



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday February 14th, 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

Love is in the air!

We gather as people called to love, called to the path of mercy and compassion.

We love with our whole heart, deep understanding and complete strength.

We will love unconditionally – both neighbour and stranger.

May we be open to letting love transform our lives.

Music for meditation

VU 296 This is God's Wondrous World

Opening Prayer

Welcome us to worship, O God, for our lives are busy. Welcome us to worship, for some of us are tired, or experiencing pain in our lives.

Welcome us to worship, for some of us come with joy in our hearts.

Welcome us to worship, and help us make a space in our lives to welcome you into our hearts. Amen.

Time with Children

Music for meditation

VU 575 I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

Scripture Mark 9: 2-9

This is the gospel for transfiguration Sunday, which precedes the beginning of Lent. This story is told in all of the synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke. That carries significance, in that all 3 gospel writers found some reason to include this story in their works.

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could

bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

Reflection

We are at that threshold between two seasons – we end the season of Epiphany with, today – Transfiguration Sunday.

So we have Shrove Tuesday – also known as Fat Tuesday – this week, where the tradition is to consume all the rich food in the house, and prepare for a season of eating more simply, giving up the goodness of fat and other rich things for Lent. Some even give up chocolate!

If you follow that tradition, keep in mind that throughout Lent, we see Sundays as “Little Resurrection Days.” The 40 days of Lent do not count the Sundays. So you can still have those favourite indulgences like that chocolate you give up for Lent, one day a week.

Consider, instead of giving up sweets and treats, why not give up things that would help others...such as making an extra donation to support a good cause...so perhaps give up your Tim’s or your favourite treat once or twice a week, and give the money you would have spent on that to support Mission and Service, or the Boys and Girls Club, or Hospice, or whatever organization is dear to your heart.

Lent is a season where traditionally, Christians also seek to be more reflective, and so I am preparing an “At Home” bible study resource that I will be posting on the website. I will also have a few printed copies available for this that aren’t on line – so if you know of anyone that would like that, let them know it will be available in the office.

The study is based on a spiritual practise called “Lectio Divina.” Lectio Divina is Latin for ‘divine reading’ and is a way of immersing yourself in a scripture passage, devotion or reflection. Instead of simply reading it, you pray it. Lectio Divina is a way of developing a closer relationship with the Divine by prayerfully experiencing what you read.

So it becomes a way of reading scripture and listening for the voice of God, listening for the voice of the divine. Each week, I've offered one of the readings from the Lectionary, so you'll be giving yourself time with a passage you'll hear in church the following Sunday. That's a little preview of Lent.

Today's reading – The Transfiguration - is indeed included in the first 3 gospels. It often gets spoken of as Jesus' mountaintop experience.

Have you ever had a moment when you sensed the presence of God so close that you were in awe? That's a mountaintop experience, in my book.

Those experiences, they are to be treasured...and shared – difficult as that sometimes be. It can be hard to share and capture the awe, the mystery, that you have experienced in one of those moments. They tend to be those “you had to be there” kind of stories.

I have had those moments – in both times of great joy, and in times of deep struggle. I think of the time that I saw, for the first time, a triple rainbow. I was in a car – during driver training. My partner was driving at the time, I was in the back seat...quietly thinking about my paternal grandmother. She was very ill. The car turned a corner, and the most dazzling triple rainbow came into view. It was like the light of hope, shining in full colour.

In that moment, I knew that God was with me. I knew that God was with my Gram. There was such peace in that moment. She was still ill – but I found myself with new strength to support my parents and aunts and uncles. In fact I ended up spending several nights at Gram's hospital bedside, so my elders could get their rest.

I've had other mountain top moments too – becoming a parent, having my children, for example. All those moments have served to remind me that the presence of God's Spirit is with me, always, in the dazzling moments where light is revealed, but also in the moments where things are just the everyday of life.

The neat thing about today's gospel is that a group of people – Peter, James, and John -shared in this amazing moment of awe with Jesus. A few weeks ago, we heard the story of Jesus calling these disciples, and now, we hear how they are with him at this very significant moment.

Together with Jesus, they experienced the mystery of seeing him transformed before their eyes; all of them experienced seeing Elijah and Moses, as well. Those two are characters from the disciples' own biblical history, leaders they would have learned about as they grew in faith.

The disciples were in such awe that they wanted to build tents or dwellings, and contain this wonder for ever! Yet that is not what Jesus wanted. He knew there was work to be done. Mission to be accomplished.

Then came that message to the disciples to listen. To listen, to fully listen, in ancient Hebrew tradition, meant not just to hear what was being said, but to act upon it, to respond to what is heard. To hear and do nothing was not truly listening.

We can't practically explain what happened on that mountaintop, yet we can see it as a shining moment of the wonder of Christ's light and love for the disciples. It must have been a transformative moment for them...so much so that they wanted to contain it and stay with it as long as possible.

We need to remember though, that Jesus would not stay on the mountain forever, and called for his disciples to descend the mountain with him. For us, this can be a message to come down off the mountain and enter into discipleship, into service and ministry, too. We can see it as a moment of inspiration to follow Jesus's mission of loving God, self, and neighbour.

This year, as we – both Olds and Sundre – participate in the Cluster Discernment Study and enter into conversations with our neighbouring United Churches – that's what we've been doing. We've been discerning mission – discerning what God is calling us to do in this time. Not just because we're living in this new unfamiliar time of pandemic, but also because we are in transition as communities of faith.

We are – let's be honest – aging congregations – our buildings and our membership. Our resources are limited – but we have resources. We have gifts – spiritual gifts that God has bestowed upon us, and that God calls us to use. Remember the children's song – This little light of mine? We're called to let our gifts shine, not to hide them under a bushel, or anywhere else.

We are called not just to revel in the shining moments of mystery, but to use those moments to inspire our actions, to move us to mission, to discipleship in Christ.

In honour of this Transfiguration Sunday, I offer you words I shared a few years ago, that seem even more fitting today...from a writer and artist whose work I really – Jan Richardson (not the United Church Jan Richardson...another JR). She wrote a poem, inspired by the Transfiguration story.

Dazzling -- A Blessing for Transfiguration Sunday

Believe me, I know
how tempting it is
to remain inside this blessing,
to linger where everything
is dazzling
and clear.
We could build walls
around this blessing,
put a roof over it.
We could bring in
a table, chairs,
have the most amazing meals.
We could make a home.
We could stay.
But this blessing
is built for leaving.
This blessing
is made for coming down
the mountain.
This blessing
wants to be in motion,

to travel with you
as you return
to level ground.
It will seem strange
how quiet this blessing becomes
when it returns to earth.
It is not shy.
It is not afraid.
It simply knows
how to bide its time,
to watch and wait,
to discern and pray
until the moment comes
when it will reveal
everything it knows,
when it will shine forth
with all it has seen,
when it will dazzle
with the unforgettable light
you have carried
all this way.

—Jan Richardson, from the book *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*. 2015.

This Week's Minute for Mission

Offertory Music VU 541 Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Offertory Prayer

O God, we pray that the gifts we offer today will be a witness to our faith in your good news, revealed in the life and teachings of Jesus. Bless our gifts of time, talent and money, that they may help transform our world. Amen.

Music for meditation VU 603 In Loving Partnership We Come

Prayers for This Day

O God, we give thanks for all the ways that you shine on our lives: from the beam of your wisdom in scripture or prayer, to the occasional mountaintop experiences that inspire us to follow you.

In so many ways, your love radiates in our lives, and we pray that we can be empowered to share that joy with others. As we move into the Lenten Season next week, may we remember that it is you that calls us together, in faithfulness.

As we continue to discern your call for our congregations, for how we shall live out our mission, give us memory of the saints that have served over the years to make this faith community what it is, and give us a sense of a vision of what our faith community can become in the years ahead. Alert us to the ways that we can better serve the wider community.

Keep us mindful of the work of the wider church, of Chinook Winds Region and The United Church of Canada. Make us more aware of the outreach of Mission and Service, and the ministries it makes happen in Canada and around the world.

On this Valentine's Sunday, may we be ever mindful of the call to share your love with all we meet, neighbour and stranger alike.

We pause a moment to lift up to you the prayers of our hearts, for those who are in need this day, for those who have joys in their lives that bring a sense of gratitude...we take a moment in silence...

O God of grace and love, hear us as we share the words of Jesus.

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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