

**Christmas 2 Prayers Sunday, January 3, 2021**

**The Special Meeting to vote on the Constitutional amendment will be held on ZOOM during the regularly scheduled Zoom Coffee Break time on Sunday, January 10 at 11 a.m.**

**Church members who wish to register a vote but are unable to join the Zoom Meeting may telephone the Church Clerk, Marjorie Higgs in the week preceding Sunday, January 10 to register your vote. 519-631-2248**

**NOTICE OF AMENDMENT**

**The Plains deacons give notice that the Plains Constitution be amended to permit electronic meetings and voting.**

**PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE PLAINS CONSTITUTION**

**NEW**

7.4 Electronic meetings are permitted. Members may participate in a meeting electronically and shall have the ability to:

- a. register a vote
- b. be counted towards determining quorum; and
- c. participate in any and all discussion.

Where necessary, an electronic meeting may be held without physical attendance by members as long as all participants can see/hear one another. Members participating by electronic means shall inform the clerk about their intentions to attend the meeting electronically. Members must advise the chairperson, about their intentions to leave the meeting either temporary or on a permanent basis. Members participating by electronic means will be deemed to have left the meeting when no longer electronically connected to the meeting. The chairperson of the meeting may direct that the connection be terminated if the member cannot be clearly understood, or if a poor connection or background noise is deemed to be disruptive to the meeting. In the case of a loss of connection, or any connection issue which impedes the ability of a member to participate in the meeting in real time, the meeting will continue without attempts to reconnect them to the meeting. If electronic communication is interrupted during a meeting and remains interrupted while a vote is taken, the member affected is deemed to have left the meeting prior to the vote.

**NEW**

7.5 Registering a vote as noted in 7.4 a. shall be by one of the following means

- a. a simple show of hands for or against the motion,
- b. a verbal indication as to for or against the motion
- c. or, by an electronic tabulator where this option is available.

In all cases the clerk shall record the vote, and the results as reported by the clerk shall be final and binding.

NEW

7.6 Electronic meetings shall be permitted for all committees or groups established by the church and shall be conducted in accordance with the terms set out in 7.4. and 7.5

AMENDED

7.9 A quorum of 20 members present either in person or electronically will be required for a vote at a church meeting.

---

### **Celebrations**

January 8<sup>th</sup> Justin Ralf

### **Prayer Concerns**

Bob B.

Jenny & family

Cathy T.

Bonnie & family

Marilyn C.

Jason C.

Sally P.

Carol M.

Rae A.

Hazel & family

Family of the late Betty Graham

Carol A.

Jean L

Larry S

Pete S

Carl & Leena & family

George E.

Judy J.

Mabel S.

Family of the late Dave Axford

### **AN ACROSTIC PRAYER FOR EPIPHANY**

**E**piphany God hear our prayers: silent and spoken.....

**P**rotect and guide us as we enter this untried New Year

**I**nfuse us with gratitude for every blessing, big or small

**P**our into our hearts a generous measure of your grace

**H**old, help and heal us when we fail, because we will

**A**lways know that we seek to bravely follow Jesus.

**N**o one has shown more utter devotion to you, than

**Y**our Word made flesh, full of grace and truth. Amen.

### **Gospel of John 1: 1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

## **Sermon: A NEW BEGINNING**

The new year has dawned! We've made it to 2021 and we are thankful! We're thankful that 2020 is behind us although it had its rare and shining moments. Unfortunately, pandemics have a way of stealing the spotlight from events we'd prefer to highlight in our diaries and memory boxes, like births, weddings, graduations, vacations, birthdays and anniversaries.

The new year which usually contains both the promise and potential for change and fresh starts has not disappointed. Even though the wrinkles have not been worked out yet in regard to vaccine roll out, the fact that vaccines are on the way fills us with a renewed hope.

We desperately hope that 2021 will hold better days with many reasons to celebrate than 2020 held. Although there is much that we will want to forget, about the past year we will never forget the people who we loved who departed this life to be with God. We will remember them and the gifts of love, challenge, humor, hope and blessing that they gave to us and received from us. Neither pandemic, the passing of time nor death can erase our precious memories.

Last Wednesday evening as I turned on the television, I caught the end of a Memorial tribute on an American channel that listed celebrities and political figures who had died in 2020. I was startled when I heard Vera Lynn's name mentioned. Dame Vera Lynn was an English songwriter and singer whose ballads were very popular during World War II. *The White Cliffs of Dover* and *We'll Meet Again* are two songs that are famously associated with her. Dame Lynn passed away in June 2020 at the age of 103. I was amazed that she had lived such a long life! When I Googled her name, I discovered one of her songs that I didn't remember, but the title seems to fit the situation in which we're currently living. The song is entitled *It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow*.

It was written by American composer, Irving Berlin. It was released in 1939, the year World War 2 began.

**It's a lovely day tomorrow**

**Tomorrow is a lovely day**

**Come and feast your tear dimmed eyes**

**On tomorrow's clear blue skies**

**If today your heart is weary**

**If ev'ry little thing looks gray**

**Just forget your troubles and learn to say**

**Tomorrow is a lovely day.**

The message in that little song would prove timely then as it remains timely today, as we look forward to a tomorrow that is free of this deadly virus. On a more fanciful note, I'm reminded of another famous female who spoke about the promise of tomorrow.

Granted she is a fictional character, but to generations of Canadians, she is as much a national treasure as Dame Vera was to her generation. I'm referring to Anne of Green Gables

who one day accidentally added liniment in a cake that she was baking for a very special occasion. It was for Mrs. Allen the Pastor's wife, who was coming for a visit.

After the catastrophe Anne remarked to Marilla: "*Marilla, isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it... yet?*" (*Anne of Green Gables, chapter 21 written by Lucy Maud Montgomery*)

Today as we begin a new year we face forward, clear eyed, knowing that there will no doubt, be some mistakes made in it. But let us also be hopeful that we will learn from our mistakes, as individuals, and as the human race.

The past year has highlighted many systemic mistakes, wrongs and inequities which have blighted humanity for a long, long time.

It is to be hoped that 2021 will mark a new beginning in humankind's collective efforts to address such societal sins as racial inequality, gender inequality, poverty, domestic violence and pollution. May we choose to move forward like most people have done during 2020 by working together in a common cause, rather than fermenting division and conflict.

Working together while apart has presented both new challenges and new opportunities to the Church of Jesus Christ during the past two thirds of 2020. Churches along with other faith communities, faced with the cancelations of gatherings and the closure of sanctuaries were forced to get creative in order to continue their ministry of the gospel. I remember back to a *not so distant* time when I responded negatively to the idea of recording worship services at Plains and then broadcasted to a wider viewership. At the time I believed that what happened during worship was meant to be experienced *live* within the worshipping community.

However, Covid-19 restrictions forced me to change my mindset and practice.

I discovered that there were folks who live too far away to come to Plains who appreciated receiving the services online. Church members, some of whom may have been shy about inviting friends to church were forwarding the service by email to friends and family members. Even though I look forward as you do to getting back into the familiar practice of meeting together for worship and other events, YouTube may well remain a tool for outreach.

As daunting as some new beginnings can be or seem, they happen all the time. And as much as we might not want some things to end, their ending opens the door to something new. The Roman philosopher, Seneca has been quoted as saying, "With every ending comes a new beginning."

A new beginning is the theme of the gospel reading for the second Sunday of the Christmas which ended 2020 and introduces us to the first Sunday of 2021. John's gospel is different from the other three gospels in many ways. One of the differences is the way his gospel begins from the others. For example, Mark, the earliest gospel written, begins with the baptism ministry of John the Baptist. Matthew's gospel goes back further in history, by listing a family tree which linking Jesus, the Messiah to Abraham. Luke begins his volume with the birth stories of Jesus and his forerunner John. But John, whose gospel was likely written last, probably at the end of the first century or at the beginning of the second, began his gospel by going further back in time than his predecessors. John took his beginning story of Jesus back to THE Beginning;

as in the Genesis 1 **Beginning**. In fact, we could say, that John traced Jesus' family lineage further than the creation of humans listed on day 6 of the week of Creation.

John begins with "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. *All things came into being through him...*" In other words, John is proclaiming his understanding that the Word who came to live among us in Jesus of Nazareth is the *Holy One* who *was, is and always will be*. This is John's way of telling us that in the person and ministry of Jesus, humans encountered the closest thing they will ever get to seeing God.

“No one has ever seen God”, John writes in verse 18. “But,” he continues “it is God’s only Son who is closest to his heavenly Father’s heart who makes him known.”

Now the gospel writer makes it clear that there are other ways for people to come to God.

For his people, the laws of Moses and the traditions and rituals of their religion were effective and meaningful. He doesn’t say so directly, but the author’s harking back to the Creation stories in Genesis and likening Jesus to the *light* that dispelled the darkness reminded his people and ours that people have always sought and been drawn to the divine through nature. But the coming of Jesus, while it did not mark the beginning of humanity’s relationship to our Creator, it marked *a more intimate relationship* than previously experienced.

Why? John answers the “Why” with a common sensical reply. *Because no one had ever, ever seen God—But.... they could see Jesus.*

And they could see, in his super closer relationship with God what God was like and what God was really all about. God was all about love. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son”. (John 3:16a) Jesus coming didn’t mark any shift in the way God had always viewed his people-- even the laws of Moses and 10 Commandments had been driven by love.

But Jesus’ coming helped to change the way that people saw God. In Jesus, people could see the God who knew how to laugh and cry... A God who did not pass by the helpless but stopped to help.... The God who did not right the prodigals out of the will but welcomed them home. When people saw Jesus on a cross, they saw a God who suffered rejection, pain, humiliation, defeat and death. In Jesus’ God became so like us that he became one with us, so that we could become one with God in the way we think, behave and share love with others.

It’s not easy to follow Jesus’ way. It wasn’t easy for Jesus. His way led him to a cross...to an ending... but his ending led him to a new beginning. And now he lives in every soul who speaks his name and every heart that shares his love. We know that with God there is always an opportunity for new beginnings.... there is another opportunity to pray, to share....

another day to learn from our mistakes....another day to grow in wisdom and in faith.

I like this quote that I found online about new beginnings. Like John the gospel writer this writer looks to God’s communication through Creation for inspiration. “Be like the lotus: trust in the light; grow through the dirt; believe in new beginnings.”



Though new beginnings can be hard; even covered with dirt from the past or past mistakes, John’s great gospel about Jesus teaches that God’s wise and creative Word is present with us in every new beginning. Even if everything doesn’t happen in 2021 just we may dream, God will always be close to us, building upon what is---

to make something new.

Thanks be to God!

Amen

