

May 31, 2020

Superb Mennonite Church Final Worship Service

Worship Leader - Mike Warkentin

Technology - Leighton Krahn, Eileen Klaassen

10:30 AM – Open Zoom meeting for people to chat and “gather”

10:45 AM – Sunday School Singing

11:00 AM - Call to Worship and Celebration and opening prayer -

Eileen Klaassen -former pastor 1994-1999

I want to welcome from a distance all who are worshipping with us this morning – all who have joined us, also at a distance, and those who have remained an active part of this church and who are here, now, in this place.

In this time of the pandemic, many churches recognize that this may be a watershed moment, and we wonder what the church will look like in the future, knowing it may well look quite different from what it is now. But for THIS church, the Superb Mennonite Church, which first began meeting in homes 93 years ago, and dedicated their new church building in the spring of 1945 (75 years ago) - for THIS church the whole question of what the church will look like in the future, is an entirely different question. For what was once unthinkable is becoming a reality. Some of us have a hard time believing that this is the very last service to be held in this church building; that after today this church as a place of worship will close its doors forever.

The question arising out of a podcast¹ I was listening to recently was “How do we stay attuned to the presence and will of God?” I think it is a question for church communities, and it is also a question for us as individuals, “How do we stay attuned to the presence and will of God?”

We have come here on countless Sundays to be greeted by the words on the plaque at the front of this church, first it was in German

¹ <https://resources.soundstrue.com/podcast/joan-chittister-presence-and-perpetual-goodness/?ke=eyJrbF9lbWFpbCl6ICJydXRoYmJyYXVuQHIhaG9vLmNvbSIsICJrbF9jb21wYW55X2lkIjogIkpNRGdhcSJ9> - accessed May 11, 2020.

("Gott ist gegenwärtig. Lasset uns anbeten") and later in English ("God is in our presence, Let us now adore him").

Today is also Pentecost, when we recall and celebrate the descending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus. Sometimes we have called this day the "birthday of the Church." And while this may feel more like a funeral than a birthday, we do well to remember that while the building that has housed the Spirit, the *building* is not the spirit itself. The Spirit of God lives on in the people who have worshipped here and been a part of this community of believers. The Spirit of God lives on in those for whom this community of believers has been an integral part of our formation, and it lives on in you.

And so we come to remember, to lament, to express our gratitude, and to worship. Please join me in our *Call* to Worship, as found on your screen. I invite you to read aloud the familiar lines in bold print.

Call to Worship²

One: O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For the Lord is our God,
and we are the people of God's pasture;
the sheep of God's hand.

All: God is in our presence, Let us now adore him.

One: The Hebrew people lamented the destruction of Jerusalem,
and recalled that by the rivers of Babylon—
they sat down and wept when they remembered,
wondering how they could sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land.
And still we proclaim:

All: God is in our presence, Let us now adore him.

One: Where does our help come from?
Our help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
The Lord will keep our life.
The Lord will keep our going out and our coming in

² Based on Psalms 95, 137, 121, and Romans 8:14

from this time on and forevermore.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

All: God is in our presence, Let us now adore him.

One: O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For the Lord continues to be our God,
and we continue to be the people of God's pasture,
and the sheep of God's hand.

All: God is in our presence, Let us now adore him.

Opening Prayer

O God, our faithful God, you have led us to this place, and for over 75 years (¾ of a century!), this building has been the place from which your people have gathered to worship you and praise your holy name. Grant your strength and grant us hope as we lament and celebrate together, knowing you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, are the one who is, and was, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Hymn – HWB 16 - God is Here Among Us

Pastoral Prayer and Scripture - Dave Feick- former pastor,
1986-1994 (*prerecorded... in case of malfunction*)

²⁴ O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;

²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die

and return to their dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.

³³ I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the LORD.

³⁵ ... Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

John 20

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Acts 2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

God of the Universe,
God of the Bible
God of this place
God of all of us

We give you thanks today for this building which has been the home to the Superb Mennonite Congregation these past 75 years.

In this place, many have gathered and many have gone forth.

You have blessed our lives, our families, our work.

You have called us to support ministries to children and youth here in this province at the children's home and our summer camps, to assist people in time of need in places around the world, to visit those in prison and to befriend those returning to the community.

You have empowered us to share our joy of music and drama with our community and our province.

You have been with us in so many times of both joy and sadness, through births, marriages, deaths and so much more.

And so we give you thanks.

Today, as we close the doors to this building for the last time, we pray that you will continue to send us forth into the world to continue to bless the lives of others to see your face in every face we meet and to share the goodness of this place and the people who have been part of it remembering always how you have been with us today and in the past and that you will be with us forever.

In the strong name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Hymn – STJ 106 - *Just a Closer Walk* (Stringed Instruments)

Message - Ryan Siemens - Conference Pastor (pre-recorded at Superb Mennonite)

As Jesus said to his disciples, I now say to you, "Peace be with you."

I bring you greetings this morning in the name of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ and from your siblings across Mennonite Church Saskatchewan. Our hearts and prayers are with you this morning as you gather together for worship one final time as Superb Mennonite Church.

In many ways, this is a bittersweet morning.

It is sweet in that today is Pentecost Sunday. It is the Sunday we remember Jesus fulfilling his promise to send us the Spirit of Truth and Comfort to be with us. Often, Pentecost Sunday is referred to as the *Birthday of the Church*; the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in Jerusalem and they broke out in song, proclamation, vision, and good works. The work of the Holy Spirit includes the creation of this church when Mennonite families immigrated and settled into this area in the late 1920s and the roots of what would become Superb Mennonite Church took shape. Your coming together as Superb Mennonite Church over 70 years ago is connected to this Pentecost event over 2000 years ago, and is ongoing evidence of the work of the Spirit in our world and in our lives. And today, we have come to celebrate what God has done in your life together. But in there also lies the bitter taste, for today we also lament. We lament that this good thing, this gift of Superb Mennonite Church, is coming to a close, and what we received from God, we give back to God in faith and thanksgiving.

A while back, when plans were being made for this morning's service, Leighton commented that planning this service is kind of like planning your own funeral service, and in many ways, he is right. Whereas Pentecost marks the beginning of something new, today's service marks an ending.

Now I don't know if Pentecost Sunday was intentionally chosen as the Sunday to close (or if May 31 just looked like a good option on the calendar), because on the surface, it seems like a bid of an odd day to pick. I mean, this is the day we celebrate the birth of the

church, not its ending, and yet, if we dig a little deeper, we can see that the event surrounding Pentecost, including Jesus' Ascension, suggests that Pentecost is a day that actually marks both endings and beginnings.

Pentecost marks a significant shift in the gospel story. It marks the transition from focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus to the life and ministry of the disciples and the early church. Here in Acts 1 & 2, Jesus own ministry has come to an end and the ministry of the disciples is about to begin. For most of us, we don't think of Jesus' ministry as coming to an end. I mean, it's Jesus. He's eternal. Yet, his ministry was temporal. It had a time and place. It began with his baptism, and ended with his Ascension. And a significant part of his time, particularly recorded in the Gospel of John, was spent preparing his disciples for life without him.

In his Farewell Discourse from John 13-17, Jesus prepares his disciples for life without him, and for the most part, they don't get it. What do you mean you are going away? Where are you going? Can we come with you? This ending was not something they were prepared to accept. Yet, this was Jesus' plan all along. He called his disciples to follow him, he taught about the Kingdom of God and revealed to them God's ultimate power over death. He revealed to them God's mysterious presence and love and he took these nobodies in earthly terms, and made them into his new beloved community. And then he prepared them for life without him. Telling them that they will go on to do "even greater works than he did", proclaiming the nearness of God and God's love and power in the world. But to help them do this, to support them in living and loving in the world the way Jesus lived and loved in the world, he promised

them the Holy Spirit to guide them, comfort them and empower them to continue the work that Jesus started. As Jesus says to his disciples on Easter Evening (and the same day as Pentecost in the gospel of John), “Peace be with you. As the Father has send me, now I send you.”

The life, love and way of Jesus would be made known in the life of his disciples.

Earlier this week, I sent out an email to an email chain that Leighton had started, and in the email, I asked people to describe the qualities, or characteristics of Superb Mennonite Church, as if you were describing a person. And I will be honest, I was not totally surprised by what you said.

Words like welcoming, compassionate, ‘home’, belonging, were used...and so was practical, opinionated, and most importantly, loving. As I read the few reflections sent to me, again, I was not surprised. Even though I have only visited out here three or four times, I feel like I actually know who you are, and that was way before I ever became conference minister.

When Sandra and I moved to Saskatchewan in 2007, we moved to PA, and it wasn’t long after our move, that we got to know Ed and Holly Olfert. And as we all know; Ed loves to tell stories. And I gather, some of those stories are true. And it didn’t seem to matter what the situation was, visiting at Men’s Breakfast, or sharing in Sunday school, or when he preached, he would connect his story with his experiences here in this church. He’d tell about when tent revivals would come to town and people were presented with pretty stark understandings of faith and this church was a place to challenge

some of those ideas. At the same time, Ed would share that the congregation would also challenge his ideas, as a youth and young adult, and those challenges were not seen as threatening, but a place to test the core values of our faith and to see that these core values do not need defending, but rather, lived out, in day to day life.

As pastor in Prince Albert, I became quite involved with Person- to- Person, even directing it for 18 months. And in this work, again I saw the faith of Superb Mennonite Church in action. While I didn't get to know Pam and Dan well, I learned that for many years they used to drive all the way from here to SaskPen once a month on Monday nights to visit David, a 7 hour round trip!! Recognizing the importance of caring for the least of these led three of your former pastors to take on some kind of Spiritual Care work, offering comfort, compassion and hope to those who are aging, or ill, or in prison.

And now in my role as Executive Minister, the faith of this small congregation continues to make a large impact as I have befriended Ken Warkentin over the five years as we work together on nationwide programming. Ken reflects fondly upon how this congregation shaped his faith and inspired him to not only be a part of the body of Christ, but to become a pastor, as his grandfather was here for so many years. He calls Superb his spiritual home as the faith of this community connected to all parts of life. It wasn't just about gathering on Sunday morning, as important as that is, but that our faith impacts all we do and how we live. He also asked me to bring his greetings to you this morning. He wishes he could have been here with you, but trusts that the Spirit you embody will continue to impact the people you touch.

And lastly, I would like to mention Terry Stefaniuk, moderator of MC Sask. As a “married in convert”, he came to embrace the best of what it means to be Mennonite, not a last name, or really good sausage, but in being a people of love, compassion and peace.

I realize this list is limited. But it’s important to see all the ways you have sent out people to embody the way of Jesus in this world, and those people, continue to impact the work of the broader church today.

And so as you go from here this morning, as you bring this specific congregation and ministry to a close, go living into the legacy that Superb Mennonite Church represents. The world needs more Superb. In a world that is increasingly driven by polarization and isolation, we need people who will choose relationship over ideology, hospitality over scrutiny, compassion over fear. As Jesus said to his disciples 2000 years ago, he says again to you now; “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me into the world, now I send you.”

Hymn – STJ 44 - *The Love of God*

Communion - Grant Martens - former pastor 2001-2006

The acknowledgement of togetherness

We are gathered today, both physically and digitally, to celebrate this church building which has been a home to our faith community home for many generations. Our time in this exact space may be drawing to a close, but the God of all creation is not bound to any time or place. And just as God transcends physical distances and parts the veil between us wherever we are, through the act of communion, we can become one creation, one body, one church, in many locations. Join with me now in acknowledging our togetherness.

The Gathering of the Elements

We thankfully remember the countless services of worship and sacraments celebrated at Superb, and to bring to mind the ministers and lay leaders who have led worship.

Today we transcend the physical space of Superb and share a table of enormous width along a digital plane that reaches our many locations. The table is laid bare, earnestly seeking the providence of God. If you have not already done so, I ask you now to collect whatever elements you wish to serve as your bread and fruit of the vine, knowing that grace will justify your choices in the sight of God.

The table is set. Let us proceed.

Institution

You are Holy God, and blessed is your Child Jesus. Your Spirit descended upon him so that he could proclaim good news to the poor, heal the sick, feed the hungry, engage with sinners, and liberate the captive. His life gave birth to the church through a new covenant, one born out the Holy Spirit whose power dwells within us today.

On the night in which he gave himself over, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, God, and said, "take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

(raise bread)

As we break this bread, remember the many treasured memories that we have of time in this space. This is grief at saying farewell to this hallowed space, but there is also hope for continuing our life of faith in new communities of faith.

After dinner he took the cup (raise cup), gave thanks, and said, "This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Drink from it in remembrance of me."

(Raise cup)

As we raise this cup, we recognize that we may have a reluctance to face the realities of the faith community. We might want to cling to familiar patterns of worship, or familiar ways of serving the community. We let our past habits go, and look forward to serving with new communities in new ways.

Thanksgiving

God is with you (pause)

It is good to be joyful as we give thanks to You, God.

You created us in your image. You gave us life with your breath.

You set us in this wonderful community of faith that has nurtured us for so long. Your love does not falter, even as our time in this space draws to a close. Your love will continue to bless us as we seek new faith communities. Your love will continue to ease our burden. Amen

Hymn – STJ 27 - *God of The Bible*

Litany of Closing - Lois Siemens - former pastor 2006-2017

L: In this closing ritual we will be praying our thanks and help to God. We will then literally close the major physical worship spaces of this church. I will give you tasks to do like closing the blinds and the piano and pulpit. I'll give more instructions later. This won't be easy but it is important. It will seem the same as when we close in a grave by taking turns shoveling in the dirt around a casket or urn. Hard, but cathartic and cleansing at the same time. With the Spirit's help we begin the last part of our journey.

L: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and gave everything a season.

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to uproot.

In the beginning, in a superb area of the world, family groups arrived, slowly opening their hearts and homes to this new land as they grieved the closing of life

and worship as they had known it.

And they yearned to worship.

Through the early years what grounded and sustained them was the faithfulness of the God of hope.

And they longed to worship together.

They met in groups as people opened their homes.

They dreamed of building a place dedicated to worship and finally... through tireless efforts,

sacrificial giving,

hard work and determination,

they bought and repurposed the old Luseland Dispatch Printing Office

bringing its boards and stained glass here to create a beautiful and functional worship space.

(powerpoint starts)

We stop today and look back saying:

ALL: "Thank you, Lord."

P: Thank you, for opening up this space for our congregation to worship. For the hours people spent in the study and preaching of Your Word.

L: Thank you for the way faith grew in us to the point where many stepped forward to be baptized into the family of God.

P: Thank you for preparing this place for couples to fall in love and pledge their commitment to one another in marriage.

P: Thank you for the children we dedicated and watched grow into strong adults.

P: Thank you for deep friendships formed over neighborhood coffee and ecumenical quilting, farming, singing and story telling... much storytelling and discussion.

P: Thank you for the tables and chairs, the kitchen that provided a place of hospitality. The diversity of our community is a gift we experienced in many ways.

P: Thank you for these walls which provided wonderful acoustics for music, choirs and singing.

P: Thank you for providing this place as a sacred place for funerals and final goodbyes to so many we have loved—family and friends.

L: We thank you Lord, for providing us with such a blessed home all these years.³ Together we say,

ALL: THANK YOU Lord for your provision.

L: We stop today and look forward, asking for your help for the closing down bits which involve government forms, banks, taxes and more decisions than we thought possible.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/Tacomabpc/posts/today-we-had-a-decommissioning-gathering-at-5-south-g-st-below-is-pastor-fishers/10154689323352016/> adapted by Lois Siemens

P: Help us as we disperse the items that turned this building into a house of God.

We need help for any unresolved issues lurking around that need attention.

For any relationships that need to make amends.

Help us as memories come

which move us between grief and gratitude.

L: Open us to the many possibilities of what future worship will hold. Together we say,

ALL: Help us Lord, in all the final tasks and future worship needs.

(powerpoint stops)

L: We ask for your blessing on these familiar things, these pieces of wood, glass and paper that have turned our building into something both ordinary and sacred. May they bring nourishment and joy in whatever form they now take whether turning back to dust or repurposed.

L: This space, this church, this body of believers have seen the opening and closing of many seasons. We are closing the building but not the church. The church is the people of God who are called to be salt and light in the world, who are named as the beloved children of God. We will no longer gather here, but we will continue to be part of the body of Christ, the church, no matter where we go or how we worship or where the Spirit leads.

Now it is time to ritually close our building for worship. We will close the main items one by one and when you clean out the church disbursing its contents you will close the rest. This will require us to move around a bit to complete the tasks. I will tell you the task and one by one get up and complete the task. They are not assigned. Move as you feel led. If two of you get up, work together to complete the task remembering to socially distance. Please move slowly, deliberately, thoughtfully. We'll start in the balcony.

L: Close the balcony: Read some of the names carved in the wooden railing. Either move all the benches together or bring them down into the sanctuary or foyer. say thank you for this space.

Please remove all the banners and close them up in the office by hanging them on the hook saying thank you to those who made them, speaking their names if you know them.

Close the nursery by closing the curtain and the door.
say thank you

Someone open the blinds of the stained glass windows and take a good look and then close them.

Close the worship table:

Is there anything you would like to say about it and the communion box: who made it, the one it replaced, where it is going...

Close the Bible

Snuffing out the candle

Fold the table cloth

Carry out the things that are on the table and inside the drawer.

Put the communion box on the table and open it. take a good look, give it a wave of blessing and close it.

Then say thank you and set the table against the wall or carry it out

Close the hymnbooks by opening the ones around you and one by one read the inscription if there is one, out loud or to yourself, and then close the books, saying thank you as you set them on the end of the pew.

Close the Sunday School area by tidying the books and moving the benches together and speak your thanks for this space.

Play the Birthday song for all of our birthdays and the birthday of the church with the piano and/or any instruments you brought.

Anybody who wants to put in their birthday money for the year can do so. Give the Birthday offering jar to Tammy.

Musicians : please play a final piece then close your instruments and say your thanks

Please take out the items from the piano bench. Open the books on the piano and read the inscriptions if there are any. Is there anything you want to say about the piano, where it came from, where it is going, if known.

I've asked Pam to please play a final song.

close the lid of the piano
shut off the light
Move the piano bench into the piano
Say thank you to Pam and the other pianists through the years.

Take out the books from inside the pulpit and open them. read the inscriptions out loud and close them. When they are all closed, set them on one of the pews.

Say something about the pulpit - who made it, where did it come from, where is it going, if known.

Close the pulpit taking off the mic and lowering the top part

Move the pulpit to the wall or onto the floor and say thank you

Look at the two signs that remind us of God's presence, and if it feels right to you, take them down and say who made them, where they came from and where they are going if you know. Say thank you.

Close all the blinds

Go back to your seats.

(recording starts)

L: My friends, *Thank you* for doing this hard thing of closing the space. This is the same work that is done in Fall when everything closes up, cleans up, shuts down to prepare for the season of winter. The winter that is coming for you will be mixed. There will be times of sadness and memories, questions and wonderings, thankfulness and discussions, laughter and warmth, goodbyes and hellos. There is no right or wrong way to go through this goodbye. The Spirit of Pentecost will lead you. The thing about Fall is it is also the season of producing all those incredible seeds that, come Spring, will burst into something beautiful and tasty. What adventures await you?

(powerpoint starts)

Fall is a time of faith.

Faith that says:

P: With God nothing is impossible

L: Faith that proclaims:

P: God is in our presence. Let us now adore him.

L: Faith that believes

P: in resurrection and the Spirit moving us into new life.

L: Along with faith there is hope. Hope that looks at how God has worked in the past and says:

P: there is light in the darkness.

L: Hope looks at the opportunity endings create.

P: As the children of Israel lamented the destruction of Jerusalem and their Temple worship they birthed the Synagogue style of worship.

L: Hope sings:

P: Come, walk with us, the journey is long; Share our burden and join in the song; Come, uplift us and bring us new life; Give us peace when the journey is done.

L: Faith, Hope and Love have come together today. Love says:

P: we will find Jesus near every day of the year.

P: Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

L: The seeds Superb has produced over the decades are energized and growing by your hard work, adaptability, hospitality, spirituality and no-nonsense view of life. You will weather this change and we look forward to seeing what amazing new things will emerge.

Faith, Hope and love, these three remain

ALL: and the greatest of these is love.

(Powerpoint ends, recording ends)

Closing Hymn – HWB 86– *Now Thank We All Our God*

Benediction:

Dave: May the God who gave us this church as a place to worship together

and the Saviour who walked at our side each step of the way
and the Spirit who filled us with life abundant,
continue to lead us as we go out from here
and grace us all with peace and hope,

Eileen: May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Grant: May the very face of God shine upon you
and be gracious to you.

Lois: May God's presence embrace you
and give you peace!

Together: Amen