



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church At
Home Worship
Sunday July 19, 2020**



Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan

Your Worship Space

*As we continue our time apart, due to restrictions related to the pandemic, we offer to you this service of worship, for your use personally, and with your friends and family. You are welcome to share it with others. **You will also be able to find a recorded version of this service on our Facebook group, Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge.***

Next week, Tammy will be on vacation with her family, and so there will be no service posted from Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge for Sunday, July 26. We invite you to our website, where you will find a listing of other pastoral charges in the Chinook Winds Region that are offering on line worship.

Try to create a special space for your time of worship. It could be as simple as lighting a candle (either flame or battery); or placing a small cross or a symbol that has meaning for you in front of you.

If you are alone, perhaps start a journal, as you reflect on the worship experience. Or, perhaps call a friend and share this time with them over the phone. If you are with one or two others, enjoy the conversation that arises...as you practise safe distancing. For interest, and further reflection, consider seeking out another church's offerings and how their message speaks to you, as well. You will find a listing of other churches within Chinook Winds Region that are offering online worship on our website www.oldsunited.ca or www.sundreunited.ca

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.*

Opening Call

As people of God, we praise the one who so delighted in creating us.
Let us delight in the community of which we are a part, and the warm love that is all around us.
Let us feel the embrace of the Spirit as we worship – together, while apart, this day, and always.

Prayer

God of never-ending love, we come to this time of worship, seeking nurture for our hearts and souls. We come to this time of Sabbath, seeking rest and renewal for our spirits and our bodies. May we feel your presence with us in this time, and may we be open to the touch of your hand upon our hearts, our souls, our bodies, our minds. In gratitude, we pray. Amen.

Hymn MV 92 Like a Rock

Reading for today

Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43

²⁴He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ ²⁸He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!



A Message for Today

I must say, I had trouble deciding which passage to focus on this week – all 4 lectionary readings for today are filled with both rich meaning and food for thought that is really connected to what’s happening in our world today.

And then I was on a ZOOM meeting, and a colleague raised a point that I wanted to explore further.

Just for background...the ZOOM meeting was a clergy "check in" with Chinook Winds Regional staff. In the early days of COVID, we did this every Wednesday morning, and there were 60 to 70 of us on the meeting, getting news, sharing stories, supporting one another as together we find "new normal" for church life, in the midst of all the new normal in our family and personal lives. As we moved into summer, we've shifted to meeting every 2nd week. With some of us taking vacation, or otherwise busy, this week's meeting had less than 25 people. That allowed for more conversation exchange in the whole group than we normally have.

Rev. Lee Spice, our personnel minister for Chinook Winds, was facilitating this meeting. One very important role of the personnel minister is that, in many ways, they are the minister to the ministers, our pastors, so to speak.

Lee asked us simply how we are feeling in these days. A few of us spoke about feeling like summer wasn't really here yet, that the usual summer slow down in work load hadn't happened, as we are still finding the new normal in how we live out our vocations as clergy in the midst of a pandemic. Some of us are finding our rhythm in all that, but with the learning curve of trying to change how we offer worship, and how we stay connected with our people, lots of other pieces of work had to be set aside, so many of us feel like even if some things have slowed down, we're playing catch up with other things.

And then Alwin Maben, minister of the two point pastoral charge of Coronation and Veteran United Churches, shared with us a question he had posed to his congregations last week. He asked us, as he had asked his congregations, if perhaps COVID 19 is like a parable. As he said, some of us understand it; some of us struggle to understand it; some of us just don't understand it, and need some help getting our heads around its impact on our communities.

And then Alvin spoke about how it might be good to reflect on what the parable of COVID 19 is saying to us, and to ask ourselves what we are learning from it?

Jesus told parables to teach people about life, and about God's will for their lives. As I offered last week, a simple definition of a parable is 'an earthly story with a spiritual truth'.

Sometimes, understanding Jesus' parables, finding the spiritual truth, requires some deep thought, and an understanding of the traditions of Jesus' time. Sometimes, Jesus' parables seemed to be telling people to let go of old ways, ways that were less than life giving, to find ways that were more closely in line with God's vision of shalom, of peace and justice.

Last week we heard about the sower and the seeds, with the focus being on the kind of soil a seed is planted in, and how that impacts growth...yet how graciously and generously the sower - God - spreads seeds of mercy and love; no matter what kind of 'soil' they land on. God's grace, we learn from that parable, is extravagant.

This week, we go a little deeper in the revelation of spiritual truth. This week's parable, in my mind, is often the source of one of those difficult conversations we often have, as people of faith, especially when we face trial or challenge, crisis or tragedy.

Back in my theological school days, what we'd be calling those conversations is a discussion in theodicy. As my dad would say – that word theodicy is certainly bigger than marmalade! Actually, is one letter smaller...and a lot less sweet!

The Miriam Webster dictionary defines theodicy as “the defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil.” The words origins, from Greek *theos*, “god”; and *dikē*, “justice”.

Theodicy...you know those conversations I mean...if God exists, then why does evil exist? If God is a God of love and compassion, then why do bad things happen?

If God is omnipotent, why do things like COVID 19 happen? And why does it take so long to find a way to stop it?

Today's gospel reading is indeed one of those passages that tends to generate those kinds of conversations. Those 'never really come to an end or conclusion conversations' that come back again and again...because we are human...and we are not perfect...and we DO question what happens in our lives, and in the world around us, and we ask WHY?

Even little children want to know why. My daughter, when she was little – would phrase it “Why come, mommy?” I'm not sure if her later “How come, Dad?” was anymore grammatically correct, and it often had a little less humorous tone, but I do know that it's human nature to ask why. Asking why helps us learn.

Theological school is where I first came to understand the concept of theodicy... but the conversations have been for me, long before that, and continue to occur- both in the context of my work in ministry, and beyond. I remember one particular one, in a study group, where we struggled with the whole idea of the existence of good and evil, and how an all knowing, all loving God let evil things happen. We went round in circles, and for some of us, how we understand the nature of God was at the core of our conversation, as well as how we understand human nature.

We asked questions like “Why DO bad things happen to good people? And where God is in that? Where is justice? Why do some people do evil things? And where is God in that? Where is justice?”

Theodicy. Good wheat. Bad weeds. God is. Evil is. It sounds simple. But it is so NOT simple.

Bring the theodicy conversation to 2020, and to COVID 19. Why do some get it, and some not. Why do some get terribly ill, and some not? It seems to be pretty indiscriminate. Yet there are indeed some factors that affect transmission. Some of them become issues of justice.

What if you couldn't afford to stay home, and had to work through the pandemic? And what if you had to take public transit each day to work. Your risk goes up. What if you work in a place where you encounter many people every day – like a grocery store. Your risk goes up. What if your work is in the category of “essential service.”

How do we care for those who are at risk? How do we care for and protect those at higher risk?

There is certainly an economic side to this one isn't there? How many times does Jesus speak economics, money, in the bible? I believe the number is 74. Economic justice mattered to Jesus.

No matter what side of the political spectrum you're on – the economic supports the government has made possible during this pandemic have been a good thing. They have given a sense of hope and security to individuals and businesses affected by this pandemic. The good wheat in this COVID parable would be the economic subsidies; the bad weeds would be the systems that been in place long before COVID that are at the root of poverty and marginalization.

There are other aspects of the COVID parable too, that become issues of justice. Jesus always stood on the side of those on the margins, those most vulnerable in his world. We have a huge vulnerable population in our society that have born considerable cost in this time of pandemic.

That is our elders, particularly those living in multi-person care facilities. There is a fine line between protecting them from a disease which has great affect because of age and health and their spiritual and mental health and the affects of loneliness and isolation. I have heard stories of this personally, and we've all heard the many news reports related to this.

And this one is much harder to define or name where the good wheat and the bad wheat lies. How do we provide the best care, and safety, and protections from contracting COVID, in a way that doesn't cause the extreme loneliness and isolation that many of our seniors are experiencing in their residences? How do you maintain relationships, connections, when under locked-down isolation, in a community that generally doesn't find warmth and love on a computer screen.

No doubt Dr. Deena Hinshaw and her colleagues across the country have been wrestling with this one for months. My heart goes out to them. I don't even want to start on the question of wearing a mask, or not wearing a mask. There are so many factors in why, and when, and where.

So what is this COVID 19 parable teaching us? For me, I am learning something that I knew – yet that is more deeply embedded now. We are all God's people; all part of that which makes us community, and all called to strive for the kind of world where justice is at the heart of our living. We are called not just to look after our own individual lives, but to care for the common good, to strive to be part of a world where justice is at the core of what we do, and how we live.

Part of that striving means taking time to struggle with the why's and the how's; taking time to consider how our actions affect others, and how we must consider the big picture, and not just our own immediate corner of it. In the grand scheme of things, there will be times when finding the best way forward must come with trial and error, with question and doubt, with trusting the wisdom of others to guide us along the way.

Perhaps that's where we can find meaning in the piece in today's gospel passage about waiting for the wheat and the weeds to grow till harvest time. Maybe it's about taking the time to discern – to prayerfully discern - God's will and God's way for our lives, and for justice to find its way in midst of everything.

I do know that in this new normal of life with COVID 19, one of the things that I have been more intentional about is finding time for spiritual nurture, for prayer and meditation, for listening for the still, small voice of God. That may not give me all the answers I seek, however it grounds me in faith, and the wisdom of God, and for that, I am grateful.

My prayer for you, is that you too, in the midst of life's busy-ness, may find time for quiet, for listening, for seeking to invite the Spirit in to all that you do. Amen.

Hymn MV 174 Soil of God

This Week's Minute for Mission

DCI Palestine helps children in Gaza just be children.

Published on:

April 13, 2020

Imagine growing up in a place of conflict where you live in constant fear of violence. This is what it is like to grow up in Gaza. As a church family our hearts cry out for those who live in fear every day. Mission & Service supports Defense for Children International–Palestine, which offers programs for children in that region. Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/FyruAZVEULI>

Prayers for this day

God of extravagant grace, as our journey through the summer continues, we hold in prayer all those that are travelling, taking time for leisure and renewal. We pray for safe journeys for the way, O God.

We lift up in prayer places in our world torn by conflict and violence and for countries where government leaders are less than honest, less than just. We think of today's Mission and Service story, and our hearts go to the people of Israel and Palestine, and we pray for peace and reconciliation in that region, O God.

We pray too, for the places in our world, both far and near, where people struggle with a lack of resources, not enough food, unsafe drinking water, a lack of employment... We pray, God, for hope and transformation of systems that perpetuate poverty and oppression.

Close to home, we pray for those in our communities in need of your healing...we think of those in hospital or at home; those awaiting treatment or surgeries; those living with loss or feeling lost or alone. In this time of pandemic, we pray that people may be guided by wisdom and not by fear. We give thanks for those who work in essential areas to support our health and our living.

O God of grace and love, as we lift up the prayers of our hearts not put into spoken word, we give thanks for your gift of love. As so many others will do on this day, we bring to you the prayer of Jesus...



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.

Hymn VU 639 One More Step Along the World I Go

A Blessing for Today

May the love that brought us into being fill us with hope. May the peace that passes understanding be upon us all. May the joy that lives where justice is be alive in each and every one of us. Amen.



Thank you so much for using this worship resource! Feel free to share it! You will also find worship and reflective posts on our Facebook Group – Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge. Feel free to invite others to join that group.

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We are grateful for your connection to the Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge, and to both Olds and Sundre United Churches. As the time of COVID 19 social distancing progresses, know that we are still the United Church in our communities, striving to serve you and the community. Our ability to do that requires financial support, and we are so very grateful for those who are able to continue to support us in these challenging times. We also are aware for some, this time of pandemic has created hardship, and we pray for peace and hope.

If you already give to the church with PAR (Pre-Authorized Giving) things will carry on as usual, unless you need to make a change. If you give through envelopes, it would be greatly appreciated if you would mail your offering in, or bring it to the office, however please call first to confirm someone is there, as in these days our staff must be cautious as well.

And finally, if you are not a regular giver, but wish to support our ministries, we would gratefully accept your gift. Our church mailing addresses are:

Olds United Church 4810 50th Street, Olds AB. T4H 1E4

and

Sundre United Church Box 614 118 Centre Street North, Sundre AB. T0M 1X0