



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church At
Home Worship
Sunday June 28, 2020**



Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan

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 the land and the people, as those who came before us did.

Your Worship Space

As you worship at home, try to create a space for that. 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. Now that the weather is more amenable, consider worshipping outdoors.

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.

Opening Call

God's love stretches wide, ready to embrace all with love. You who are thirsty for the presence of God, welcome. May your thirst be satisfied. You who long for a caring touch, welcome. May you know God's love through the caring of community. Welcome to all. Let us drink deeply of God's presence with us. Let us share in this grace with one another. Let us worship God, together, even as we are apart.

Prayer

God of unending love and compassion, we celebrate this day! Open our minds to possibility. Open our hearts to love freely. Open your hands to welcome one another. Work in us and through us, we pray. Amen.

Musical selection **VU 395 Come in and Sit Down**

<https://youtu.be/xW64yNvuxWE>

Readings for today

Genesis 22:1-14

22After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. ⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.



¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹²He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Matthew 10: 40-42



⁴⁰"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold

water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

A Message for Today

The story of Abraham and Isaac...what's up with that? That would be a question most youth I'm acquainted with would ask. And then they'd add something like 'I mean really, what parent would willingly take their son to die like that without a fight?'

Remember that the name Isaac means "laughter" – and that he was named that because Sarah laughed when God told her she would give birth at a very dear old age. I don't imagine Isaac was laughing on his way up that mountain. Although perhaps he didn't know what his father believed God had asked him to do. Perhaps Isaac didn't know what was in store.

What DOES this story mean? Well, that depends...for understanding such a story is kind of like understanding a piece of art. How I understand it could be very different than how someone else understands it. For each of us approaches it from a different perspective. Some would see it as a test of Abraham's faith. Remember, Abraham has sent his other son Ismael and his mother Hagar away. That would have been a reading last week, had I followed the lectionary. I chose to offer a reading that more directly spoke to National Indigenous Day of Prayer.

And this week, we hear what some understand as the test that God gives to Abraham – testing whether his trust in and obedience to God is paramount against all other loyalties in his life – including his only remaining son.

Keep in mind the context of the day – sacrifices to pagan gods were not unheard of – even blood sacrifices. Also, to have a son is to have status, not to mention future security. And old Abraham is willing to let that status and future security all go because of his commitment to God.

Well...I don't believe in a God like that. I just can't. The God of love and compassion doesn't put us to the test like that. The God in Jesus, the God who welcomed the littlest child doesn't test us like that.

Another possibility for understanding this story...Abraham doesn't stand up to God when he's told to send Ismael away; nor does he stand up to God when this trial is put to him. Perhaps it's about a message to the people that this is not one of their pagan god's, but a God of love and compassion that will not ever ask for human sacrifice. Some theological sources suggest that the ram that Abraham sees in the bushes becomes the substitute for Isaac.

Hmmm. I am not so sure that's any better than God testing Abraham. Especially if you're the ram.

Some go so far as to suggest that this story might be a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus – the sacrifice of the child of God...that's quite a stretch – and

includes a sacrificial theology, in that idea that God would sacrifice God's beloved. I have trouble with that theology. I believe that Jesus died because of his stand for justice and righteousness in all relationships. It was a stand that caused others to fear for their own loss of control and power. That fear became so encompassing that those others – legal and religious authorities - chose to end Jesus' life.

There's something else in this story of Abraham and Isaac. It's in those words of Abraham's in response to Isaac's question around the fact that they had wood and fire, but not a lamb...those words "God will provide." Perhaps those are words of hope and trust – Abraham trusts that God will provide a way out of what Abraham believes he has been asked to do.

Maybe...it is a little less hard to go there, to that place of meaning.

Now, what does all this say about Isaac, and HIS trust in his father? That's a whole other story, full of its own set of complications. Would he not have resisted his father's attempts to bind him up...remember, according to the story, Abraham and Sarah were old when they had Isaac – and now older still...yet there seems to be no resistance on Isaac's part. Was his respect for his father that great as to follow along without question?

In my study on this passage, I came across an interesting aspect in terms of how we might apply this story to our current reality. I question whether we can – but this source – a book called "Worship for All Season's" raised the question of how we, in today's societies sacrifice children.

We can look at countries that have pushed children into labour; or worse still, those that have recruited children into war – we hear, even today of the travesty of child soldiers. We've heard the stories too of Sudan's "lost boys" – boys who were recruited to fight, that managed to escape – and made their way to refugee camps, and some, eventually to other countries. These are boys lured away from families, often lost to them forever.

There are equally tragic stories of Palestinian and Israeli youth fighting against each other, in a conflict that has gone on for decades. And then there are the children of migrants in the US, American born to non-Americans, who have been placed in government custody, in deplorable conditions.

Yet, we can also look closer to home. In the sports world, there are some children who have a passion for sport; but how many of us have experienced the bad behaviour of a parent at the hockey rink, and the subsequent embarrassment of the child; or seen a parent push a child into sport to vicariously satisfy some unfulfilled dream of the parent.

I, for one, know what it is to be a parent and to have all sorts of visions and dreams of what you want your children to become...and I know how hard it is to let your child find their own path...and let go of your own pre-conceived notion of what that path should be.

I am to this day grateful for my own wise parents who often reminded me that my job as a parent was to nurture my children into responsible adults that could find their own way, that could forge their own path. That's not to say that we're not there for support and advice when it's needed or asked for, but that we need to let our children discern for themselves what direction they take in life. That letting go, and letting them do that is not easy.

Parenting is a task filled with complicated choices and decisions. We all know that.

For Abraham –were those choices he had to make during that mountain experience with Isaac really placed before him by God, or by some other influence in his world? It is indeed one of those pieces of scripture that raises more questions than answers.

And perhaps that is where the gospel lesson comes in – the lesson about welcome of all people, the wise and learned prophet, the righteous person, and the little ones. Essentially, the message is about justice – that all have need, no matter their status, of the most basic of life's essentials – water. The little ones, a child, a poor person, someone who in that day would not count in societies ladder of power, are equally deserving of the gift of a cool cup of water, and all that that stands for – compassion, care, love.

Whether we are parents, or mentors, or neighbours, or even strangers, we have this biblical imperative to extend welcome to all. To create a safe place, a place where the stranger can enter and know they are at home; a place where the sharing of something as simple as a cup of water – symbolic of even the smallest act of compassion...makes the world a better place to be.

Doing that, creating safe places of welcome, often involves difficult choices. The many conversations I've been a part of over the past few weeks around church re-opening are evidence of that. With the new guidelines, we could reopen with less than 50 people in Olds, and with our usual attendance in Sundre. However, there would be much to do to make our spaces safer. There would be also be people for whom gathering still would not be safe – people with compromised immune systems, people who are of an age where gathering in groups, especially indoors poses risk.

It is because of a theology of inclusion and welcome, that we choose to keep our building closed to regular worship, and continue to offer varieties of online reflection, and seek to remain connected by phone and safe distance visiting.

Hence, this week, thanks to David's technical skills and support, we are venturing into recording worship, and encouraging you to share it with friends and family. Colleagues that have already ventured into doing this are finding that actually more people than their usual Sunday morning communities are connecting to their worship offerings – colleagues are finding that the community that is not able to attend Sunday morning worship is able to access at other times in the week, and is finding welcome and inspiration in their online worship offerings.

In the midst of this, we continue to be the church, to be agents of God's presence in this community – beyond the doors of this building. So until we can return, may we strive to be as God calls us to be – justice seekers, peace makers, compassion bearers – the hands and feet of Christ. Amen.

Hymn MV 1 Let us Build A House vs. 1, 4 and 5

<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

This Week's Minute for Mission

Down a long road behind a large fence in Nairobi, Kenya, is a safe house for LGBTQIA and Two-Spirit refugees from Uganda, Somalia, and South Sudan, supported by Mission & Service partner Pembizo Christian Council. The refugees who live here dream of a day they are resettled in Canada or another country where they can live freely without fear of imprisonment. We are thankful that in The United Church of Canada there are opportunities to sponsor and support LGBTQIA and Two-Spirit refugees. Download the video here:

<http://bit.ly/357HuvT>

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Prayers for this day

Creator God, you have shown us what it means to welcome one another. As we reflect on welcome, we offer prayers for those find themselves in transition – finished a school year, seeking employment; moving to a new home; experiencing life after loss of a loved one, living with health concerns or under care in hospital or at home.

As we, as a church community, reflect on welcome, we offer prayers of thanksgiving – for the compassionate care offered by people in this community with those who are in need – we think of Thrift shop volunteers, food bank workers, school and child care staff and volunteers. Especially in this time of COVID, when how these avenues of care are lived out has changed so much, we pray for strength, patience, enthusiasm and hope.

As we, as a church community, reflect on welcome, we pray for hope for people in countries where refugee camp populations are growing because home is no

longer a safe place to be; we pray for all who live with fear of war and oppression.

O God, help us we pray, to be agents of welcome here, in this church community, in the communities in which we live and work and play. Guide us to bring your vision of justice and peace to life.

In a moment of silence, we offer prayers not yet spoken....

God of grace, we know that our prayers are heard, and enfolded in your grace.

And we give thanks.Creator God, hear our prayers and guide our actions from this moment on. We pray using Jesus' words:

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 427 To Show By Touch and Word

<https://youtu.be/PT9S9gV7xmw>

A Blessing for Today

Let us go to share God's gifts and grace, and be witnesses to the good news of Jesus, alive in the Spirit. Amen.



*Thank you so much for using this worship resource! Feel free to share it!
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 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 supporting 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. Amounts over \$20.00 will be tax receiptable, at the end of the year. Our church mailing addresses are:

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

And

Sundre United Church PO Box 614

118 Centre Street North Sundre AB. T0M 1X0

