delights in every shade.

Come, for Love rides again through the city gates -
on the back of every drag queen and trans youth,
in the courage of every body that refuses erasure.
Hosanna in the highest, and in the deepest too.

Poetic Reflection – The Gospel According to Glitter and Grit
There was a time when joy was dangerous,
when laughter in our voices marked us for mockery;
when colour was rebellion,
and a hand held in public could become a prayer for survival.

Still, we danced.
In basements and back rooms,
in Pride parades and on dimly lit stages -
we claimed the right to shimmer.

Some said it was indecent,
but it was incarnation.
Every lash, every sparkle,
every strut was an act of theology -
the Word becoming flesh that refuses to hide.

And still, they try to shout us down -
to silence Drag Story Time, to shame the storytellers of joy.
But our stories do not stop.
They are gospel - the gospel according to glitter and grit,
the gospel of laughter that rises from lament.

We remember the processions and the protest.
We remember the cheers that turned to jeers.
And we know: it takes holy courage to be visible
in a world that crucifies difference.

And when the laws began to change,
the Spirit did not stop at Parliament's door.
Bill C-16 named what love had always known –
that dignity is not up for debate.

When Iridesce gathered our stories like palms,
the Church heard the sound of its own repentance -
a thousand voices, shimmering,
crying: Hosanna still means Save Us.

Yet we will walk - again, again, again.
Because we are the parade.
Because love must be seen to live.
And the road stretches on –
through protest and praise, through jeers and hosannas –
carrying the sound of belonging that refuses to be unmade.

Sermon Starter – Proclaiming Joy in the Face of Jeers
The palms in our hands are not mere symbols of victory; they are banners of survival. This Sunday, let us tell the truth of what it costs to be visible - to wave joy in a world that once silenced us. Christ's entry into Jerusalem mirrors our own: the triumph of being seen, the risk of being misunderstood, and the sacredness of standing where Love insists we belong.
A sermon might explore what it means to be both celebrated and endangered, to walk through crowds that cheer yet misunderstand. It might name the courage of queer and trans visibility as a modern procession - where palms are replaced by pride flags and protest signs, where joy itself becomes defiance.
Bill C-16 and Iridesce remind us that witness is not only liturgical - it is legislative, communal, embodied. What began in worship becomes action in the world.
Where do our hosannas still need to move from celebration to solidarity?
What does holiness look like in the act of being seen?
What if our public presence is itself a form of prayer?

Reflection Prompts – Holding Both Hosanna and Heartbreak

- When have you risked being visible - and how did it change you?
- Where do you see courage in your community's creative expression, resistance, or joy?
- How might your story itself be gospel - a living procession of hope?
- How has your story, or someone's you love, become part of the living apology?
- What does it mean to see your dignity affirmed not just by faith, but in law - and how might the Church keep that witness alive?

Prayer - For the Brave and the Beautiful
God of parades and protests,
You who ride not on war horses
but in humble hearts -
bless our road of witness.
Holy One of glitter and grace,
You ride into the noise of our lives

and find beauty even in the trembling.
Bless our visibility and our vulnerability.
When our joy is misunderstood,
wrap it in Your fierce tenderness.
When our truth is mocked,
sing it louder through our laughter
and our drag and our dance.
When the crowd turns,
keep us steadfast in joy.
May our Hosannas be healing
and our laughter your song.
We wave palms that look like rainbow flags,
and shout *Hosanna* from the margins
We walk in heels and bare feet and holy drag -
saints of sequins and sorrow.
Forgive the Church its fear,
and forgive us when fear makes us forget our own beauty.
Let our bodies - trans, queer,
Differently-abled, large and small,
Black, brown, radiant -
be Your living liturgy,
proclaiming what You have always known:
that all creation is beloved and unrepeatable.
Grant us rest from protest and strength for the march,
tears for remembering and courage for tomorrow.
For You ride with us - glitter in Your hair,
dust on Your feet,
and a smile that says:
"You are and always have been …
enough."

Amen.

Blessing / Sending – For Those Who Carry Palms and Pride
Go now in the colours of courage -
your very being, a hymn of defiance and delight.
May your laughter be loud enough to frighten despair,
your tenderness strong enough to heal a world still afraid of joy.
And may you know this truth deep in your bones:
that to be fully yourself
is to wave palm branches before the Living Christ.
Go forth waving palms of courage,
carrying stories that will not be silenced.
Go with glitter on your hands and truth in your hearts.

Go knowing Love still rides through our streets -
and we are its procession.

Optional Music – Songs of Witness and Wonder

"In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful" – **Taizé**
"Hosanna Filio David" – **Taizé**
"Laudate Dominum" - **Taizé**
"All Gory, Laud and Honour" – **Voices United** 122
"Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" – **Voices United** 123
"And on This Path" - **More Voices** 8
"When They Heard Jesus Was Coming" - **More Voices** 128
"Procession of Joy and Protest" – **Instrumental**
"Rainbow Hosanna" - **Instrumental**
"Hosanna in the Streets" - **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Palm / Passion Sunday – The Road of Reckoning

For congregational or small-group worship within the wider Church

Scripture focus: Matthew 21:1–11; Luke 19:28–40

The road fills with palms and protest, with yearning for liberation. As Christ enters Jerusalem, the crowd cries out with praise that turns to fear, courage that turns to silence. The theme of this day calls the Church to reckon with its own processions - moments when it has cheered love with its lips yet betrayed it with its actions. The Church must choose its place in this procession - whether it will walk the road of justice despite the cost.

Historical context: Palm Sunday asks the Church to remember that the road to resurrection begins with uncomfortable praise. The cheers that welcomed Jesus quickly turned to condemnation - and in many ways, the same has been true of the Church's path toward inclusion.

By 2016, the Church's words began to take flesh in public witness. Supporting Bill C-16, it joined voices calling for gender identity and expression to be protected in Canadian law - a sign that repentance was learning to speak not only in prayer, but in policy. The palms of proclamation had become the work of legislation: love written into justice.

The church and Affirm United host a dialogue on Global Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ rights with global ecumenical and civil society partners. In 2017, the Church and Affirm United/S'affirmer Ensemble launched Iridesce: The Living Apology Project, a national invitation to listen - to gather the stories of Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people who had carried both faith and wound.

Congregations that once turned away now opened their doors to hear, to lament, and to begin again.
The Church's road from 1988 forward was lined with both hosannas and heartbreak. Other denominations began similar journeys - the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada all wrestling publicly with affirmation, repentance, and renewal. Each step revealed the truth: applause for inclusion is easier than the work of living it.
Palm Sunday became, in its own way, a rehearsal for this public confession: a procession not toward triumph, but toward truth. To wave the palms is to commit ourselves to follow Christ into the streets - where love must be visible, justice must be lived, and apology must take on the shape of action.
The palms we wave this Sunday are not triumphal; they are testimonies. They remind us that the Church's welcome is still becoming real, and that the crowd's song of "Hosanna" must become a lifelong vow: to bless what God blesses, to love what Love loves, to follow the Christ who always walks with the marginalized first. And so we stand again at the edge of the road - palms in hand, hearts unguarded - called to let our praise become protest, and our apology become the work of love made visible.

Call to Gathering – An Invitation to See Who We Have Missed
Come, Church of Christ –
come down from the balconies and join the parade.
Step out from the safety of your pews
into the street where glitter catches the sunlight
and songs rise from voices you once called too loud.

Christ enters our streets again,
asking not for our applause but for our courage.
Let us follow Love where it dares to go.
This is not a rehearsal for holiness -
it is the real procession,
and Christ is already here,
riding in on laughter and lace,
in the sway of hips that will not apologize for joy.

Come, you who have blessed the palms
but ignored the hands that waved them.
Come, you who thought the procession was for you.
Come, and learn again what Hosanna means.

Poetic Reflection – Love In the Streets, Truth In the Crowd
We did not see it, not at first -
the holiness in the drag queen's dance,
the prayer in the painted face,
the gospel written in glitter and grit.

While we recited our creeds,
another gospel was already being preached -
in the laughter that rose from lament.
Their stories were good news to those who had ears to hear,
even when the Church had none.

We turned away from what we feared might unmake us,
forgetting that You, O Christ,
are always found in what unsettles.

While we kept our pews in tidy rows,
others met in basements and back alleys,
turning survival into song.
We mistook our silence for neutrality
and our policies for prudence.

But still the procession came -
through every Pride march and protest,
through vigils for the lost,
through the sparkle that would not be subdued.
It came in colour and courage,
and in the fierce love of those who stayed
even when the Church would not.

We remember the palms and the protest,
the cheers that turned to jeers,
the bravery of those who kept walking anyway.
We loved the sound of “Hosanna,”
but we missed the cry beneath it.
We know now: it takes holy courage
to be visible in a world that crucifies difference.
And perhaps this is where Christ has always been -
not above the crowd,
but among the witnesses,
bearing the weight of beauty that will not be denied.

Bill C-16 became more than a bill –
it was repentance in ink, an act of seeing long overdue.
And when the Church joined Iridesce,
it turned its palms outward,
finally learning that apology begins with listening.
Each story gathered was both confession and call –
a reminder that love, once spoken aloud, must be lived.

Now the street hums beneath our feet.
The same Christ who once turned our tables
has turned our gaze.
We see the palms we dropped long ago,
trampled but not destroyed,
and the ones we left behind still waving -
still waiting - for us to join them.

This is the road of reckoning -
not shame, but sight.
A conversion of vision.
The moment we realize the parade we feared
was always heaven passing by.

And the road stretches on - toward the cross,
toward the reckoning yet unfinished,
calling the Church to follow with humility,
with courage, and with open eyes.

This is the time -
not to wave palms,
but to roll up our sleeves.
To rebuild what our fear tore down,
and to learn how to sing a better Hosanna.

Sermon Starter — Learning to See Who Walks Beside Us
Palm Sunday reveals both celebration and blindness - how the same crowd that shouted "Hosanna!" failed to recognize the cost of love. What would it take for our faith communities to cheer as boldly for others' liberation as for our own comfort?
Palm Sunday calls the Church from proclamation to protest - from waving palms to walking beside those still waiting for justice. Bill C-16 and Iridesce stand as mirrors: policy and story revealing what repentance looks like when it takes form.
A sermon might explore the difference between public approval and prophetic witness or ask what happens when the Church's "Hosanna" becomes performative - when welcome is spoken louder than justice lived. It could name the courage of those who stood for inclusion amid hostility, and the ongoing call for the Church to follow Christ into uncomfortable streets.
You might invite the congregation to ask:
Who have we cheered for without truly seeing?
Where has our faith turned from witness to avoidance?
How do we welcome Christ among us when he arrives in the faces of those we have marginalized?

This might be opportunity to lift up those who carried the palms of protest - queer and trans people, drag performers, allies - whose joy and courage have been met with scorn, and yet they have continued to march in love's procession.

Reflection Prompts - Confession in the Crowd

- Where have we mistaken noise for faithfulness - applause for action?
- How do we respond when the crowd turns, when justice costs something real?
- Where in your life or community is courage being called forth right now?
- How can joy and justice meet in the same breath?
- Where has your community seen repentance take concrete shape - in advocacy, in partnership, in changed hearts?
- What might it mean for apology to keep unfolding, not as a statement, but as a public practice of love?
- How can the Church learn to see those it has silenced as the bearers of gospel truth?

Prayer – For the Church That Must Learn to Follow

Christ of palms and protest,
You enter our sanctuaries with truth that unsettles.
Forgive our silence when we should have shouted.
Teach us to follow you beyond the parade -
into the places where love costs us something.
Make our Hosannas honest,
our repentance real,
our welcome wide.
God of Dust and Glitter,
You who ride in every act of courage -
forgive us for mistaking reverence for restraint.
Forgive us for the centuries we spent
deciding who could carry Your image.
For the pulpits that stayed silent
while prophets danced in the street.
Forgive our applause that cost others their peace.
Teach us the rhythm of repair.
Let our repentance move like procession -
public, persistent, and embodied.
When fear tempts us to retreat to safety,
remind us of the One who stayed
until the whole city heard the truth.
When shame whispers that it's too late,
remind us that resurrection waits
for those who risk being changed.
Teach us the courage to listen
when truth is uncomfortable,

to repent not with words but with work.
Let our pulpits speak without fear,
our congregations act without hesitation,
our leadership open without condition.
Make our apology flesh - visible in justice,
audible in affirmation, tangible in policy,
and radiant in love.
Turn our apologies into transformation,
our intentions into incarnation.
May this Church - broken, beloved, still learning -
be known not by its slogans,
but by its solidarity.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending – For Those Who Choose to Walk Beside
Go now, Church of glitter and grace,
not as spectators but as participants in the parade.
Not triumphant but teachable.
Not blameless, but brave.
May our palms become promises,
our hymns become action,
our welcome become sanctuary.
And may every step toward justice
become a hymn that even the wounded can sing.
For Christ rides through every drag performance,
every protest chant,
every tender act of truth-telling -
still calling, still inviting, still undoing.

Hosanna - not for who we were,
but for who, by grace, we may yet become.

Optional Music – Songs for the Church That Chooses Cross Over Comfort

- "Crucem Tuam Adoramus, Domine" – **Taizé**
- "Jesus, Remember Me" – **Taizé**
- "Ride On, Ride On in Majesty" – **Voices United** 127
- "All Glory, Laud and Honour" – **Voices United** 122
- "O God of Every Nation" – **Voices United 677**
- "Many Are the Light Beams" **Voices United**
- "Christ Has No Body Now But Yours" – **More Voices** 171
- "Sisters Let Us Walk Together" – **More Voices** 179
- "Shadowed Procession" – **Instrumental**

"Echoes of Courage" - **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿Bridge Reflection – The Meeting of Roads

This bridge is intended to rest between the two liturgies, The Road of Witness and The Road of Reckoning. It marks the point where the voices of the queer community and the wider Church meet - not in completion, but in conversation.
The Meeting of Roads can be used in several ways:

- As a spoken interlude: two readers, or two groups, alternating the "Witness" and "Reckoning" stanzas. This symbolizes mutual recognition — each community hearing and being heard.
- As a communal reading: one side of the congregation taking the "Witness" lines and the other the "Reckoning," allowing the full assembly to embody dialogue and shared repentance.
- As silent reflection: read internally or displayed on screen between the two liturgies, accompanied by soft instrumental music (piano, cello, or gentle percussion).
- As musical response: a soloist or choir may sing a refrain between sections - such as "Draw the Circle Wide" or "We Are a Rainbow."

This moment of intersection is not meant to resolve tension, but to hold it tenderly – to name the distance that still exists, and to affirm the shared hope that both roads lead toward healing, justice, and joy. In the spirit of Palm Sunday, it is a turning point - where witness meets reckoning, and the crowd begins to become the Church again.

Witness: We have walked this road in sequins and sorrow, in drag and dust, in laughter and lament.
Reckoning: We have watched from the sidelines, unsure, afraid, not knowing what holiness looked like in motion.
Witness: But our stories did not stop - we kept dancing when the music turned cruel, we kept telling the truth when silence was safer.
Reckoning: And we are learning now to listen, to see the gospel glistening where we once saw only glare.
Together: The road of witness meets the road of reckoning. Not in triumph, but in truth. Not in apology alone, but in the promise to walk together - dust and glitter, hymn and heartbeat - until the procession becomes one.

2016–2017 – Affirmation of dignity
The parade becomes protest, becomes prayer



To kneel is to remember - that power is not in the hands that wound, but in the ones that wash.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The Road of Tenderness / The Road of Humility

Introduction

Scripture Focus: John 13:1–17, 31–35 - Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, revealing that love's truest power is service.
Theme: Love that kneels, listens, and stays.

Maundy Thursday draws us into the intimacy of the table, the scent of bread and oil, the sound of water poured into a basin. It is the night of trust and trembling, of companionship and betrayal. Christ invites us not to believe more, but to love more - in ways that risk vulnerability and demand humility.

- ***The Road of Tenderness*** – calls queer communities to gather the courage to remain open-hearted and soft in a world that has too often betrayed or denied love's depth.
- ***The Road of Humility*** – calls the wider Church to kneel, to listen, and to serve with sincerity rather than control, to learn to wash the feet it once wounded.

Together, these roads bend toward one another, meeting at the basin - where Love becomes both servant and teacher, and the world is changed by a single act of care.

🌈 Maundy Thursday - The Road of Tenderness

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Communities
Scripture: John 13:1–17, 31–38
Jesus kneels to wash his disciples' feet - a gesture of intimacy that defies hierarchy and expectation. This is love made tangible, vulnerable, and close. For queer people of faith, this story is a reclamation of tenderness: to love boldly even when love has been weaponized, to create family where others have withdrawn theirs.
Historical Context: There were years when tenderness was dangerous.
In the wake of rejection and ridicule, queer communities became one another's sanctuary. When churches closed their doors, living rooms became chapels; chosen families gathered around kitchen tables instead of altars. During the height of the AIDS crisis, love itself became liturgy - feeding, bathing, tending the dying when others refused to touch them. That kind of love - embodied, enduring, defiant - was holy long before the Church knew how to call it so.
By 2019, the work of healing widened again. The United Church supported *Revitalizing the Circle* - Saskatoon's first Two-Spirit Powwow - celebrating the sacred gifts of gender-diverse

and queer Indigenous peoples. It was an act of tenderness made public: honouring spirit, body, and culture as one.
This marked yet another circle of belonging - where story, ceremony, and song became the basin and towel of mutual care. Maundy Thursday's love took on a drumbeat; the Church knelt not to wash, but to listen.
Tenderness has always been our resistance: a hand held in public, a pronoun spoken correctly, a meal shared without shame. Every act of care has been a washing of feet, a testament that love is stronger than fear.

Call to Gathering – Come to the Table of the Beloved
Come, beloveds -
to the table where Love kneels beside us.
Bring your weariness, your guardedness, your ache for touch.
Here, every wound is seen, every story honoured.
Come, and let mercy wash over you like warm water.

Poetic Meditation – the Courage to Stay Soft
This is the night when Love stoops low -
when the Holy dips fingers into water
and calls it sacred.

We have known this night:
when tenderness was mistaken for weakness,
when gentleness was called a sin.

Still, we loved -
still, we risked
the washbasin,
the towel,
the table.

And in 2019, the drum sounded again -
Two-Spirit voices increasing,
songs rising like blessed water.
"Revitalizing the Circle," they called it - a powwow of spirit and survival,
where tenderness meant truth,
and identity was danced into prayer.
We saw what it meant to serve:
not to lead, but to listen; not to fix,
but to stand alongside.

Still, we say:
this body, this touch, this care -
all of it is holy.

And the circle keeps turning –
love bending low, hands open wide,
carrying us toward the night
where mercy will be broken and shared again.

Sermon Starter – The Vulnerability of Love
Maundy Thursday is about embodied love - washing feet, sharing bread, honouring one another's wholeness. Revitalizing the Circle calls us into that same posture of humility: to honour Two-Spirit wisdom as sacred leadership within queer and faith communities.
A sermon might explore the courage of tenderness - how love made visible in action becomes its own resistance. It could speak of the queer sacrament of chosen family: the communion of those who stay when others leave.
It might ask:
How do we learn to kneel before difference - to let our service be guided by those whose stories have been erased?
How does vulnerability become sacred when it is met with compassion?
Where is Christ still kneeling, still serving, still washing our weary feet?

Reflection Prompts – Listening with the Heart That Has Been Broken

- When has tenderness been an act of courage in your life?
- What does "chosen family" mean to you as a sacred reality?
- How might you embody love as service this Holy Week?
- When have you witnessed love expressed through culture, ceremony, or community beyond the Church's walls?
- How do Two-Spirit teachings invite you to see tenderness as strength?
- What might it mean for your own community to 'revitalize the circle' - to create spaces of belonging that honour every identity and tradition?

Prayer – For the Hands That Wash and the Hearts That Risk
Tender Christ,
you kneel in the dust beside us,
and call our bodies holy.
Teach us to love without apology,
to serve without fear,
to offer grace even in the shadow of betrayal.
Let the water we pour become healing,
and the hands we hold become home.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending – Go in the Grace of the Basin
Go with water still dripping from your hands.
Go in tenderness, fierce and gentle.

Go with hearts open to the holiness of care,
and may every act of love you offer
become the basin where Christ still kneels.

Optional Music – Songs of the Basin and the Beloved

"Ubi Caritas et Amor" - **Taizé**
"Eat This Bread" – **Taizé**
"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With You Love" – **Voices United** 593
"An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare" – **Voices United** 130
"When Painful Mem'ries" – **More Voices** 74
"Take, O Take Me As I Am" – **More Voices** 84
"Table of Grace" – **Instrumental**
"Washing Feet" – **Instrumental**
" - "– **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Maundy Thursday - The Road of Humility

For congregational or small-group worship within the wider Church

Scripture: John 13:1–17, 34–35

At the table of Holy Week, Christ overturns power. He takes on the posture of the servant and commands us to do the same.

For the Church, this story is both gift and reckoning: a call to kneel before the very people it once rejected, and to learn again what love looks like.

Historical Context: Words of welcome came easier than acts of listening. Those wounded by the Church's exclusion were invited to return, but too infrequently were they met by communities ready to kneel, to serve, to change.

Humility is not an announcement but a practice. It is the basin and the towel - the courage to confess that we have caused pain and the willingness to begin repair through action, not apology alone.

In 2019, the Church was invited once more to learn the posture of service. Through its support of Revitalizing the Circle - Saskatoon's first Two-Spirit Powwow - it joined Indigenous and queer communities in a circle of renewal. The drums and dances became a living parable: reconciliation not as policy, but as presence. Maundy Thursday's basin overflowed - reminding the Church that humility begins in the willingness to listen, and that service must honour the wisdom of those it once silenced.

Christ invites the Church to unlearn dominance - to let go of its compulsion to lead and instead to follow the love that kneels. This is the posture of true discipleship: not standing at the head of the table but kneeling where the hurt has been.

Call to Gathering – Come to the Water of Learning
Come, people of the basin and the towel.
Come to the place where love breaks power open.

Christ meets us here -
not as judge, but as servant,
inviting us to kneel beside those we have wronged.

Poetic Meditation – The Posture of the Servant
The water shimmers with memory.
Every drop remembers a name we forgot to bless.

We have stood too long above one another,
forgetting that Love's true posture is low.
So, we come now - awkward, afraid, sincere -
to learn the humility of touch,
to listen where once we spoke too much.

The sound of the drum reached even here –
a rhythm older than empire, stronger than silence.
At the Two-Spirit Powwow, the Church stood at the edge
and remembered how to listen.
To kneel is to learn again
that holiness is plural, that humility is kinship.
The towel becomes a drum,
the basin a circle,
and love finds its home
in every body that dances free.

Christ's hands are still wet from washing,
and the towel waits for ours to take its turn.
With humble hearts we leave the basin,
still shimmering with grace –
a reminder that true service will always lead us to the cross,
and to the work that waits beyond it.

Sermon Starter – The Grace of Kneeling Low
As Jesus knelt to wash the disciples' feet, so too is the Church called to kneel in reverence before the sacred traditions and identities it once dismissed. Revitalizing the Circle becomes a gospel moment - an act of humility that restores relationship.
A sermon might explore what it means for the Church to kneel - to release power, to listen deeply, to let repentance become relationship.
It could name that love which washes the feet it once wounded.
It might ask:

How might Maundy Thursday's commandment - to love one another - be expanded through Two-Spirit wisdom and ceremony?"
How can humility become the Church's most credible witness?
What does it mean to love as Christ loved - in service, not superiority?

Reflection Prompts – What Does Servanthood Cost Us?

- Where is your community being called to kneel and listen?
- What would it look like to serve those who no longer trust the Church?
- What does service look like when the Church stands not at the centre, but in the circle?
- Where can your community create space for Indigenous and Two-Spirit voices to lead?
- How does shared celebration become a sacrament of humility?

Prayer – For the Church That Learns to Kneel

Servant Christ,
you upend our hierarchies and cleanse our hearts.
Teach us the holiness of humility,
the grace of listening,
the courage to serve where we once stood in pride.
Wash away our self-importance,
and make space for compassion to flow freely again.

Amen.

Blessing / Sending – Go with Hands Ready to Serve the Wounded Christ

Go from this place with water on your hands
and humbleness in your steps.
Let your words become service,
your service become love,
your love become the washing of feet
in every life you touch.

Optional Music – Songs of Learning, Listening and Letting Go

"Ubi Caritas et Amor" - **Taizé**
"Stay with Me" – **Taizé**
"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" – **Voices United** 593
"Go to Dark Gethsemane" – **Voices United** 133
"Let us Build a House – **More Voices** 1
"Be Still and Know That I Am God" – **More Voices** 77
"God in the Darkness" – **More Voices** 17
"Basin and Towel" – **Instrumental**
"Love's Gesture" – **Instrumental**

" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿Bridge Reflection - Between Tenderness and Humility

The basin stands between us -
its water rippling with memory.

One pours from a heart long wounded,
the other from hands learning to serve.

Between tenderness and humility lies the meeting place -
where the one who was refused love
and the one who withheld it
both kneel together,
learning again what grace feels like.

The water is not finished speaking.
It tells of tears and cleansing,
of wounds bathed and healed by touch.
In its reflection, we see our shared humanity -
and the Love that bends low enough
to hold us both.

2019 - Two-Spirit drums rise at Saskatoon's powwow
Tenderness learns the rhythm of repair



Even here, where love is broken, the work of mending begins -
and grace weaves it's threads through creation

GOOD FRIDAY

The Road of Suffering / The Road of Repair

Introduction

Scripture Focus: John 18: 1 – 19:42 – Jesus is crucified between two others. Darkness covers the land. The curtain of the temple is torn, and silence falls.
Theme: Love that endures, grieves, and transforms.

Good Friday is not a day of answers but of honesty - a day when the world's cruelty is laid bare and love's persistence is tested. It is the place where we face the cross, not as ornament but as revelation: where human violence meets divine vulnerability, and the truth of our choices is exposed in the light of mercy.

- ***The Road of Suffering*** - the crucifixion as a mirror of queer endurance, the sacredness of bodies condemned, and the persistence of love amid loss. Here, every scar becomes testimony, every silenced voice a hymn of defiant faith.
- ***The Road of Repair*** - the cross as revelation of harm done and harm endured, the call to repentance in the wider Church, that costs something real, and the work of mending what was broken through love made active.

These two roads meet at Calvary - where Love, wounded yet unbowed, stretches out its arms to embrace the world. Here, the Church is stripped of power and the Beloved is revealed as God in flesh, bearing every scar that still cries out for justice and healing.

🌈 Good Friday - The Road of Suffering

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Communities
Scripture: John 18: 1 – 19: 42
The crucifixion as a mirror of queer suffering and endurance - the sacredness of bodies condemned and the persistence of love amid loss.
This is the story of Love refused, Love betrayed, Love crucified - and yet still, Love endures. For queer communities, Good Friday is not a distant drama; it is the memory of our own crucifixions - the slow suffering of rejection, silence, erasure, and fear, met by a love that refuses to die.
Historical Context: The queer story has always known the cross.
In alleyways and sanctuaries, on the steps of parliaments and the pews of churches, queer bodies have borne wounds that mirror Christ's own - wounds of ridicule, of abandonment, of being told that who we are must be buried to make others feel safe.

By 2023, the road of witness had widened to include voices from across the globe. The United Church hosted an Asian Consultation on Gender and Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Justice, creating new pathways of solidarity and mutual learning. In 2024, it prepared for a Gender and Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Consultation with African partners in Zimbabwe, recognizing that the work of liberation must be global and grounded in local realities.
Even at the cross, love keeps expanding its reach - crossing oceans, languages, and borders.
Still, the crucifixion echoes through every life lost to hatred and despair.
It lives in the memories of those denied communion, denied family, denied safety. It shudders in the pain of those subjected to conversion therapy, whose faith communities became instruments of torment.
And yet, even there, Love endured.
Queer people prayed, sang, held vigils, and buried one another when the Church would not.
We found one another in the shadows - and there, we met the God who never left.
Good Friday is not our defeat; it is our truth-telling.
It is where we see that God has never been on the side of those who crucify, but always with those who hang beside Love, asking only to be remembered, reminding us that resurrection begins wherever courage refuses to stay silent.

Call to Gathering – Come Beneath the Shadow of the Cross
Come, beloveds -
come to the foot of the cross,
where grief and grace breathe the same air.
Bring your tears, your memories, your sacred rage.
Here, no wound is too deep for mercy,
no silence too long for love to find its voice again.

Poetic Meditation – The Sacredness of Endurance
This is the day the sky went dark,
and the world held its breath.

We have known this darkness -
the hush after slurs,
the quiet of closets,
the chill of hands withdrawn.

But Love was never buried quietly.
Even here,
amid the nails and the jeers,
Love speaks -
in the sigh of a dying friend,
in the courage of a trans child who lives,
in the drag queen reading stories
to children who still believe in rainbows.

And the story continues - not bound to one land or tongue.
In Asia and Africa, new voices rise –
prayers spoken in many rhythms of love and struggle.
Even here, at the cross, the circle widens;
the body of Christ becomes the body of all who resist erasure.
Each consultation, each song of courage,
is a resurrection seed sown in the soil of suffering.

And so the road stretches far beyond our own remembering –
every place where love learns the language of courage.
Here, even in the shadow of the cross,
we hear a harmony of voices rising - a chorus of survival, solidarity, and song.
Through deserts and doorways, through songs sung in tongues of longing.
In every aching heart, love does not die - it migrates, it multiplies.
Even from the cross, the Beloved whispers across borders:
"You are mine. You are free. You are whole."

The cross is not the end of the story.
It is Love's insistence
that nothing - not even death -
can silence the holy.

Sermon Starter – The God Who Knows Our Wounds
The cross has never been local. Today, as the Church gathers voices from Asia and Africa, we remember that Good Friday is a shared wound - and resurrection, a shared calling.
What does it mean that the story of Christ's suffering is now told in many tongues through Two-Spirit dances, African prayers, Asian hymns of justice?
How might global dialogue reframe our understanding of repair - not as charity, but as mutual rising?
A sermon might explore the cross as the place where the sacred and the condemned meet.
It could name the queer experience as modern crucifixion - where society's fear and faith's failures collide upon human flesh.
It might ask:
How does Christ's suffering speak to our own?
How do we hold the tension between despair and defiant hope?
Where do we see resurrection stirring, even here?

Reflection Prompts – Finding Sacredness in Survival

- What memories of exclusion, harm, or loss do you bring to the cross this year?
- Where have you seen love persist amid suffering?
- How might you honour those who did not survive their own Good Friday moments?
- How does your understanding of suffering and endurance change when you hear it echoed in global voices?

- What would it mean to see your own story as part of a worldwide body of hope?
- Where are the global intersections of queer, trans, and faith resilience calling you to stand in solidarity?

Prayer – For the Crucified and the Courageous
Crucified Christ,
whose arms still open wide,
receive our pain and our protest.
Gather the lost, the silenced, the shamed.
Bless every scar that tells a story of survival.
Let your wounds speak hope into ours.
Let your death remind us that love cannot be killed -
only hidden for a time,
waiting for dawn.

Amen.

Blessing – Go Bearing the Light the Cannot be Overshadowed
Go gently from this place of sorrow.
Go knowing that every act of endurance is holy.
Go in the company of all who have suffered,
and all who still believe
that love will have the final word.

Optional Music – Laments and Longing for the Light

"Jesus, Remember Me" - **Taizé**
"Within Our Darkest Night" – **Taizé**
"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" – **Voices United** 145
"O Sacred Head Now Wounded" – **Voices United** 145
"Jesus Came a Child Like Me" - **Voices United** 583
"Beneath the Cross of Jesus" – **Voices United** 135
"God Weeps" – **More Voices** 78
"How Deep the Peace" - **More Voices** 95
"Crucifixion Meditation" - **Instrumental**
"Lament for the Lost" – **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝️ Good Friday - The Road of Repair

For congregational or small-group worship within the wider Church

Scripture: John 18: 1 – 19: 42

Confronting complicity - the cross as revelation of the harm done, the invitation to repentance that costs something real.

On this day, Christ's suffering exposes the cost of human cruelty and indifference.

The cross is not only a symbol of salvation - it is a mirror. It reveals what happens when fear triumphs over love, when silence becomes complicity, and when religion mistakes control for holiness.

For the Church, Good Friday is a call to repair - to see in Christ's broken body all those whom we have crucified by exclusion, prejudice, and neglect, and to confess that redemption cannot come apart from restoration.

Historical Context: The cross has stood for centuries at the centre of Christian faith - yet too often, the Church has failed to recognize who hangs there.

In every age, those deemed unworthy, sinful, or other have been placed upon it: queer and trans people, Indigenous and racialized communities, survivors of abuse, those told that their suffering was their own fault.

Good Friday must mean more than remembrance - it must mean truth-telling. It must mean recognizing that theology has been used as a weapon, pulpits as platforms for pain. It must mean lamenting every life lost to shame, to suicide, to the Church's indifference or denial.

Today, the cross stands not as decoration but as revelation.

The crucified Christ bears the weight of the Church's history - its misused authority, its unholy silences.

To face the cross is to look into that history without flinching, and to hear again Christ's words: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Forgiveness, however, does not erase responsibility - it deepens it.

It calls the Church beyond confession into covenant, beyond apology into action, beyond sorrow into solidarity.

In 2023, the Church hosted an Asian Consultation on Gender and Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Justice, engaging partners across the Pacific in shared conversation about faith, culture, and inclusion. And in 2024, it planned a Gender and Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Consultation in Zimbabwe - a step toward deep listening with African partners whose realities differ yet intertwine with our own.

These gatherings signal a turning point: the Church's understanding of repair is no longer confined to apology, but expanding toward accompaniment - the ongoing work of relationship across borders.

This is The Road of Repair - where repentance becomes rebuilding, and love begins its long work of making all things new.

Call to Gathering – Come to the Place of Truth and Transformation

Come, people of the cross.

Come to the place where the truth cannot be avoided.

Here, the world's cruelty and Christ's compassion stand side by side.

Here, our silence is shattered by love's cry.
Come, and let the reckoning begin.

Poetic Meditation – The Cross as Mirror and Mercy
The cross stands - not as triumph,
but as truth made visible.
Its wood remembers the hands that built it,
the weight it was made to bear.
It casts a long shadow -
stretching through centuries of faith and fear.
We have hung too many there -
our prophets and our queer children,
our doubters and our dreamers,
our wounded and our wild ones.
We have built sanctuaries beside the gallows
and called it faith.

We look up and see ourselves.
The Church - splintered,
its edges sharp with fear and pride -
held in this wounded love.

This is not a place of judgment,
but invitation:
to lay down our certainties,
to touch what we have broken,
to learn how mercy feels against our palms.

Yet still, Christ hangs -
not as victim,
but as truth.

His wounds are mirrors.
His silence, an indictment.
His mercy, our only hope.

The body of Christ is not distant.
It is every body we refused to bless,
every life we called unworthy,
every silence we mistook for peace.

Across the world, the circle turns –
Asia, Africa, the Americas –
each heartbeat echoing the same prayer:

“Do this in remembrance of me.”
The Church begins to understand:
remembrance is not nostalgia;
it is the labour of justice.

Even here, at the cross,
we see the map of mercy redrawn –
nations and peoples gathered, not around power,
but around the wound that unites us.

Yet, Love remains -
not to erase the past,
but to write it again,
to bind the cracks with covenant,
to teach the wounded Church
how to be a healer, not a judge.

And now the cross is lifted higher –
not as triumph, but as a gathering point
for all who labour toward justice.
New companions join the journey,
and the Church begins to learn again
that the body of Christ is broader than its borders.

This is not the end.
It is the beginning of repair -
where mercy becomes movement,
and love remembers that for which it was created.

Sermon Starter – The Cross as Mirror and Measure
Good Friday teaches the Church that repair must reach beyond itself. These consultations in Asia and Africa are reminders that Christ’s suffering transcends all sorts of boundaries - and so must our compassion.
How can the Church practice solidarity that listens first, especially when invited into contexts not its own?
What does global partnership look like when shaped by humility rather than dominance?”
A sermon might explore the cross as the Church’s mirror - revealing both the love we profess and the harm we have done. It could name the crucifixion as ongoing - every time the Church defends privilege instead of justice or preaches peace while ignoring pain.
It might ask:
How do we look upon the cross without turning away?
What must die in the Church for love to rise again?
What would repentance look like if it took the shape of solidarity?

Reflection Prompts – Facing the Shadow, Committing to Repair

- What does the cross reveal about our faith community's history?
- How can the Church move from guilt toward genuine change?
- Who is being crucified in our time, and how can we stand beside them?
- What might it mean for the Church to see its call to repair as global rather than national?
- Where can your community partner, listen, or learn from those walking parallel roads of justice and faith?
- How might true accompaniment transform the Church's understanding of power and repentance?

Prayer – For the Church that Bears the Cost of Love

Christ of the cross,
you bear what we cannot abide,
and reveal what we would rather not see.
We confess our complicity -
in silence, in fear, in theologies that wound.
We confess our tendency to look away.
Let this Good Friday break us open.
Let your mercy undo our self-deception.
Give us courage to tell the truth,
and strength to live it.

Amen.

Blessing – Go Changed by the Light of What You Have Seen

Go now, with the cross still before you,
its shadow long, its truth unsoftened.

Do not hurry from this place.
Let what you have seen stay with you -
the wounds, the silence, the mercy that holds them both.

May the ache of this day become your teacher.
May the memory of harm become your map.
And may love - crucified and risen -
be the work of your hands and the fire in your heart.

Go as people who have looked upon truth
and chosen to live differently because of it.
Go in the name of Christ,
whose forgiveness calls us not to forget,
but to repair.

Optional Music – Laments for a Church That Must Rise Changed

"Jesus, Remember Me" - **Taizé**
"O Lord, Hear My Prayer" - **Taizé**
"Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" – **Voices United** 144
"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" – **Voices United** 658
"Though Ancient Walls May Still Stand Proud" – **Voices United** 691
"Christ Has No Body Now But Yours" - **More Voices** 171
"God Weeps at Love Withheld" – **More Voices** 78
"Cross of Shadow" - **Instrumental**
"Requiem for the Silenced" - **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

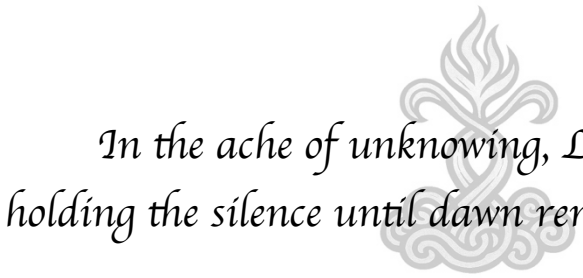
🌿Bridge Reflection - Between Suffering and Reckoning

The cross casts a shadow that touches us all. One stands beneath it in memory of survival, the other, in confession of complicity.

Between suffering and reckoning lies the truth we share - that no one escapes the weight of the image, and yet no one carries it alone.

The queer body, crucified by shame, and the Church body, burdened by guilt,
are both held in the same outstretched arms.
Here, pain meets repentance.
Here, love refuses to die.
Here, the work of resurrection begins - not in triumph, but in the courage to face the cross together.

2023 – 2024 – Across borders voices rise in prayer
Love stretches out its arms and does not turn away



In the ache of unknowing, Love keeps vigil -
holding the silence until dawn remembers how to speak

HOLY SATURDAY

The Road of Waiting / The Road of Witness

Introduction

Scripture Focus: Matthew 27:57–66; Luke 23:50–56
Jesus is laid in the tomb. The stone is sealed. The women keep watch.
Theme: Waiting in uncertainty; tending what is not yet restored; trusting what is still becoming.
Holy Saturday is the pause between what has been shattered and what is still unseen. It is the ache that lingers after the work of love has cost everything - the quiet where hope and fear breathe the same air. This is not an ending but a holding, the in-between space where the work of repair deepens into trust.
Holy Saturday stands between lament and rising - the pause between confession and transformation. In 2025, the Church's apology to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities becomes this kind of day: solemn, trembling, necessary.
It is not yet resurrection. It is a fire kindled in the night - a promise, not a conclusion.

- ***The Road of Waiting*** –holds queer communities in the sacred stillness after survival, when grief and endurance sit side by side. It honours the sacred fortitude of those who have lived too long in the in-between: between exclusion and welcome, between despair and resilience, between crucifixion and resurrection. It respects the truth that healing cannot be hurried, that resurrection is slow work, and that rest itself can be resistance.
- ***The Road of Witness*** – reminds the wider Church to stay present beside the tombs it once built, to listen before speaking, the call to stay present when words run out, to tend what cannot yet rise. It is the silence of accountability, heavy with grief, thick with prayer, and already trembling with the faint pulse of dawn - the waiting that prepares the soul for new creation.

Together they remind us that repair is not complete until it learns to wait - to honour what is buried, to believe that even in the dark, love is still at work.
Here, both roads converge in silence - not empty, but full of listening.
Holy Saturday stands in the pause between sorrow and rising, between apology and transformation. This is the night when the Church lights a new fire - from which the Christ Candle burns and each heart receives its flame.
This moment finds echo in the Apology to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities. Like that flicker in the dark, it is not the end of a journey but its rekindling - fragile, luminous, calling for care.

Apology without action is an ember that cools too soon. But when tended, truth becomes flame; when shared, love becomes light. This night invites us all - queer and ally, wounded and repentant - to bear that flame forward into the dawn.

🌈 Holy Saturday - The Road of Waiting

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities

Scripture: Matthew 27:57–66; Luke 23:50–56

The sacred endurance of those who have lived too long in the in-between: between exclusion and welcome, between despair and resilience, between crucifixion and resurrection.

The story has paused, but it is not over. The tomb is sealed. The body lies still. And yet, even in this silence, love keeps breathing -quietly, unseen.

Holy Saturday is the queer experience of waiting in faith's long twilight: of holding vigil through the nights of rejection, of tending the embers of hope when resurrection feels far away. It is the sacred endurance of those who still dare to believe that life will rise again.

Historical Context: In 2025, the United Church of Canada offered its long-awaited Apology to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities - words spoken in humility and hope, acknowledging decades of exclusion and harm. There were those who received them as balm; others, with skepticism or weariness. Some wept, some turned away.

Between the Church's harm and its apology, between policy and transformation, between inclusion and belonging - queer people have lived Holy Saturday for decades. We have known what it means to wait in that silence: waiting for recognition, for safety, for healing, for home.

We have known the exhaustion of hope deferred, and the grace of those who kept watch even when belief faltered.

This waiting is not passive. It is holy work - like the women at the tomb who refused to leave. It is prayer in the dark. It is faith that endures even when it can no longer sing.

For queer people of faith, the apology was not a conclusion but a kindling - fragile, trembling, real. As fires are lit across congregations this night, each flame carries both memory and possibility: a light from the ashes, a warmth we have long held for ourselves.

Call to Gathering – Enter the Silence That Holds You

Come, beloveds –
Come warm yourself by the fire
fanned from the ashes
of memory upon our brow,
into the quiet between endings and beginnings.

Lay down your striving, your need for answers.
Let silence be sanctuary.
Here, Love rests -
and so do we.

Poetic Meditation – The Faith of Seeds Beneath the Stone
This is the night without a name,
the space between heartbeat and breath.

We have lived here -
in waiting rooms and closets,
in the long ache of almost-believing.

But even here,
love hums beneath the silence.

They say the Church has spoken –
finally - and the words flicker
like candlelight in trembling hands.
We remember too many nights of cold,
too many doors shut against our breath.
Yet here, in the stillness between grief and dawn,
a new fire catches.

It does not erase what has been - it illuminates it.
This flame is not theirs alone; it has always burned in us.
We have kept it through exile and silence,
through drag and defiance, through love's small resurrections.
Now, we share it back - not as forgiveness,
but as promise: that light will not be wasted again.

The tomb is sealed,
but the seed is breaking open.

The story pauses,
reminding life does not end.

Sermon Starter – Faith in the Space Between
This is the night when the Church learns that apology is not absolution, but the first light of a long, unfinished dawn.
A sermon might explore waiting as a form of faith - not resignation, but trust that what is buried will rise or explore the meaning of apology as resurrection-in-process - how words of repentance can only be redeemed by ongoing action.
What does it mean to receive an apology that arrives too late, and still dare to tend its flame?
How do we honour both gratitude and grief in the same breath?
What might this new fire symbolize for those who have already kept the light alive in exile?
It could speak of the queer experience of "in-between" spaces - of living in the tension between harm and healing, and of finding God even there.

It might ask:
What does faithful waiting look like?
How does hope survive when evidence disappears?
What does resurrection mean for those who have already lived through so much dying?

Reflection Prompts – Trusting What Grows in the Dark

- When have you lived in an "in-between" place?
- How do you nurture hope when nothing seems to change?
- What does it mean for you to wait *with* God - not *for* God?
- When have you felt a light rekindled after loss?
- What does apology mean to you - as someone who has been both silenced and seen?
- How can you carry the flame forward without letting it be extinguished by disappointment?

Prayer – For Those Who Wait in Hope Deferred

God of the waiting,
we rest in the silence that holds all things.
We name our weariness, our longing, our fear.
Hold us in your stillness
until we can breathe again.
Teach us the faith of seeds -
to wait, to trust, to break open
when the time is right.

Amen.

Blessing – Go Holding the Promise Hidden in the Dark

Go quietly,
carrying the mystery of what you cannot yet see.
Let the waiting become its own kind of grace.
And when dawn comes,
may you recognize the light you kept alive in the dark.

Optional Music – Laments and Longing for the Light

"Wait for the Lord" - **Taizé**
"In God Alone" – **Taizé**
"Stay With Us Through the Night" – **Voices United** 182
"Abide With Me" – **Voices United** 436
"In the Quiet Curve of Evening" – **Voices United** 278
"Be Still and Know That I Am God" – **More Voices** 77
"Ka Mana'o 'I 'O" – **More Voices** 103
"Night Vigil" - **Instrumental**
"Seed Beneath the Stone" - **Instrumental**

“ - ” – **Then Let Us Sing!**
“ - ” - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝ Holy Saturday - The Road of Witness

For congregational or small-group worship within the wider Church

Scripture: Matthew 27:57–66; Luke 23:50–56

The Church stands in silence - between death and resurrection, between confession and change. Holy Saturday is the Church’s invitation to stop speaking, to listen, and to learn how to wait beside its own failures with humility and faith. This is the call to stay present when words run out, to hold vigil beside the tombs it helped to build, and to keep faith that transformation can still come.

Historical Context: After decades of harm, Holy Saturday calls the Church not to rush to Easter proclamations of new life, but to linger in the silence of what has been broken. Too often, the Church has hurried toward redemption without dwelling long enough in lament.

On April 2025, the United Church of Canada offered an Apology to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities - the culmination of decades of struggle, listening, and witness.

The words were sincere yet sobering. They came not as final act but as first step - a confession that must ignite transformation.

For congregations, the ritual of lighting the new fire must take on deeper meaning: the Church, standing before the flame of truth, naming its complicity, and choosing to begin again; the commitment to keep the flame alive, not on altars, but in policy, welcome, and action.

This is a time to witness - to stay beside tombs of our own making: the graves of those shamed for their love, the losses from silence and neglect, the exhaustion of those who worked and waited for the Church to change. To witness is to acknowledge what cannot be undone, and still to keep vigil for what can yet be made new.

Call to Gathering – Come to the Quiet of Accountability

Come, people of the long pause.
Come to the quiet where repentance takes root.
The ashes of our denial
have become flames
of revelation.

Lay down your explanations and your defenses.
Listen - to what the silence reveals,

to what the Spirit stirs beneath the stone.

Poetic Meditation – The Stillness Between Apology and Change
The Church sits beside the tomb,
its hymns gone quiet.

This is the hour of unlearning,
the moment between apology and amendment.

The fire is lit, and for a moment, faces glow –
a Church caught between relief and reckoning.
The words "We are sorry"
rise like smoke, fragile, real, unfinished.
An apology cannot undo, but it can uncover –
truth, long buried, now flickering in open air.

This is not absolution; it is awakening.
The Christ Candle burns
because hands dared to strike the match –
and the Church must now carry its light
into every shadowed place.
Repair begins here:
not with applause, but with endurance.

We wait,
not knowing what resurrection will require -
only that it cannot come cheap.
Still, in the hush,
something holy trembles.
The stone is heavy,
but Love has already begun to move.

And the fire crackles softly,
as if whispering: "Begin again."
Ash and ember mingle - apology and promise, word and will.
A flame burns still, steady as conscience,
daring the Church to rise with its own light.
Resurrection begins here –
not in perfection, but in perseverance.

Sermon Starter – The Work of Sacred Silence
And so the match is struck - a single spark against the long night.

The apology spoken, the flame entrusted - the Church stands before its own fire, knowing that light must now become labour. This is the silence before dawn, when words must learn to walk.
A sermon might explore the practice of waiting as communal accountability - the space between confession and transformed living. It could name the Church's silence not as failure, but as reverent pause before new understanding.
It might ask:
How can the Church witness faithfully to pain it has caused?
What does it mean to keep vigil beside those it once harmed?
How does the Church tend the flame of repentance so that it becomes transformation?
What does it mean to speak "We are sorry" when the harm still echoes?
How can Easter's light guide ongoing accountability and courage?
What new life might arise if we stayed in the silence long enough to hear it?

Reflection Prompts – Holding Vigil Beside Our Own Tombs

- What does faithful silence look like in your community?
- How can the Church hold space for grief without rushing to fix it?
- What might resurrection mean if it begins in the quiet work of change?
- Where has your community tended the fire of apology - and where has it let it fade?
- How might your congregation 'live into' the apology through action and advocacy?

Prayer – For the Church Learning to Wait and Listen

God of the long silence,
we sit beside the tombs we ourselves have made.
Forgive our haste to move past pain.
Teach us to wait,
to watch,
to witness.
Let this silence change us,
until our words ring true again.

Amen.

Blessing – Go Bearing the Silence that Transforms

Go quietly from this place,
bearing the weight of what has been
and the hope of what may yet be.
May your waiting be honest,
your silence compassionate,
and your faith wide enough to hold the dawn.

Optional Music – Songs of Waiting, Listening and Renewal

"Wait for the Lord" - **Taizé**

"Stay with Me" – **Taizé**
"Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness" – **Voices United** 375
"Breathe on Me Breath of God" – **Voices United** 382
"Holy Spirit, Come into Our Lives" – **More Voices** 6
"Be Still and Know That I Am God" – **More Voices** 77
"Holy Silence" - **Instrumental**
"Stillness Before Dawn" - **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿Bridge Reflection - Between Waiting and Witness

The tools of mending lie still. The fabric is not yet whole.
Between the hammering of injustice and the hush that follows, there is this breath - the tender work of waiting.
One tends the wound that has begun to close; the other keeps vigil by its side.
Neither can hasten the dawn.
Both must trust that healing takes its own time.
Amid waiting and witness lies a shared ache - the longing for a world remade,the slow trust that change can come.
Both know what it means to live in the in-between: to hold grief in one hand and hope in the other.
Here, repair becomes reverence.
The silence becomes teacher.
The hands that once broke now learn to cradle what they cannot yet restore.
In the stillness, our prayers intertwine - the quiet pulse of faith beating between us.
And somewhere beneath the stone, life is turning quietly toward the light.

2025 – The Church has broken its silence
It is in the light before the dawn that resurrection begins



From ashes and tears, from all that we have broken -
the breath of life still rises, and hope takes root again

EASTER SUNDAY

The Road of Resurrection / The Road of Renewal

Introduction

Scripture Focus: Matthew 28:1–10; John 20:1–18 - The women come to the tomb at dawn. The stone is rolled away. Love is risen.
Theme: Resurrection as renewal, not arrival; living into apology; the work of love that continues.
Easter morning begins in astonishment - not certainty. It dawns over confusion, doubt, and fragile hope. In the glow of the 2025 Apology, this day asks: What now?
For both queer communities and the wider Church, resurrection is not a moment, but a movement - the daily choosing to live differently, to embody what the words of repentance have begun. The light kindled last night is carried into morning not as a symbol alone, but as a summons. For an apology to mean anything, it must become a way of life - a love lived into, over and over, until it becomes the language of the Church itself.

- ***The Road of Resurrection*** – for queer communities, the possibility of rising that comes after long waiting, the joy that still carries the scent of tears; the courage to live again, to rise from the tombs of exclusion and shame into the radiance of belovedness, to fan the embers of endurance into the flames of joy. It is the moment of claiming life again, not as something granted but as something fiercely, beautifully lived.
- **The Road of Renewal** – for the wider Church, this is a summons to live into the words of the apology it has spoken and the promise of transformation; a call to rise into the hard work of love made visible, justice made real and to become a Church resurrected in action, truth, and love. Resurrection here is not a conclusion but a commission - to build what repentance began.

Together they remind us that resurrection is not an ending, but the continuation of repair - the daily rising of courage and compassion, the fire born of ashes, still burning toward the new day.

🌈 Easter Sunday - The Road of Resurrection

For use within Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities
Resurrection as the courage to live again - to rise from the ashes of exclusion into the joy of belovedness; to fan the embers of hope into flame.
Scripture: Matthew 28:1–10; John 20:1–18

At dawn, the stone is rolled away. Mary stands in the garden, weeping until her name is spoken, and she recognizes Love alive again.
For queer communities, Easter is not naïve joy. It is the astonishment of still being here - of surviving, of loving, of daring to hope after the long shadow of Good Friday. It is the slow, radiant truth that resurrection happens not once, but every time we rise again to claim our dignity and joy.
Historical Context: After decades of harm, resistance, and resilience, 2025's Apology became a new kind of dawn - yet not all hearts received it the same. Some wept for the healing it offered; others, for the wounds it reopened. Some found gratitude; others, only fatigue. Still, the light has opportunity to spread - small as candle flames passed from hand to hand - through sanctuaries, streets, and stories that refused to die.
For queer communities, Easter morning does not erase the night; it redeems it.
This is not a victory march but a rising - slow, deliberate, fierce with truth.
Resurrection here is not abstract theology.
It is trans joy, queer families, drag as celebration, chosen kinship - the daily art of living fully in the light we were once denied.
Resurrection is not an event but a practice - an insistence that love's promise must become love's policy, and love's policy must become love's presence.
The work is not finished. The stone keeps rolling.

Call to Gathering – Come to the Garden of Becoming
Come, beloveds -
come, all who have waited in the dark.
The dawn is breaking.
The tomb is open.
And Love - scarred, radiant, unstoppable - calls your name.

Poetic Meditation – The Joy That Rises From the Ashes
We are the risen ones -
wounded and yet still shining,
bearing witness that death did not win.

The tomb is open, but the air still smells of grief.
We do not rush to shout "Alleluia."
We whisper it - trembling, defiant, real.
We rise not because the world has changed,
but because we have kept changing.
Resurrection feels like morning light on tired faces,
like forgiveness we offer to ourselves first.
It is the drag queen stepping again onto the stage,
the trans elder blessing a child's pronouns,
the choir that sings "still here."
The Church's apology burns behind us like dawn –
beautiful, incomplete, demanding our living into it.

We carry its light not as pardon,
but as promise: we will not return to darkness.
From the ashes of rejection,
we build sanctuaries of joy.
From the wreckage of silence,
we sing.

The world tried to bury us,
but it forgot -
we are seeds.

And every time we love,
every time we dance,
every time we speak our names
with pride and with peace,
resurrection happens again.

And we rise, not as proof
of what is complete, but as promise of what will be.
Alleluia is not our ending –
it is our breath, our becoming, our daily defiance.
This is resurrection: not a single morning,
but a thousand risings - each time love is lived into its word.

Sermon Starter – Love That Will Not Stay Buried
And now the light breaks across our faces - soft, unsure, and real. The words of apology still hang in the air, not yet fulfilled, not yet forgotten. We breathe it in, knowing resurrection does not erase the night, but rises through it.
A sermon might explore resurrection as continuing revelation - the divine persistence of life that refuses to stay buried. It could connect the Church's apology to Easter morning: the beginning of repair, not the end.
It might ask:
How do we live resurrection daily - in love, in justice, in joy?
What does it mean to rise from apology into action?
How can we keep the flame alive when the world grows cold again?

Reflection Prompts – Living the Resurrection Daily

- Where do you see resurrection happening in your life or community?
- What ashes have you risen from?
- How do we move from apology to embodiment?
- What does resurrection look like when we refuse to rush past grief?
- How can you carry forward the light of Easter into the everyday work of justice and joy?

- How do queer lives reveal the face of the risen Christ?

Prayer – For the Flame That Will Not Die
Risen Christ,
you who were dead and live again,
speak our names in love.
Roll away the stones we still carry -
fear, shame, exhaustion, despair.
Let the light in.
Fan our embers into flame.
Make our lives your resurrection story -
love embodied,
joy unbreakable,
hope made flesh again.
Amen.

Blessing – Go As Living Proof of Resurrection
Go forth in resurrection light.
Go as those who have seen what love can do.
Carry your fire gently, boldly, faithfully -
and may it set the world alight
with the brilliance of becoming whole.

Optional Music – Songs of Joy, Freedom and Becoming Whole

"Surrexit Christus" **- Taizé**
"Laudate Omnes Gentes" – **Taizé**
"Christ the Lord is Risen Today" – **Voices United** 157
"The Risen Christ" – **Voices United** 168
"I am the Dream" – **More Voices** 106
"Hey Now! Singing Hallelujah!"– **More Voices** 121
"I Have Called You By Your Name" – **More Voices** 161
"Easter Morning Light" - **Instrumental**
"Song of the Seed" - **Instrumental**
" - "- **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

✝️ Easter Sunday - The Road of Renewal

For congregational or small-group worship within the wider Church

The cross as confession, the resurrection as commitment - to live into apology, to keep love's promise alive in action and in truth.

Scripture: Matthew 28:16–20; John 20:1–18

The Church gathers at dawn, not to declare its triumph, but to witness Love's victory over fear. Easter is the Church's call to become what it proclaims - to live resurrection not in word, but in deed.

Historical Context:

The 2025 Apology has been spoken - yet the real resurrection of the Church will be measured not by its words, but by what follows.

This apology joins a chorus - from governments, from other denominations, from those who once condemned and now confess.

The light kindled at the Easter Vigil burns unevenly across the landscape - bright in some places, dim in others - revealing how far the journey to justice remains.

But even so, something has begun.

In the faces of queer clergy, the prayers of trans members, and the courage of allies who refuse complacency, the Church must learn to live into its apology.

Resurrection for the institution means accountability that does not end when the candles go out; to become a community where love costs something, where justice is tangible, and where every person knows they are beloved of God.

It is a love that keeps building - policy by policy, welcome by welcome - until every pew and pulpit reflects the light of the One who rose for all.

Easter begins when apology becomes action - when the Church, risen from its own tombs of fear, walks forward in the light of love despite all risks.

Call to Gathering - Come to the Dawn of New Commitment

Come, people of resurrection -
come to the dawn of new creation.
The stone has rolled,
and love will not be contained.
Let us rise,
not only in song,
but in the work of love renewed.

Poetic Meditation – Apology Turned to Action / Faith Turned to Flesh

The Church stands at the tomb it once sealed,
and hears Love call its name.

Morning breaks over the Church,
not in fanfare but in questions.
Can these words live? Can this love last?
Can we rise into what we have promised?

The apology glows in our memory –
not a finish line, but a fire we must keep feeding.
Christ is risen, yes –
but only if we rise with Him, in justice and in truth.
Resurrection is not a return to comfort.
It is the work of repair carried forward with courage.
Let the Church be known not for what it said,
but for what it sustained.

The stone is heavy -
carved from centuries of silence and fear -
but the light is stronger.

Resurrection is not triumph.
It is transformation.
It is apology lived,
relationship restored,
justice rising from the ground like spring grass.

This is the work of Easter:
to live as if the world is already being made new -
and to make it so.

The light spreads slowly –
across pews and pulpits, into homes and hearts.
The Church, if it dares, will rise each day into its own unfinished Easter.
For love is risen indeed - and it waits to see if we will follow.

Sermon Starter – Resurrection as Responsibility
And so morning dawns - not to erase the shadows, but to reveal what still needs tending.
The apology lingers like incense - fragile, fragrant, fleeting - waiting for the Church to breathe it into being.
A sermon might explore resurrection as the Church's ongoing conversion - from confession to commitment, from apology to accompaniment, or examine resurrection as the test of repentance - the living-out of apology through sustained justice.
It could lift up the 2025 Apology as not an ending, but an Easter beginning.
It might ask:
How will the Church live resurrection now?
Where do we see the Spirit's fire still burning, calling us to move?
What does it mean to "live into" an apology?
How does resurrection challenge the Church to move from confession to consistent inclusion?
How can joy and accountability coexist as resurrection truths?

Reflection Prompts – Living the Apology as an Act of Easter

- Where is the Church still being called to rise?
- How can we turn words of apology into acts of love?
- What does resurrection look like in your community's ministry, relationships, or advocacy?
- What signs of new life do you see in your community's inclusion efforts?
- Where do apology and resurrection still need to take root?
- How can your congregation become a living Easter — ongoing, authentic, and bold?

Prayer – For the Church That Rises Through Change

Risen Christ,
you call your Church from tomb to garden,
from fear to freedom.
Forgive our hesitation.
Renew our courage.
Let our worship become witness,
our promises become practice,
our repentance become resurrection.
Make us partners in your rising,
builders of your kingdom,
bearers of your hope.

Amen.

Blessing – Go and Live the Resurrection You Proclaim

Go as Easter people -
not to declare victory,
but to bear witness to transformation.
Go with light in your hands and truth in your heart.
Go and live the resurrection -
until the whole world rises with you.

Optional Music – Songs of Courage, Commitment and New Creation

"Alleluia, The Lord Is Risen" - **Taizé**
"Laudate Dominum" – **Taizé**
"Jesus Christ is Risen Today" – **Voices United** 155
"Now the Green Blade Rises" – **Voices United** 186
"Sing, Sing Out!" – **More Voices** 180
"Sent Out in Jesus' Name" – **More Voices** 212
"Dawn Rising" - **Instrumental**
"From Ashes to Flame - **Instrumental**
" - " – **Then Let Us Sing!**
" - " - **Songs for the Holy Other**

🌿Bridge Reflection - Between Resurrection and Renewal

The dawn finds us side by side, bathed in the same light.
The silence begins to breathe.
Between the ache of what was lost and the light of what is coming, there is this holy trembling - the first pulse of resurrection beneath our feet.
One feels it as release, the other as responsibility.
Both rise slowly, hands still dusted with the earth of their repair.
Both hear their names called in the garden - both turn toward the voice of Love.
This is how resurrection comes - not in a rush of triumph, but in the quiet faith of those committed to the work of living what we now believe - of making apology into action, gratitude into justice, faith into flesh.
Love wakes first, and whispers: "Begin again."
The tomb is behind us,
the road ahead still unfolding.
Together, we walk in the direction of the rising sun - not finished, but finally alive.

From ashes and tears the fire rises and the road of hope continues on …
The work of resurrection of never done

AFTERWORD
Living into the Resurrection

From Word to Revelation

This is the turning point - the moment after the alleluias, when we step from sanctuary to street, from the poetry of faith to the practice of love.
The road does not end at Easter. It bends forward into life - into choices, relationships, and actions that will carry the truth of resurrection into the world.

- For Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities, resurrection may mean the ongoing reclaiming of joy - to live boldly, tenderly, fully, as the image of God we were told we could not be. It means knowing that our stories are holy, our bodies sacred, our love part of God's own rising.
- For the Wider Church, resurrection means more than celebration. It is the invitation to live the apology - to make inclusion more than word, to turn confession into companionship, to walk not ahead of the marginalized, but beside.

Here, at the threshold of light, we are called to build what the resurrection began - a Church that learns from its own breaking, a community that carries forward the fire that burned in the heart of Easter morning.
So we go - not as those who have arrived, but as those who are still becoming.
The stone is rolled, the tomb is open, and the work of love goes on.

Closing Benediction

Proof of Resurrection
Go now, beloveds, from ashes to fire,
from silence to song,
from sorrow to the fierce joy of becoming whole.

You have walked the road of witness and of reckoning,
of tenderness and humility,
of suffering and of renewal.
You have lingered at the tombs of what has been lost
and have seen the dawn of what can yet be.

The stones are still rolling.
And the light we carry must become our way

The work is still unfolding.
The resurrection is not finished -
it is being lived in you.

So go -
go as light-bearers and bridge-builders,
as those who rise not once, but daily.
Go with hearts still tender,
hands still open,
and fire still kindled for justice, joy, and love.
Go in peace, to live the words we have spoken -
to become the apology, the witness, the flame.

And may the Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation,
who wept at the cross,
who laughed at the empty tomb,
breathe through you now -
that your life may become the living Word,
and your love the proof of resurrection.

Amen.

POSTSCRIPT
Living Into the Apology

These liturgies were written for a particular time and place - a Church standing on holy ground between apology and action, between the words we are sorry and the lives that must prove it. They draw upon the story of our faith - dust to dawn, exile to belonging, cross to resurrection - and upon the story of a people who have lived those movements in real bodies, in real time.

For queer, non-binary, BIPOC and trans people of faith, these prayers and poems name the long ache of exclusion, erasure, the defiant joy of surviving, and the sacred work of healing what the Church once broke. They are not simply liturgies of remembrance; they are tools for reclamation - ways to tell the truth, to grieve, to rise.

For the wider Church, these same liturgies are invitations to humility and courage: to reckon honestly with history, to repent in public ways, to understand that an apology is not a punctuation mark but a paragraph still being written with every act of justice, every pronoun spoken right, every welcome made real.

This series can be adapted for worship, vigil, retreat, or study. It can be used whole or in parts - as mirror and lamp, lament and song.

It honours the 2025 Apology of the United Church of Canada, the earlier apologies of other denominations, and the government's apology to Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Canadians - while holding all of them accountable to their promise: to do better, to love better, to live what has been spoken.

These pages belong to no single people, but to all who seek to follow the Christ who still rides into the city through parades and protests, who still kneels to wash the feet of those the Church has wounded, who still rises in the laughter, art, and courage of the queer community.

May these liturgies be received as both offering and challenge - an act of faith and of repentance, a living prayer that the Church might yet become what Christ has always been: inclusive, incarnate, and unafraid.