



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
At Home Worship
May 3, 2020 Fourth Sunday of the Easter Season
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. 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 Prayer

O God, in whom we find shepherding love, may we follow and embody this love in everything we do. May our words and deeds testify to the abundance of your compassion and grace for us and all creation. We pray as Easter people. Amen.

Hymn The Lord is My Shepherd Click on the link below to hear

https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-iry-fullyhosted_003&hsimp=yhs-fullyhosted_003&hspart=iry&p=the+lord%27s+my+shepherd+hymn#id=3&vid=8b6bad7392adb01daebf80a827b99ec1&action=click

Readings for today

Acts 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;



³He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

A Message for Today

It has long been said by many a biblical scholar that each time you read a passage of scripture, you do so with a new set of lenses, with new eyes. That is certainly proving itself true in these days that we are living in now. I find so much of what we do has necessitated looking through lenses coloured with the realities that come with living in a world affected by COVID 19.

In my study this week, I came across an interpretation of Psalm 23 that I really appreciate. It was created a month ago by Samantha Beach Kiley for Austin New Church and the background music is by Caleb J. Murphy. I don't know either of these individuals, however a colleague shared this, and it felt like something I should share with you.

Click on the link below (press control and then click your mouse) to view it.

https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-iry-fullyhosted_003&hsimp=yhs-fullyhosted_003&hspart=iry&p=Youtube+psalm+23+and+me#id=1&vid=f929c86121832546c0d51b8799f1b491&action=click

I know that each of us will be touched by a different aspect of that video. For me, the strongest message is that those still waters are moments of rest that are offered to us. The rub is that we have to choose to take advantage of those moments. When we are upset, or feeling alone or isolated; when we are feeling off kilter and things don't seem to make sense – for me, that's a clue. I'm usually trying, in those times where I tend to get overwhelmed, to do too much, to be too much, to make order and sense of things that are beyond my control. And when I get that way, it's a sign that I need to find some still waters – I need to go for a walk, or read a piece of scripture or poetry, or simply have a nap.

The Psalm offers us an image of God as shepherd, as caregiver and protector. In fact, all of today's lectionary readings offer us images related to shepherding. I chose the two I did to share with you because they fit with the lenses I seem to be looking through these days. The Psalm is one that many of us know so well, and I find it helpful to read it from the perspective that the

video gives us. I'm really grateful for the woman that created this, and how it helps us move from lament and uncertainty to hope and a sense of comfort.

The other reading I offered you today, always reminds me of my time teaching school on a Hutterite Colony, as it is this passage that inspires that communal way of life. In many ways, there are aspects of that communal living that I long for. I also know of many who are living alone in this time of social isolation that are particularly missing those opportunities to gather with others, to break bread with others over a shared meal. One of the ways I found helpful to deal with that was to spend Easter dinner on the phone (we actually did "Facetime") with first my daughter, and then my sister. Both live alone, and were really missing not being with friends or family that weekend. We, in turn, were missing them. (although I cannot lie, we had fish instead of turkey because my daughter, who couldn't be with us hates fish!).

There is a deeper message in this little passage, though - one of care and concern for the common good. It's about being the church. This passage, indeed all of the Book of Acts, tells us about the establishment and mission of the early church. There is great wisdom here for us, in how to be church today.

We are called, together, to strive to be faithful disciples, faithful followers of the way of Jesus; to strive for right relationship with our neighbours – those close at hand, and our global neighbours.

This story occurs right after the Pentecost experience; the followers of Jesus, and many others in Jerusalem had that powerful experience of the Holy Spirit, and after hearing Peter help them understand that experience, many (scriptures tell us thousands) turned their lives toward the way of Christ, were baptized, and joined the early Christian community.

Today's passage describes what the life of the resulting community looked like. The piece about breaking bread - it's not clear whether that's about the Passover meal, or the sacramental meal; it may even simply be talking about the hospitality and welcome that would be offered wherever the disciples journeyed to teach and minister.

It would be like the hospitality and welcome we experience in our own time, the kind of things many of us are missing, while we are being socially distant, for the common good.

Remember, too, that this passage speaks about how the apostles devoted themselves to prayer. Perhaps the writer of the passage was referring to times of prayer at temple – not unlike the times of prayer we hope to share again soon, as a church family on a Sunday; but there are also those prayers that we offer each day – for those we love; for local concerns; for our concerns for the global community; for the broader family of humanity. And there is the time in

prayer you are spending now, as you experience this worship resource, or as you set aside your own prayer time in these where we must practise safe distancing.

I also want to hold up verse 43: ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

If you go back to the original Greek – the wonders and signs are being done “through the apostles.” In the early church, it was understood that ministry happened as God worked through God’s servants. I think that’s just as applicable to today. Ministry happens as God works with God’s servants. That’s you. That’s me. That’s anyone who listens to hear God’s call in their lives – and responds. Maybe in this time, it’s by giving a phone call to someone you know might really be struggling with the idea of social distancing. Maybe it’s by sewing masks for those who need them. Maybe it’s by letting a front line worker know how much you appreciate them.

And then there’s verses 44 and 45:

⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

We are called to be together, to serve the common good, to share out of the abundance of what we have, so that all have what they need. This certainly goes against our western world concept of market economy, doesn’t it?

We see some of this ideal lived out in some traditional Anabaptist communities – think Hutterian Brethren; or Amish, or Mennonite.

If only we could see this lived out more broadly in our world. It saddens me that we have world leaders that are against things like universal health care, or supporting of the shared mission of institutions like the World Health Organization.

On the other hand, I am grateful for the many ways people are supporting one another in these times, how many organizations are pooling resources and reaching out, serving the common good.

The passage ends with that piece about praising God, and having the goodwill of the people.

That’s about striving to be in healthy and whole relationships; relationships that inspire us to be glad, to be generous, to be about praising God, and sharing what we have with the world.

There’s a pattern – that began back in the early church – worship, praise, hospitality and care, that leads to mission and broader outreach that serves the common good.

Day by day...it’s about striving to share with all, as a way of being, day by day. It’s about being a contributing, caring, sharing community, day by day.

And finally, those words in the passage “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Being saved? What does that mean to us, in our faith tradition? Saved? Salvation?

I am forever grateful for one of my theology professors, the late Pauline Bradbrook – who reminded us, as students, that salvation, and save come from the root of 'salve'. It's a word that means 'to heal'.

The word save, in the context of this passage, is about healing, about bringing wholeness to that which is broken...it's about hope, found through community that cares, that loves, that welcomes and nourishes at table, with food for body and soul.

So adding to the number of those being saved is about adding to those who have found healing and hope through community, that have found a place that says you are welcome, you are worthy, you are loved.

We are called to be bearers of that kind of grace in our discipleship today. We may have to change how we do that for the time being...carefully caring for each other, yet, as members of the community of God, we can strive to bring hope and healing, wholeness and love to the world, with glad and generous hearts. May it be so.



Hymn Deep In Our Hearts (from More Voices 154)

This recording was done by Ron Klusmeir at Carman United Church in Manitoba. It is one of the church's I visited on my sabbatical.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnZaO8udMcQ>

Prayers for this day

This prayer is used with permission from my friend and teacher, Ted Dodd, formerly on staff at the Centre for Christian Studies, where I studied for Diaconal Ministry.

PRAYERS (from Psalm 23)

Gracious God,

you care for me; I need nothing more.

Not more retail therapy,

Not more ego massaging,

Not more privilege or productivity,
Not to have my perspective prevail.

You lead me into a haven of peace and rest.

In the midst of pandemic and mass shootings,
you call me to non-anxious presence,
to prayerful reflection,
to spirit-filled breathing.

You breathe new life into me and lead me in new ways.

Restore my soul.

Lift my vision.

Guide my life.

**You are with me, and comfort me,
even when the way of the world seems lost.**

And so, I pray for the planet,
its leaders,
those on the frontlines,
those grieving,
those afraid,
those alone.

**In the face of those who trouble me
you provide for me and pour out your blessings.**

Grant me steady patience.

Grant me holy impatience.

Grant me the discernment to know when which is needed and which is faithful.

**God of justice and compassion you are with me always
and have promised to sustain me all my life.**

Gratitude for all the blessings.

Appreciation for all that is sacred.

Thanksgiving for this life.

A Blessing for Today



Giver of life, in the same way bread is broken and shared for the benefit of all, may the giftedness we each share be a breaking open of abundant love to the world.

May we all live to be a blessing, today and always. 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.

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Here is a link to some on-line worship opportunities in the Chinook Winds Region.

<https://chinookwindsregion.ca/2020/03/16/online-worship-opportunities/>