

Greetings to Susanne Guenther Loewen and Nutana Park Mennonite Church

June 27, 2021

Congratulations to Susanne as you receive the blessing of ordination this morning. May this be a day of deep joy for you. May you experience the companioning presence of God as you accompany others and open the scriptures for them in your own unique way.

We also wish to extend our congratulations to the community at Nutana Park MC. May you be richly blessed as you serve God and each other. We commit ourselves to prayer for your community.

Shalom,

Claire and Garth Ewert Fisher on behalf of Mount Royal Mennonite Church

Dear Susanne,

We at First Mennonite Church rejoice with NPMC that God has called you to be and proclaim the Good News. Congratulations and best wishes!

Rod

Wildwood Mennonite Church would like to offer congratulations and blessings on your ordination, Susanne! We have also witnessed your gifts in leadership, teaching, hospitality and compassion and we are glad to affirm your calling as a minister in the way of Jesus in the wider church! We look forward to continuing to partner with you and NPMC in our shared community in Saskatoon and MC Sask.

Joe Heikman

Greetings from Osler Mennonite Church as we join you in joyful spirit and prayer this morning for Susanne's ordination. "May God's Word shine in your hearts by the Holy Spirit so bright and warm that you always find comfort and joy in it." #912 Voices Together

Peace Mennonite Church Regina Sends you, Susanne, and Nutana Park Mennonite Church greetings on this special day of ordination. May God bless you all as you continue on the journey begun when Jesus ministry moved beyond their local area into the wide world. Today and into the future may you be blessed.

Peace Mennonite Regina.

"On behalf of Langham Mennonite Fellowship, we offer our warmest congratulations to Susanne on her ordination. Susanne is a woman of character and wisdom. We know that her thoughtful approach to worship, her deep theological wisdom and her incredible gifting as a teacher and pastor will continue to be a blessing to Nutana Park and the entire MCSask Family. We pray and trust that Susanne will continue to sense God's leading as she pursues God's call on her life. We rejoice with you all today!"

The peace of Christ be with you (and also with you). It's an honour, privilege, and a blessing to be here this morning, to worship with you and to celebrate the ordination of Dr. Susanne Guenther Loewen. This is an exciting day for Susanne, her family, this congregation, and all of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, as evidenced by the greetings and well wishes by your colleagues. I share in their joy and pray for the presence of Christ to be with us as we reflect on this morning's text and invite Susanne up for ordination. (Let us pray😊)

When I asked Susanne which texts she would like me to focus on this morning, I thought she would respond with a typical call story, like the call of Mary (sure, that's the text we used at her installation, but I don't remember last Sunday's sermon, never mind what was preached four and a half years ago!). Or, maybe the call of Moses at the burning bush or the Anointing of David. But no, our venerable peace theologian chose the story about a fight; that all night wrestling match between Jacob and Yahweh disguised as a stranger. As Susanne

wrote in some reflection questions in preparation for ordination, “because Scripture is never interpreted once and for all, but must be revisited again and again, I think of reading Scripture in terms of the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32). As Jacob refused to let go until he received a blessing, so we live and wrestle with the Bible until its blessing for us becomes clear.”

And while, yes, Susanne also chose the original ending of Mark’s gospel where the women at the tomb become the first apostles to proclaim the risen Christ, most of this morning’s focus will be on the wounded blessing.

Some of us here are currently engaged in the Marvel Cinematic Universe TV show called Loki. For those of you familiar to Norse Mythology, Loki is known as a trickster; the god of Mischief, and he’s the younger, adopted brother to Thor, the god of Thunder and heir to the throne. The problem is, Loki wants the title of heir for himself, and so throughout his life he deceives others to try and get the blessing that isn’t his. As a

result, he is guilty of things he isn't proud of. And in the first episode of season 1, Loki has all his tricks, deception and duplicity laid bare and he's exposed for the fraud he really is.

Loki and Jacob have a lot in common. For Jacob is also the younger, jealous brother. He's also a trickster, as his name implies, and is already wrestling and jostling for position with Esau in his mother's womb! Throughout his whole life, he cheats, lies and steals to receive the blessing that wasn't meant for him. He buys Esau's inheritance with stew, and with the help of mom, lies and cheats Esau out of Isaac's blessing while Esau is away on a hunting trip. This deception forces him to go into exile, to live with his uncle Laban, who will return this trickery in kind. It's on his way to Laban's, vulnerable, afraid and alone, that God briefly enters the story in a dream; presenting a ladder between earth and heaven, where God's promise of a real blessing for Jacob's family is revealed.

This morning we find ourselves 20 years after these events, and Jacob is now on his way home to confront Esau, and in many ways, the trickery has not stopped. Jacob has become quite wealthy working for uncle Laban and he's worried that Esau will take revenge on him for his past deeds. So, he hides half of his assets (just in case things go bad), and prepares gifts with the other half to appease his brother in the hope they will make peace, which is pretty much what he says; Genesis 32:20: "I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me." Peacemaking 101, buy out your opponent. Yet, it's in preparation to meet his brother that Jacob finds himself alone once again, and it's in this moment, in the darkness of the night, a stranger attacks him.

"Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go,

for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So he said to him, “What is your name?” “Jacob”. Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name?” And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.”

Jacob finally gets his blessing, but it doesn't arrive as expected. As Walter Bruggemann notes, “That is how Israel comes on the horizon. Israel is not formed by success or shrewdness, or land, but by an assault from God. Perhaps it is grace, but not the kind usually imagined. Jacob is not consulted about his new identity. It is given, even imposed. When daylight comes, the stranger is gone. And so is Jacob. There remains only Israel, who had not had a great sleep that night.”

Yes, Jacob has finally received his blessing...a new name and identity no less, kind of like a baptism, but this victory, this blessing, comes with a cost...he is now crippled. Well, actually the text says he is limp, which, considering where he was injured, implies his future, and the future of his people, is no longer his own. This crippling becomes the mark of Israel, both the person, and the people, in that the blessing from God, as great as this victory it may be, cannot be separated from the wound.

To quote Brueggemann again, "Israel must ponder how it is that blessings are given and at what cost. This same theology of weakness in power and power in weakness turns this text toward the New Testament and the gospel of the cross. [The disciples] want thrones, an equivalent to asking the name. Jesus counters by asking them about cups, baptisms and crosses. Like Jacob, they are invited to be persons of faith who prevail, but to do so with a limp...Jacob's struggle with a holy vocation may hint an anticipation of the Crucified One."

While this may not paint pastoral ministry in the warmest of colours, it's a recognition that the vocation of ministry, whatever form that takes, involves both woundedness and blessedness – these two are intricately interwoven. And as much as we would like to resolve, or collapse this tension, or separate it, we can't. For when we try to focus on one or the other, it leads to a distortion of both.

Kate Bowler, historian, author, professor, internet pastor, and incurable optimist as her website states, knows a lot about what it means to be blessed, or as is common today, #blessed. She has spent much of her professional career researching what it means to be “blessed” by certain North American Christian standards, and has worked hard to try to provide a counter-narrative to what is commonly known as the prosperity gospel. If you love God with all your heart, mind and soul, and increase your donation to your well dressed pastor, you will be blessed with health, wealth and prosperity. And if you don't do

those things, or you experience something negative, like a wound, then it is your fault and a sign of your weakness. Now, it's not wrong to say that God wants to bless you. The fact is, God does. While we don't often connect the Hebrew word Baruch, which means "bless" to "shalom", which means peace, they are not far off from each other for God desires both. We see this desire to bless all creation in the creation story itself, a creation created in peace, and we see it in the call story of Abram and Sarai, where they are sent out to be a blessing to the nations of the world. Blessing, and being a blessing, is at the heart of the gospel! But, as Bowler notes, heresy (like the prosperity gospel) happens when the volume is turned up too loud on something that is true...or we focus in only on one aspect of the story. Yes, God wants to bless us, our communities, and our world, but when this becomes the prosperity gospel, and the volume becomes too high, it gets distorted.

This can also happen on the flip side of the tension point.

If we only focus on woundedness, or sacrifice, we can also create heresies that are untrue when left on their own.

A few months ago, I was involved with a credentialing interview with one of our sibling regional churches, they needed me to pinch hit at the time, and I was impressed how this new-to-Mennonite pastor caught on to one of the shadow sides of Mennonite theology and practice. In their 10 years of ministry, they were shocked at how often, when at the death bed of a dearly beloved saint, the dying person was unsure of God's love for them. In fact, I have experienced this too when I was a pastor. Questions were raised asking; "have I done enough, been good enough, achieved enough, and sacrificed enough in order to earn my heavenly reward?" And there was very little awareness that they were dying in the presence of a loving, gracious and forgiving God and this made that pastor quite sad. How is it that blessing, and grace, has been missing from the lives of these people? Yes, discipleship, ethics, making

the world a better place is an important aspect of following Jesus, but when we only engage following Jesus from the place of sacrifice, discipleship, dare I say works, and lose sight of grace, of being forgiven, and hearing that you are God's beloved, we can also distort the truth of the gospel in another way.

If we only drink from the well of blessing, we will never count the cost of grace.

If we only drink from the well of sacrifice, or the need to do more, we will never see the joy of the gospel.

Growing in Christ, first as baptised believers, and now for you Susanne, as an ordained minister, is an ongoing invitation to live in the tension of blessing *and* woundedness; discipleship *and* grace; the yet, *and* not yet; the academy *and* day-to-day lived reality; tradition *and* change; loving God *and* loving neighbour; being a priesthood of all believers, *and* being called

out of the “collective priesthood” to serve them through pastoral care and leadership.

Susanne, as you step more fully into the call before you, and embrace ordained ministry as a call from God and this community, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, the wounded Messiah; may the same love that sent Christ into the world be the same love that sends you into the world; and may the same Spirit that empowered the women at the tomb to go as the first apostles to proclaim the Risen Christ be the same Spirit that strengthens and encourages you to proclaim the risen, Crucified Messiah, today, and in the years of ministry ahead of you. Amen.

Ordination Litany for Susanne Guenther Loewen

Sunday, June 27, 2021

Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, SK

Presentation

Ryan: Today is a significant day for Susanne, Chris, Simon and Junia, for Nutana Park Mennonite Church, for

Mennonite Church Saskatchewan and for God's people in this community and across the church. Today is a day of celebration, consecration, and commitment as Susanne is ordained for pastoral ministry and leadership.

Before inviting Susanne up to be ordained, I would like to offer a few words on what we are doing here this morning.

Each one of us here is called by Jesus to use our gifts and abilities to serve the Church and the World. As a priesthood of all believers, we are all called to be ministers of the Gospel of healing, hope and peace. At the same time, throughout history, the Holy Spirit, together with the Community of Faith, has called out individuals to serve in roles of leadership and care giving to the priesthood and the community. Most often this is in the form of ministerial leadership, however, as Mennonites, we have also ordained deacons, church administrators in our conference offices, professors, teachers, evangelists and chaplains.

Ordination is not elevating an individual above the rest, but rather it is the church, the local community of faith, joining together with God, calling an individual to serve on behalf of the congregation and on behalf of the larger church body. It is an affirmation of gifts for ministry and a recognition that you have been called to use those gifts to fulfill this office.

Susanne, God has been at work all through your life, calling you to be a follower of Jesus Christ. You have responded to that call. God and the people of God have affirmed your gifts of leadership and ministry within this community of faith and in mission to the world. Your identity as pastor has taken shape as God has blessed you with experiences of pastoring. Your sense of call to ministry in the church has remained strong. The congregation has affirmed your gifts for ministry and leadership, as well as the greater church through Mennonite Church Saskatchewan.

Today we celebrate your call from God and God's people to ministry in the church.

Ryan: Sisters and brothers, we are gathered today in the presence of God and this assembly to ordain Dr. Susanne Guenther Loewen to the pastoral ministry.

Who presents Susanne for ordination to ministry?

Nutana Park Mennonite Church:

We present our sister Susanne to be set apart for ministry of this congregation.

Ryan: In commending Susanne for this ministry, will you also uphold her in it?

Nutana Park Mennonite Church: We will stand by Susanne in her calling.

Questions

(invite Susanne up)

Ryan: Susanne, today, do you renew your baptismal vows of commitment to Jesus Christ.

Susanne: I do.

Ryan: Susanne, do you accept the call of this faith community as a call from God? Do you commit yourself to this congregation, to be Christ's representative among them, both unafraid to lead and willing to live in mutual accountability with them?

Susanne: I do.

Ryan: Susanne, do you promise to devote yourself to prayer, Bible Study and the spiritual disciplines so that as you grow in God's Word and Wisdom, you may grow also as an agent of healing, hope and peace?

Susanne: I do.

Ryan: Susanne, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will you love the people you have been called to serve? Will you work with others and members of this congregation so that the body of Christ might be spiritually equipped to grow into the likeness of Jesus? Will you commit yourself to support the

Mennonite Church and the work of the Regional Church, maintaining an open spirit which is ready to receive and give counsel within the congregation as well as within the Regional Body?

Susanne: I will.

Request to Congregation

Ryan: As Nutana Park Mennonite Church, you are part of the cloud of witnesses that surround and embrace Susanne. Do you accept your role in calling her to ordained ministry? Will you honor her calling and also your own? Will you pray with her? Will you speak the truth in love? Will you join her in sharing and living the good news of Jesus Christ with others? (If so, please respond, 'we will'.

Congregation: We will.

Ordination

Ryan: Susanne, we have heard your promises. Now, on behalf of these, your brothers and sisters here at Nutana Park Mennonite Church, and on behalf of Mennonite Church Saskatchewan, we ordain you as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prayer of Ordination

Ryan: Susanne has asked certain individuals to come forward to form a circle of prayer around Susanne. In normal times, we would open that up to just about everybody. For those of you surrounding her, I as she kneels, I invite you to put a hand on her or the person next to you. Those in the congregation, or at home watching, I invite you to imagine Susanne is right beside you, and you are putting your hand on her shoulder. Together, let us pray for Susanne, and bless her in this step of ordination.

Prayer: Our God, who is with us wherever we are, who discerns our thoughts from far away, and who is acquainted with all of our ways, we come today filled with joy and thanksgiving at your work among us, and in particular, your work within Susanne's life and ministry. We give you thanks, O God, for the ways your Spirit has moved within her, and among your people. Look with favor on your servant whom we now dedicate to Christ's ministry. Send your Holy Spirit upon Susanne so that she may be strengthened by the gift of your grace to carry out faithfully the work of congregational ministry and to run with perseverance the race that is now set before her. May she not grow weary or lose heart. May she excel in every virtue: in love that is sincere; in concern for the sick and the poor, in unassuming authority, in self discipline and in holiness of life.

May she in this life imitate your Son, who came not to be served but to serve. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Anointing of Blessing

Ryan: Loving God, your Son was anointed by the Holy Spirit, not to be served but to serve. Let your Spirit come down upon Susanne in fullness.

Let her be a minister of your healing love. Let this oil be a sign to her of your presence and protection.

Susanne, we anoint you for blessing in the name of God the Father, in the name of Jesus the Son and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Welcome

Ryan: Susanne, we welcome you as an ordained minister among our family of churches here in Saskatchewan. May you sense God's presence as you continue to minister in Christ's name.

Presentation of the Bible

Ryan: Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach.

Response from Congregation:

Response from Susanne: