

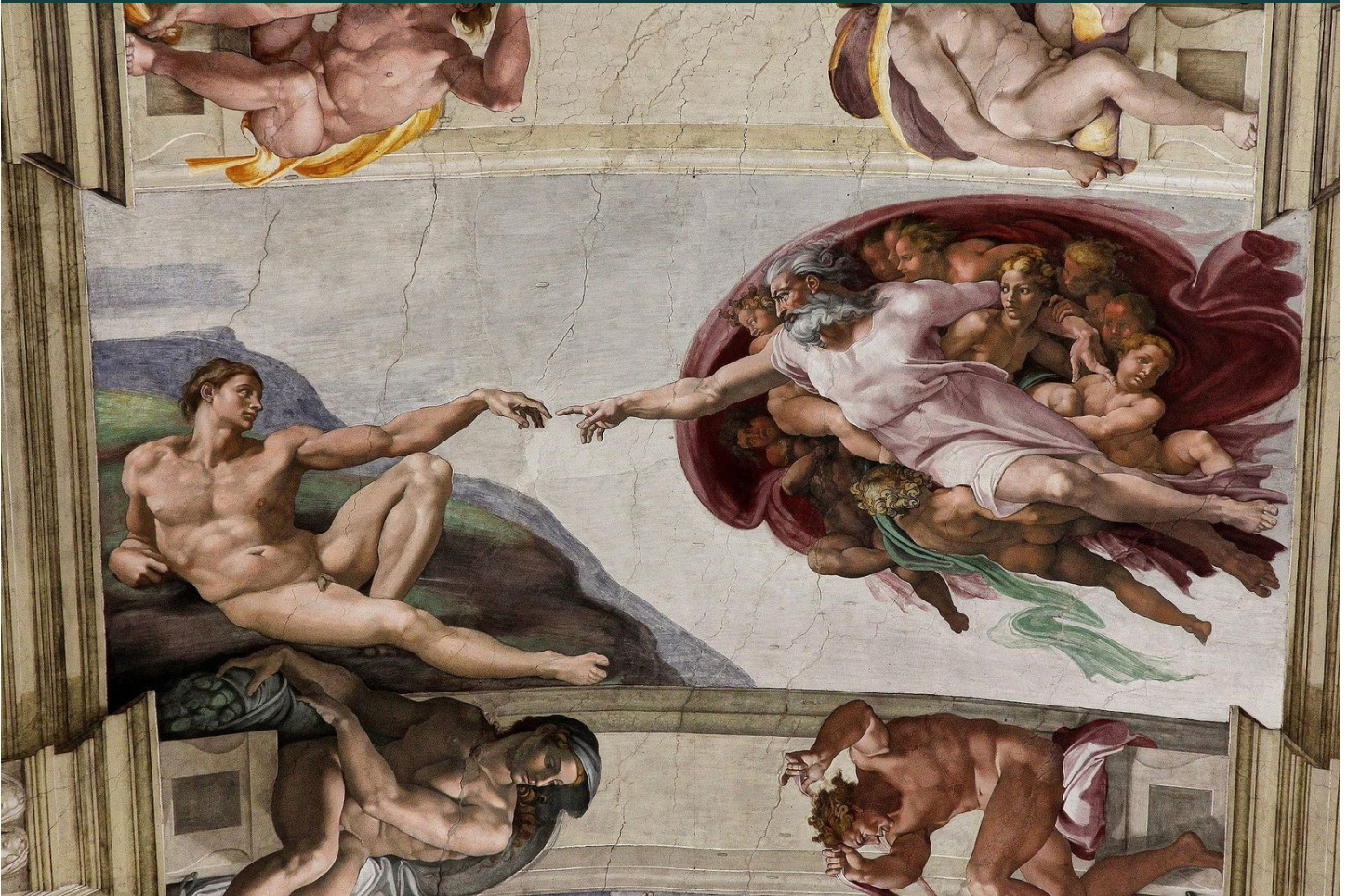
# THE Gathering

The Newsletter of the Church of the Redeemer

Christmas 2020







## Closing the Gap During a COVID-19 Christmas

As “one of the most replicated religious painting of all time,” Michelangelo’s “Creation of Adam” certainly needs no introduction. It has adorned the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel for over half a millennium and is gazed upon by countless flocks of admirers every year. I have not seen it in person but have spoken with many who have. What is interesting is what people notice - and don’t - and what excites their imagination or sparks their indignation.

Beyond comments on it’s beauty and stark simplicity, many remark on the figures that surround God; are they angels adoring God’s creative gesture in making a creature in God’s image? Others comment on the representation of God; Caucasian and masculine – images that we have come to find challenging and excluding, as we have come to believe that

God’s very nature is diversity. Still others comment on the calm, casual, countenance of Adam as he regards the one who just brought him into being.

However, what has always fascinated me is the narrow gap that exists between God and Adam, the modest but intentional space between creator and created. Most theologians surmise that the artist’s intent in leaving that slight rift was to convey the sense that there is a separation, that while created in the image of the divine, Adam is not God – a lesson that he will come to learn painfully in the fall and which the artist latterly depicts. However, what fascinates me about the gap is something quite different. Something, moreover, that speaks to our common experience this Christmas with COVID-19.



These past nine months have heightened our sense of separation from God precisely because we have been separated from one another in so many ways. The sheer lack of physical contact. Not just in the hugs and handshakes we would share when we gathered, but the significance those gestures take on when we share them in “the peace,” expressing our reconciliation with God, one another, and our being made whole again. We have missed the meal that makes us one, of hands touching hands as bread is placed, and of sipping from the same cup in which we taste the fruits of our redemption. All these tangible, physical, absences for me epitomize the distance that is between us, and the distance we sometimes feel from God. And yet, still, we will gather – as we can – to celebrate the Incarnation.

This Christmas we will not be able to touch one another. The gap – enshrined in Michelangelo’s opus – will be felt by us all; a reminder of the distances we must keep between us, and how distanced, figuratively, we are from “normal.” Our lives have changed in so many ways, no wonder we feel “apart.” And yet, still, we will gather together to celebrate “God with us” – the creative union of God

and humanity that narrowed the distance between God and us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This Christmas, even though we will feel the gap, we are no less connected. We are one as Christ’s body in the world; the people who are called to act courageously, especially in diversity, to believe wholeheartedly, even when fear and anxiety surround us, and to rejoice with sincerity, even when COVID-19 creates the illusion that there is not much cause for celebration. For we are united by bonds that transcend all adversity and that will carry us through any crisis. That is to say, we are one in God; created in the image of love unbounded, redeemed by love incarnate, and held together by love unceasing.

Merry Christmas!

Affectionately yours in Christ,



The Rev’d Canon Steven Mackison



Advent  
Hope  
Peace  
Joy  
Love

The tradition of an Advent wreath in our homes was shared with our families at the beginning of the season. Through Zoom, households gathered with the makings for their wreath and learned more about Advent. The session ended with a liturgy where the first candle—hope—was lit. The smiles on these faces show the joy shared by all who were able to gather.

Thanks to Hilary Keachie, pastoral associate for children and family ministry for making this possible.

# Road Maps to Reconciliation

Carolynn Bett and Darlene Varaleau

*This article is part of an on-going series prepared by Carolynn Bett, a member of the Indigenous Solidarity Working Group. She is joined by Darlene Varaleau, also a member of the committee for this article.*

Many documents from earliest times to the present day lay out protocols for peaceful and respectful co-existence on Turtle Island. Some are incorporated into the Canadian Constitution. **We are all treaty people.**

**The Dish with One Spoon** is said to be part of the original Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace of 1142. It is later documented as a treaty between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee to share the resources of the land around Trois Rivières in 1644 and again in the Great Peace of Montreal 1701. The image is of one dish (the shared hunting territory) with a single spoon. The spoon signifies that the nations will share the territory peacefully (without knives) and limit the game they take to ensure the continued abundance and viability of the hunting grounds. First Nations continue to use One Dish protocol to request permission to hunt, fish, trap, gather food and medicines and grant travel rights across their territories. The responsibility to care for the land and its resources is part of the agreement.

As settlers, we can be grateful that First Nations extended their hospitality to us. As we reflect during each land acknowledgment, we are called to assume our responsibilities.

**The Two Row Wampum** was signed in 1613 by the Dutch and Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Two Row Wampum covenants for a brotherhood of peace, friendship and respect, signified by the three white rows of wampum shells. The two purple rows

signify the Dutch ship and the Indigenous canoe both in the same river, sharing and caring for the resources, but not interfering with each other. This wampum belt is understood by the Haudenosaunee to be the basis of all relationships with European settlers. To uphold this agreement is to grant each other self-government, self-organization and sustainable economics.

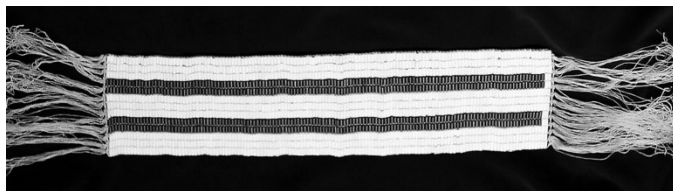


Photo credit for Two Row Wampum Belt: By Nativemedia - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45094440>

**The Royal Proclamation, 1763** was issued by Great Britain confirming the original occupancy of Indigenous peoples and paving the way for land agreements between the British Crown and Indigenous peoples. The principles of nation to nation relationship, non encroachment of settlers on unceded land, and hunting and fishing rights in perpetuity were established. The proclamation stated that settlers could not own land until the Crown had signed treaties with the First Nations who occupied the territories. Only the Crown could buy land from the First Nations; settlers had to buy their land from the Crown.

Indigenous rights and land title, as secured in the Royal Proclamation, are guaranteed by section 25 of the Canadian Charter of Rights, a part of the Canadian Constitution of 1982.

In 2007, the United Nations adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples **UNDRIP** which Canada must ratify before it be-

comes part of Canadian law. In 2019, Bill C-262 was introduced as a private members bill to require Canada to “take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with UNDRIP.”

Conservative members of the Senate prevented passage of the Bill, as they believed the words “free, prior and informed consent” were not adequately defined in the Declaration and would give indigenous communities a *de facto* veto over resource development projects.

Submitted in 1996, the **Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples** investigated and proposed solutions to challenges affecting relationships between Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Government and Canadian society. Four hundred and forty practical solutions were given to cover a 20 year agenda; however, the document was effectively shelved.



Despite its formidable title—**Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**—the summary report, published in 2015, is an accessible document that gives the Indigenous perspective on residential schools. The history section contains many of the anecdotes reported by Indigenous people during the Commission hearings; the legacy section outlines the problems remaining today as a result of that history; and the 94 calls to action address various institutions and levels of government and of society, outlining action plans. As individuals, our first call is to learn the history.

Fortunately, Trent University is a world centre for Indigenous studies and the Spadina branch of the Toronto Public Library has a totally Indigenous collection. Learning resources abound.



Christmas Eve Family Service on Zoom at 5PM.  
The children help us to hear the age-old story anew.



Christmas Eve Service on Zoom at 10:30 PM with  
an on-line party with Morgan as our DJ afterward.



Christmas Day Service on Zoom at 10:30 AM. In  
the quiet of the morning, the celebration continues.  
Links for the services are in the Christmas eNews.



# Parables, Prophets and Prayers

*Hilary Keachie*

I thought I'd share a little of what the kids and youth of Redeemer have been up to these past months.

Redeemer Kids continued to meet on zoom every Sunday morning over the summer. Usually the programme takes a break over the summer months as many of our families are away, but given the realities of this summer, we decided continuity of programme was important. While our group was fairly small, we had a great time exploring the parables of Jesus. We played guess that seed, dramatized the Good Samaritan and learned about how pearls are formed. Mostly importantly, I was grateful for the opportunity to get to know some of the kids of Redeemer as I began in my new role as Pastoral Associate for children, youth and families.

In August, we had a lively and engaging virtual Vacation Bible Camp. Sixteen kids plus youth and adult volunteers gathered for an hour every morning for week to go on adventures with Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar. We experienced the destruction of the temple and the long journey to Babylon, were thrown into the fiery furnace and huddled in the dark (and kind of scary) lion's den. Together, we sang, we did crafts, we had snack and we prayed. It was a great week!





In conversation and consultation with families and church school leadership, we made the decision to keep church school on zoom for the foreseeable future. We moved the time of our meeting to 9 AM so that families could attend in-person worship and when church services needed to move back to on-line only, we adjusted again to 9:30 AM).



We had an interesting and fun fall! We tie-dyed t-shirts orange for Orange Shirt Day, learned about residential schools, had a virtual blessing of our animals (both pets and stuffies!) and shared what we are grateful for this season.

In November, we will begin our Unit on the Prophets prepared by Paul MacLean and Jennifer Miceli. We learned about the stories of Elijah, Elisha and Huldah, and have been making artwork in our own homes that we will put together to create a large display.

Advent boxes were delivered to families with materials to make Advent wreaths, nativity stickers, an Advent calendar, weekly devotions and much more! We have been working on this year's Christmas Pageant, and while it will certainly look different than other years, we are hoping that it will be special and meaningful, and help us all enter into the mystery and wonder of the Christmas story.





Our youth group, who have named themselves The Wise Cherubs, also continued to meet over Zoom over the summer. We read and explored the Book of Revelation together, played a role playing game and participated in a virtual CLAY event with Christians from across Canada. We also had an excellent, if at times challenging, book club discussion on *The Hate U Give*, a timely book about police brutality and standing up for racial justice.

We made the decision for youth group to re-gather in-person starting September 13. For five weeks, we met outside and walked to Philosopher's Walk to tie-dye t-shirts, listen to Residential school survivors' stories, go on a St. Francis scavenger hunt, read the Bible and pray together. It was really wonderful to reconnect in person with the youth, and we had some wonderful laughs and discussions.

In September, we also welcomed Pavani Paul to the youth ministry team through the Youth Ministry Apprenticeship Programme (YMAP) of the Diocese of Toronto. Pavani is a PhD student at Wycliffe College and has been part of the Redeemer community for about two years. She brings deep Biblical knowledge and passion, particularly for the Old Testament. We are so excited to have this opportunity to work with and learn from Pavani!



In mid-October, we decided that it would be best to move back to online youth group. We have explored Season of Creation, stories of Saints and interrupted journeys in the Bible. And most importantly, we continue to be there for one another, to share highs and lows from our week, to share our frustrations, our disappointments, our joys and our worries. Through this, we will continue to remind each other that we are loved, by one another and most especially by God.





# 2020: Beckoning Towards the Future

*Paul Pynkoski*

Eliza Gilkyson was born to musician parents in 1950. She has recorded twenty albums, received two Grammy nominations, and was inducted into Texas' Music Hall of Fame. Until COVID-19 she was performing one hundred fifty concerts yearly. Her voice is reminiscent of Joan Baez and Bonnie Raitt, and her deceptively simple guitar style and fine lyrics move listeners through folk, pop, and country styles.

A distinguished career, yet *2020*, her most recent album, was my initial contact, and for the past month I have played it daily. *2020* has about it a ring of familiarity, starting with the opening song, "Promises to Keep."

The Hammond organ intro, the guitar and harmonica accompaniment, hark back to the folk songs of the 1960s, yet she offers much more than musical familiarity. Gilkyson gathers up our fears, our anxieties, and our longings, graciously offering them back in a way that lets us know we are not alone. "I've been crying in the dark of night/I can't find my way to sleep...I've been hoping there'll be some way through...I'm just looking for a sign." She doesn't have to name poverty, racism, election fears, or the threat posed by an expanding military budget. We know what's been keeping us up at night, and we know deep down that "Thoughts and prayers will never make things right."

Her song, like the cry of the Psalmist, is an unmistakable lament, tempered with hope and risk. Gilkyson sings out "We're on fire, on fire/We're on fire now." Hope points us towards the fire of love: "I've been counting on my angel choir/To put some wings upon my feet/Fill me up with inspiration's fire/And get me out into the street." The risk, though, is that while "the fire of love burns deep inside," we have "no roadmap tells us where we are."

There is a gentle prodding here: Inspiration may come from the angel choirs; it may come from the burning fire of love. Either way, we are not called to the naiveté of a false or empty hope, but rather to one that is active and engaged. The wings the angels put on our feet propel us into the street. The darkness remains, but we commit to following "the brightest star" down an unlit road, because – and here Gilkyson channels Robert Frost – we have "promises to keep" and "miles to go before I sleep."

Her prodding continues with "Peace in our Hearts," a march-like tune calling us to "walk together arm in arm," bringing together "every color and tribe" to stand for the earth and the future of our children. This is not Kumbaya. She knows it will lead us into conflicts where we will "stare into the face of the hateful mind," and she challenges us to do so with love as our inspiration and "peace in our hearts."

Gilkyson motivates us to get our feet on the road, but suggests in "My Heart Aches" that marching is not enough. "50 years and 500 miles," of marching and singing "we shall overcome" and "give peace a chance," has not overcome complacency. We are "Waiting for some others to take a stand/and hammer out justice all over this land." We look around and see "the helpless and the homeless," those who have "been silenced at the mercy of our greed," and find ourselves stepping over the bodies of "the victims of hatred" who have been shot down



in our churches and schoolyards.” This is not condemnation. It is lament, and she cries out again and again, “My heart aches”.

The feeling of familiarity continues as Gilkyson covers Dylan’s “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” and Seeger’s “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” With “Beach Haven” she reaches back into the 1950s, setting to music a letter Woody Guthrie wrote to Fred Trump, envisioning the type of community Trump’s Beach Haven apartment complex could become without racist tenant policies. “One More Day” reminds us that transforming love requires both hearts and hands. “Beautiful World of Mine”

exhibits a sacramental sensibility. Gilkyson finds in water “my holy wine,” and pledges to be “faithful and true” as she hymns earth’s beauty.

2020 has been a hard year. But rather than wish us back to normal, Eliza Gilkyson gently calls us forward to commit to the hard work of embodied love, to endure and resist until we see the emergence of the Beloved Community.

## worship together but two meters apart

On September 13, we regathered for worship in the church for the first time since March 13. While the current state of the pandemic has meant a return to on-line only worship, it was wonderful to be back in a beloved space while we could.





# Advent Waiting and The Lord's Table

Nate Wall

Steven Mackison, our Incumbent ask Scholar-in-residence Nate Wall to bend his insight and eloquence towards articulating our longings for the Eucharist and addressing our hunger in this Season of Advent. This is his offering.

*"O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here."*

Sometimes I picture those exiles: the ordinary residents of Judah, taken captive by Babylon's military in the 6th century BCE. Imagine the homes left vacant, the families scattered, the tight-knit neighbourhoods unravelled. Workaday life disappeared in a moment. No one knew if or when "normal" would come back around. Which is reason enough to mourn.

But they had more to mourn still.

At the heart of this people's life was an altar—God's own dining room table, in Jerusalem's holy temple. This was Home, the gravitational centre of all their homes. And when the people became refugees, that home fire stopped burning.

Nothing would be roasted, no drink poured out, no grain smoked up and shared with God in thanksgiving sacrifice. Years passed without anyone seeing God's temple. Months dragged on with no extended family gathering around the Lord's supper table.

So what did they do? By the rivers of Babylon, they sat and wept. Always they remembered Jerusalem.

Sometimes they sang. Mostly they prayed their lament; searched their own hearts; faced into the lonely dark. When they could, they met. They rediscovered the neglected words of the Prophets, which became an anchor. And day by day they learned why "hope" and "wait" were synonyms in the Hebrew tongue.

Those exiles lived Advent.

*"O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here."*

Isn't that *the* Advent hymn? To sing those words is to find that Israel's story isn't ancient history. This past is not dead; it's not even past, as William Faulkner once wrote. No: in the season of Advent we stand shoulder to shoulder with those exiles, our wet eyes squinting at the horizon, quietly pleading with the apparently absent God, holding out for hope. *Ad-matai, Adonai*?, they say; "How long, O Lord?" we echo.



That's what Advent invites us into every year. Most years my imagination works hard to transport me to that spot next to the exiles of Israel. This year, I find I'm already there. Maybe you are too.

The lights are off in the Church of the Redeemer at Bloor and Avenue. There's no drink or food served at that altar; no thanksgiving sacrifice offered at the table. And we, where are we? Many places—that's



just it. We are scattered. Many of us are lonely. Most of us are weary of waiting. All of us are hungry for a meal at God's table.

Just as there was no quick fix to the problem of exile, there is no fingersnap solution to the reality of this pandemic.

Maybe we're not supposed to have a solution yet.

Israel's poets dared to imagine that God's hand was in their scattering. Even in their scattering. Somehow, their long Advent wasn't beside the point. Exile was the seedbed of hope, precisely because it was the place of waiting.

This Advent—this Advent in particular—we have a unique chance to join them. It's all too tempting to skirt Advent's hard edges, especially by self-medicating with food, drink, streaming entertainment, social media. But maybe God's hand is in our scattering. Maybe the thing most needful is to feel the weight of our waiting, and to let it sink us down into the truth of Advent, down into the seedbed of God-bottomed hope.

Listen again to that old Advent hymn. The song begins in exile and mourning. It always does. Before long, though, our voices lift with the exiles of Israel in the recurring refrain: *"Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel."*

