



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday February 21th, 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

Lighting the Christ Candle

Light and warmth are returning to the land around us. Light and warmth are represented in the light that glows from this flame. May this lit candle remind us of the reality of the land, and the light and warmth of our presence with God.

Adapted from words by Peter Chynoweth, Gatherings L/E 2021, Year B, pg. 32

Opening Call

Through healing waters, through troubled waters,

God is with us.

Through still waters, through dangerous waters,

God is with us.

Through welcoming waters, waters of life,

God is with us. Thanks be to God.

Let us worship God with joy in our hearts.

Music for meditation VU 232 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

Opening Prayer

O God, Creator of all things, we begin our Lenten journey, praying for a closer relationship with you. When life's waters threaten to overwhelm us, help us to trust that you are with us. Help us, as we walk through this season, to choose to follow the way of Jesus, in all we do. Amen.

Time with Children

Music for meditation MV 92 Like a Rock

Scripture

Genesis 9:8-17

We all know the story of Noah and the ark. Today's passage finds us at the point in the story where God makes the covenant with Noah, and with all creation – a covenant symbolized with the rainbow.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Mark 1:9-15

We are told for the second time in as many months, of Jesus' baptism, and, as we enter Lent, the story goes beyond the baptism experience to Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness.

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Reflection

Lent is the 40-day period (excluding Sundays) that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Traditionally it is a season of reflection and preparation for Easter, and it commemorates Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the desert.

Last year, we experienced the first three Sundays of Lent as a worshipping community able to gather each week here in our sanctuary. The 3rd Sunday of Lent became our last in the church for many weeks. In many ways, with the onset of the changes that came last year with the pandemic, we really were living our own wilderness experience.

And now...almost a year later...we begin the season again. We've been adjusting to the changes thrust upon us, and found some sense of "new normal"...with some healthy lamenting, some shared grumbling, and some careful compassion for each other along the way.

Throughout this season, I invite you to engage in the Lenten bible study material I have posted on our websites, as each week's material uses one of the lectionary passages for our Sunday worship. You're invited also to connect with the group that meets on Tuesday mornings on ZOOM, and part of our conversation will touch on your experience of that study material. Engaging in the study will give you opportunity to go deep with a reading, and bring those reflections to your experience of Sunday worship, as well.

So...Lent begins. There is a common thread in the two passages I shared today. In fact, all of the 4 lectionary readings have a common stream flowing through them...in the common element - water. Each has some reference to water.

Noah's Ark, of course, begins with the extreme of water, in the flooding – but transitions to the beauty of water reflected by the sun's rays to create the wonder of a rainbow, the sign of God's covenant with all creation.

And Jesus baptism, we know that happens at the river Jordan; a river that to this day carries deep meaning for so many people.

Last week I spoke of my own experience of seeing for the first time an amazing triple rainbow. We all know there are scientific explanations for how rainbows appear, for what creates the beauty that we see in them. Yet, I rarely go to science when I behold the beauty that is a rainbow. My believing heart goes to gratitude, and to the Noah story.

Even last week, on those cold, cold days, when I saw the rainbow colours reflected in the sun dogs, I found myself in a space of gratitude...mostly for the working heat in my vehicle, and the fact that the darn thing started, even though it seems to be missing a key part – the block heater. That's what I get for taking on a vehicle that's first life was in south-central BC!

The rainbow shines for it's promise of God's covenant after a rainfall...or even on a very cold day. It is one of the beautiful aspects of God's creation.

Beauty after the storm. Colour after the grey rain; rain which in turn refreshes and renews, adds life to bodies of water.

Think about the bodies of water that have a place in your memory bank.

Perhaps, like me, you grew up somewhere where water was significant. I was a short city bus ride or a bicycle ride to both the Bow and the Elbow Rivers. I fished and swam in both; canoed down the Bow, and floated down the Elbow on hot summer days on a tire tube.

As a child, my family often camped or picnicked along the banks of the Sheep River...usually with a crowd of cousins, aunts and uncles too.

From the home where I grew up, it was an easy bike ride to Fish Creek – long before it was in a provincial park, where we played for hours ...without adult supervision.

There are also lakes that hold memories – sitting on the sand at Gull Lake, late at night watching the northern lights; learning to water ski at Woods Lake in BC; spending every summer for decades taking our own children to Wasa Lake, near Cranbrook.

I've also been privileged to travel to both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans – on our countries western and eastern coasts. Seeing the Tall Ships at the Halifax Harbour, and watching the seals play off the break water in Victoria – memories of God's creation, in those places where water is an aspect of the beauty of our world.

No doubt you can all paint a picture in your mind of your connection to the bodies of water that carry meaning and memory for you.

As we journey through Lent, I hope you may reflect on the place of the Spirit in those moments of meaning and memory.

The Noah story, water, everywhere. Water, first a force for great change, but then part of the sign of promise in the rainbow. That promise is not just for God's people, but for all of God's creation. Today's passage opens with those words:

“Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.”

Now, we know that the promise is about never flooding the earth again; and yet we know of stories like the Red River flood of 1997 that affected Minnesota,

North Dakota and Manitoba. And the floods of 2013 here in Alberta were really too close to home. Many of us have personal connections to people affected by those events.

Yet should we not consider how human intervention in the natural course of nature has played out in the damage those floods created? Think about it – those bodies of water that hold special places in your life story – how has human intervention changed them? Are they the same today as they were when your memories were formed?

How has humanity held to the covenant – to the promise to care for creation? Have we been faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us in creation?

Lets look at our gospel reading for today. Again, we hear of Jesus' baptism. This is a story we heard from another gospel just a few weeks ago – just a few Sundays after Christmas.

Mark's version of this story takes us beyond the moment of baptism, and the revelation of the dove and God's words of blessing upon Jesus; to the experience of Jesus entering that time of wilderness – 40 days.

We often hear that biblical wilderness time in a negative light. We hear that Jesus is tempted by Satan – and other gospel writers say more about that time of temptation...yet this passage also tells us that angels waited on Jesus – angels – we know them to be messengers or agents of God...waiting on Jesus...

Think again about wilderness time. When was the last time you enjoyed hiking in downtown Calgary. Isn't a hike more meaningful, more spiritual even, when you are in the wilderness...surrounded by God's natural creation, as opposed to the concrete creation of humanity?

As we look at the concrete jungle of our cities, and compare them to the wonder of creation in nature, again, I raise the question:

How has humanity held to the covenant – to the promise to care for creation?
How well have we stewarded the gifts God has given us in creation?

Perhaps that 40 days, for Jesus, was more a time of preparation, of retreat and renewal as he prepared himself for his ministry, for the times of challenge that he might face as he followed God's call to teach and heal, to seek justice and love with unconditional compassion.

Perhaps that time of wilderness was about making ready, and making room for God to be a present help and guide in Jesus' life.

So for us – as we enter into these 40 days of Lent...what might we be about in terms of making room for God in our lives?

As I spoke of earlier – there is that Lenten Bible study, that offers a means of “praying” the scriptures, and reflecting on what God is saying to us through the Word.

As the weather warms, and the snow hopefully soon melts, perhaps there is opportunity to reflect and act upon being faithful stewards of the world around us – caring for the environment we are privileged to live in.

Perhaps a little wilderness time – time in quiet renewal and reflection...maybe even getting in touch with nature...going for walks outdoors, or paying attention to the birds as they return from far away places...themselves signs of hope and new life.

Remember that Lent is a time to reflect – yet it is also a time to celebrate that God’s promise, accompanied with the sign of the rainbow, was a promise for all time – that we are not alone – God is with us on our Lenten journey. Amen.

This Week’s Minute for Mission

Collecting stories to help us understand Black experiences in our churches

The Sankofa bird

Credit: Logo for the Sankofa Global Project, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



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It isn’t hard to rhyme off statistics that show racism is alive and well. For example, third-generation Black Canadians make about \$32,000 a year compared with the \$48,000 earned by those who aren’t a visible minority. While 94 percent of young Black Canadians want to complete a university degree, just 60 percent think it is possible. And Black Canadians are more likely than any other racial group in Canada to be the victims of hate crime, perhaps not surprising considering the last segregated school in Canada didn’t shut its doors until 1983.

February is Black History Month. Since 1996, Canadians have set aside this time to recognize the realities faced by people of African descent and honour their contributions.

It’s the perfect month to make this announcement:

Thanks to support through Mission & Service and the United Church Foundation, six young Black adults will begin to collect stories from Black church members about their experiences in the church as well as their knowledge of Black church history. This fall, they will facilitate online gatherings to share learnings. The project runs through December 2021.

“Hopefully, the young adults will gather prophetic stories that help us understand Black experiences in our churches. The aim isn’t so much to identify what we do wrong. It’s not about blame. It’s about hearing the experiences and asking ourselves ‘Where do we go from here?’” says Emo Yango, who works in the United Church’s Communities in Mission unit. Yango adds that one of the aspects of the project he finds exciting is building leaders. “We lack resources from Black voices, especially younger ones. We are building leaders. These leaders will help us live into our commitment to become an anti-racist church.” Church members who would like to share their experiences or learn more about the project can contact Emo Yango.

*Becoming anti-racist is an ongoing journey of transformation. Your gifts through **Mission & Service** help us take vital steps forward. Thank you for helping to build stronger Christian communities and a better world.*

Offertory Music VU 541 Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

Offertory Prayer

These gifts are offered today, that they may flood and flow into your world bearing your good news of justice and compassion to all. Bless them we pray. Amen.

Music for meditation MV 87 Water Flowing from the Mountains

Prayers for This Day

O God of grace, we pray today for one another, and for your guidance as we begin our Lenten journey. Help us remember our call to be careful stewards of all of your creation - human, as well as life of the sea, the air, the lands.

We pray for those who struggle to find enough food for each day, and for those who live in places where safety is an issue, where war and violence factor into every decision, every action.

We lift in prayer those on the front lines of the pandemic, nurses, doctors, EMT’s, store clerks, cleaners, educators and law enforcers. May they stay safe and well as they risk for others.

We pray for those in our own communities who are living with illness, or who are awaiting tests or are undergoing treatments. We lift up those in our communities in hospital or long term care situations, knowing that many are struggling with the feelings of isolation and loneliness that seem to be part of COVID restrictions.

We take a moment of silence to raise the prayers of our hearts...

O God of grace, we know that all our prayers are held in love. For this we give you our thanks and praise. As we prepare to go into the world and serve you, we join our voices in the words Jesus 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 return to the world and our lives outside of this time of worship, refreshed and renewed.

May we each follow Christ's call to be light and love in the world.

Let us go in peace.

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 Page, Olds and Sundre United Churches.

PLEASE NOTE: MARCH 7th during worship, we will be having our Annual Meeting. There are important matters to discuss. In Olds, we will be asking those who are not able to attend if they would sign on using ZOOM, either on computer or by telephone. Please contact the office to register – letting us know if you will attend in person or by for ZOOM.

Questions? Wish to financially support our ministries?

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