



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday February 7th, 2021
Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan



As we worship we gratefully acknowledge that we are on the ancient and traditional lands of The Blackfoot Nation, the people of the Treaty 7, and of Metis Region 3. May we cherish and care for these lands and the people, just as those who came before us did.

Prelude

Opening Call

We come to worship with yearning in our hearts,

Yearning to know that love makes a difference.

We come to be loved for who we are, and because of whose we are – people of God.

We come seeking messages of hope that transform our living.

Come, let us worship God.

Music for meditation

VU 374 Come and Find the Quiet Centre

Opening Prayer

In the midst of the crowded lives we lead, we set aside this time to worship, O God. Clear the chaos from our minds and hearts, and clear our senses to discover your presence. Show us things that really do matter, as we strengthen our faith through this time of Sabbath. Amen.

Adapted from a prayer written by Kate Crawford, Gathering Advent/ Christmas/ Epiphany 2020-21 pg. 47. Used with permission.

Time with Children

Music for meditation

MV 138 My Love Colours Outside the Lines

Scripture

Mark 1:29-39

This reading follows directly after last week's. Jesus is continuing to minister in Capernaum, and continuing to make a lasting impression with those he encounters.

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Reflection

We now have just a couple of weeks left in the Season of Epiphany. Today's reading is a continuation from the last few weeks. The passage is rich. There's so much in it that speaks to us.

Firstly – I want to draw attention to how Jesus approached Simon's mother-in-law. As the passage says - "³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up."

This was a woman...and in Jesus day, it was socially inappropriate to touch a woman not related to you...and even worse to touch anyone – man or woman - with an illness...for they were considered ritually impure and unclean.

Yet Jesus took this woman by the hand, regardless of the rules of society. And in so doing, he validated her worth as a human being. More importantly, he affirmed for her and everyone watching that she was someone worthy of the love of God, and of God's gift of healing. Jesus restored this woman's dignity. He restored her place in community, and he likely restored her faith.

With a simple touch, something that considered so wrong at the time, Jesus gave this woman so very much. It didn't cost him anything to give that touch. And in turn, it showed something to her, to her family, and to the community who was still learning about who Jesus was, and what his mission was about.

Interestingly – the Greek word used for "lifted up" is the same word used later in Mark's gospel in reference to Jesus' own resurrection. Jesus didn't just help this woman to physically be lifted up – he lifted up her spirit.

And what did Simon's mother-in-law do in response to Jesus' compassion and care? She got up and started to serve people -as soon as she was healed. There's a message in that too. We cannot serve others if we are not well ourselves – whether that be in body, mind or spirit. Yet, once this woman was

healed she began to live out her God given gifts of hospitality and compassion – spiritual gifts of service.

The Greek word for what she does – “diaconeo” often gets translated as “to serve” or “to minister.” It’s that “diaconeo” that is the root for Deacon, which was a role we have had in the United Church since before Union, a role we now call Diaconal Ministry. That is one of the two streams of ordered ministry in the United Church of Canada, and other denominations. That ministry finds its roots in our Christian scriptures. It is a ministry for the whole people of God – men and women alike.

As the Season’s of the Spirit commentary notes – this diaconeo is the same word that the author of Mark’s gospel uses to describe how the angels cared for Jesus in the wilderness earlier in this chapter. The commentary goes on to note that what Simon’s mother-in-law does, in her serving, is “something beyond mere hospitality...this woman provides what is necessary to sustain life, as Jesus does.” Seasons of the Spirit Fusion ACE, 2020-21 pg. 170

There’s a third aspect of this story I want to draw your attention to. It goes back to that idea of not being able to serve others if we are not well ourselves – body, mind and spirit. After Jesus’ encounter in the home of Simon’s mother-in-law, he takes time for himself. “³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.”

That Sabbath time was just important for Jesus as it was for those he served.

We all need that Sabbath time– time alone to renew and restore – especially after a time of intense activity or emotional stress. Jesus went to a quiet place, a place where he would not be disturbed. He went there to pray, to commune with God. He needed that spiritual food to give him strength for the journey. We all need, I believe, Sabbath time...a rest from the usual, from our day to day labours, from that which drains our energies and makes us yearn for healing.

The place he goes – the wilderness – a retreat from the centre of communal life, in nature, quiet and peaceful. He turns off the noise of the day to day of his work and mission to restore and renew.

That idea of retreating – in some ways has become a luxury. If you can afford a retreat centre, a hotel room somewhere close to nature, you are in a class of privilege. Even the idea of Sabbath retreat has become a marketable commodity in our time.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. Most of us, with affordability or not, cannot escape to a retreat or a place of renewal – simply because of COVID restrictions. But we can retreat. We can experience Sabbath. We can do so without opening

our wallets, and without even getting in the car. Take a walk in the early morning...before most of the world is moving. Not this week – do that when the thermometer rises a fair bit. Pick up that book you've been wanting to read for so long. But instead of racing through it – savour it. As you read, note how you are feeling, note what impact your reading is having on you. Is it inspiring you to new actions? Is it challenging your way of thinking about a particular issue, about the world around you? Or perhaps is it opening you up to new spiritual awareness?

We could simply do what Jesus does in this passage, and at other times in his ministry – in finding a quiet place alone...in my house, sometimes that is a night when the others are asleep...it might be on a park bench, or hiking trail resting upon a rock or a quiet meadow, maybe with a creek meandering by. Find a place to just be silent, to allow the stillness to enter in to you soul. Even if just for a few moments each day, silence is good for the soul.

Jesus – in this passage spent the night in quiet retreat. Did he pray all night? Maybe. Did he sleep, while on retreat? Maybe. Both are renewing, healing acts of self care and self love. Both are good for the soul.

And for Jesus – when the night of quiet reflection was over – he went on with his work. He travelled to other towns, offered his gifts of healing and compassion in other communities, he served other people.

We are called to model our lives after his example – to share God's love and compassion – but also to care for our own spiritual health and well being along the way. For as Simon's mother-in-law shows us, as Jesus shows us, in this passage – we must care for ourselves to care for others. The two go hand in hand.

As you go into this week – may we all find peaceful moments to find your quiet centre in the crowded lives we lead. Amen.

This Week's Minute for Mission Living the Dream

What are your dreams for the world? And if you could turn your dreams into concrete goals, what would they be? Surely, right now a quick end to the COVID-19 pandemic would top the list!

Did you know the United Nations made a list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals for the world? In 2015, the UN vowed to achieve these goals by 2030. The list includes eliminating poverty and hunger as well as making sure everyone has access to quality education and health care.

These are ambitious goals. In light of COVID-19, they are more necessary than ever.

The first week of February is International Development Week (IDW). During this week, Global Affairs Canada encourages organizations across the country to celebrate the ways we are working to achieve the UN's goals.

Did you know your generosity through Mission & Service supports justice work in 19 countries around the world through 80 trusted organizational partnerships? In Canada, we support 81 life-changing ministries like food banks and shelters. These numbers aren't empty statistics; they reflect real people who, thanks to Mission & Service, receive the support they need. This support means they can access crucial things the goals highlight, like clean water, food, education, and healthcare.

"The sustainability goals are important because we are all interconnected, and as people of faith, we are called to care about the world. What's happening globally affects us here, and what happens here has a global impact," says Thivan Hoang, Program Coordinator for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response at The United Church of Canada. "In the COVID-19 crisis we've seen, for example, how parts of the world that don't have the means or governance to protect and vaccinate affects all of us. This crisis has really underlined that there is no us and them. We are one community. Keeping our eye on the goals reminds us of that."

Mission & Service is your church—our church—in action. Together, we work to achieve life-changing, indeed world-changing, goals.

Mission & Service is one of the ways we are living the dream—God's dream of a world where no one goes hungry, no one lacks healthcare, and no one feels alone. Thank you for your generosity.

Offertory Music VU 541 Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Offertory Prayer

Let us bring to God our gifts, in response to God's gracious love. Let us bring to God our lives, in response to Christ's call to serve others. We pray that these gifts may be used to build hope and love in the world. Amen.

Music for meditation VU 358 When Jesus the Healer

Prayers for This Day

O God, we thank you for the special gifts you have given each of us.

We especially thank you for the opportunities we have to share offer compassion and care to our neighbours, our friends, our families. May we be agents of God's love wherever we find ourselves.

Be with us throughout this day and every day, as we remember our call to be Christ's hands in the world.

Fill us with a deep understanding of the care you have entrusted to us and the loving care you have for each one. Help us to remember to take the time we

need to care for ourselves, to rest and renew our own spirits for the journey of life.

Loving God, we have come to worship today, filled with an awareness of the needs of our community, our country, our world.

We lift up in prayer all those who suffer from loss – of relationship, through conflict or through the end of life, of a sense of security or a sense of home. We pray for those struggling with health concerns; we pray for them, and for their care-givers, family and friends, and medical personnel.

As citizens of the world, we pray for peace, for an end to poverty and hunger, for freedom from oppression and fear. We especially pray for those parts of the world affected by the pandemic, and less able to provide access to vaccines for their populations.

As we prepare to leave this place and go into the week ahead, may we be mindful of your call to serve you in love.

We take a moment now in the silence of this place to lift up the unspoken prayers of our hearts...

In thanksgiving, we pray as followers of the way of Jesus, who taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.

A Blessing for Today

Let us go from here empowered by the Spirit to spread the light of Christ.

We go, knowing that God's love goes with us, for we are God's beloved and God's blessed. Amen.

Thank you for taking time to be part of the Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge worship experience. We are having in- person worship with careful COVID precautions: Olds – 9:30am and Sundre - 1:30pm.

The bulletin and sermon will continue to be posted to the websites, for those who are unable to join us. Messages will also be posted to the Facebook Group, Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge.

**Questions? Wish to financially support our ministries?
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