



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church At
Home Worship
May 17, 2020 Sixth 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. 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 / Prayer

Oh God, you are within and beyond. Out of your being, all things were made, yet in all things your being is uncontained. Help us to see you within all things, and within all people. Help us to know that you are beyond our imagining, yet closer than our breathing. Help us to trust that you are with us always, and in all ways. Amen.

Musical selection **Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise** click on the link below

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=immortal+invisible+god+only+wise&docid=608005349793399760&mid=83F8358AD3A5DA34DFE683F8358AD3A5DA34DFE6&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Readings for today

Acts 17:22-31

²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.

²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the

times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even



some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ ²⁹Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

John 14:15-21

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”



A Message for Today

This was intended to be a study week for me...with a few interruptions for some emergent pastoral needs. To that end, I looked back to another time of preaching on these readings, and “dusted off” what I said 6 years ago, to give it relevance for today. And it only took 3 tries to spell relevance. 😊 And so...

In God we live and move and have our being.
In God, is everything we do, everything we are.

Today’s reading from Acts is set in Athens, among people “who would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.” – as the reading says. I did a little historical research around what it would have been like in Aeropagus. I learned that this was indeed the centre of wisdom and knowledge in Athens – it was a place, located just above the Agropolis.

During the time of Paul, the Aeropagus was the centre for 9 magistrates, political leaders – whose work began the movement toward democracy in the region. These magistrates questioned the validity of Paul's faith and work, and so invited him to have an audience with them, to hear for themselves what he had to say.

This region was also, at the time, the literary capitol of the world. It was a place of scholars, educators, and visionary people. They were people interested in change, in new stories, in learning about the world around them.

And so, one can assume, they would be people open to hearing what Paul had to say to them. They would have been open to hearing and really giving thought and consideration to his words.

In doing my research, those years back, I read an essay by theologian Dan Clendenin, who wrote of how Paul practiced evangelism "not in a corner" but wherever he could travel – that Paul believed in sharing the good news not just with the religious community, but in places of commerce and trade, of education and law.

Paul also believed deeply in an imminent God, a God "that is not far from each of us." And that is indeed the God that Paul spoke of to the Athenians and foreigners he addressed; bringing to them his understanding that the statues and idols they named as unknown God's were merely pieces of art; that the real God, the God that was near to each of them, was the God of all creation, all life, of everything.

One can imagine that some in the audience to whom Paul preached would have taken what he said and dismissed it as crazy babble, some may have taken what he said as food for thought, and gone away to study and contemplate. And we know that some heard what Paul had to say and were indeed moved by his message – moved to the point of seeking to know God, being baptized and following Paul.

One can imagine also that there would have been places along Paul's journey that would not have been safe places to speak of Christ openly in public. Not all audiences would have been as those in Athens, who as in verse 21 "would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new." Some would in fact, persecute those who tried to offer something new, who tried to engage people in seeing the world differently than it was seen by most. It happened to Paul, on more than one occasion. Sadly, it still happens today.

You don't have to look far. Just this past week, (May 2020) 2 United Churches and St. Andrew's College (the United Church theological school), all in Saskatoon, were vandalized – spray painted with offensive homophobic slurs. All three buildings house faith communities that are Affirming – openly welcoming of all genders, races, abilities.

The good news is that within hours, all the hateful graffiti was removed by volunteers, and since this happened all sorts of supportive and kind messages have been conveyed (including with great sidewalk chalk messages) by all kinds of people to both churches and the college.

How many times, over the ages, has change within Christian tradition, caused conflict and upheaval? Think of our own denomination...and how challenging the decade of the

80's was, leading up to and including 1988, when the church officially took a strong position of support of the LGBTQ+ community. It was not an easy time for the church, yet we have come a long way since then.

More recently, over the last few years, our church underwent a major re-structuring. There were some that saw those changes through a lens of fear...fear that the changes would cause trouble...fear that some will not move with the changes...fear that others will adopt the changes and the church we've known will no longer be.

And yet here we are, mid way through the second year since the most significant changes took effect, and from where I stand, we're doing okay. In fact, one of the greatest fears many of us had was how we would stay connected without our almost monthly presbytery meetings, and with a region much larger than our presbytery boundaries were.

Funny thing...COVID 19 has put us in a place where we are really connecting well, as we support one another through changes we never imagined, happening faster than we ever dreamed. Now, that connecting is mostly on ZOOM (a web based platform for meetings on-line). And depending on your electronic device, you can "see" 9 to 15 people at a time, and scroll or swipe to see more, but we are safely connecting. The added bonus is our cars are staying in the driveway, and we're saving bundles on mileage and travel time! Believe me, that's a practice that we will not let go of once we find a new normal. The new normal, in terms of meetings with people across our region, is less travel and more ZOOM.

Reflect again on those words... In God we live and move and have our being.

What then, are we to fear. No matter how the church changes, there is a constancy in God. God will never be far away. That spiritual connection, if we truly have faith, can never change.

I want to add emphasis here – we are still the church, even if we don't meet each week in person. I have heard how many of you are witnessing to your faith, by looking out for neighbours, by supporting the food bank, by praying for those in our community who are experiencing loss or difficult times, by sending cards and letters to people you can't see.

Paul wrote a lot of letters to his followers – church wasn't always in person for him, either.

Paul tells the people that we are God's offspring. That is a wonderful analogy, isn't it.

The gospel takes that further – with those words "I will not leave you orphaned." Again, we are reminded that God – in the Advocate – the Spirit, will be with us always, in all ways. I had a great conversation with friends (on ZOOM) just this week about "Spirit" and how each of us experiences "Spirit" in different ways. For some, Spirit is found in nature, in wind or rain, sun or moonlight. For some, Spirit is experienced in quiet contemplation, while for others it is found in acts of solidarity and justice.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is with the disciples in the upper room – it is the occasion of the Last Supper. The mood would have been so mixed – fear, confusion,

anxiety, sadness...recognize any of those emotions related to how those first weeks of COVID isolation unfolded?

The words we hear in the gospel, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." ANOTHER Advocate...the world has already had an advocate, in the life and ministry of Jesus...and in this passage, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time that he will no longer be with them...preparing them, and assuring them that they will know this other Advocate - the Spirit of Truth...the 3rd persona of the triune God.

Jesus is assuring his friends that God – Spirit will always be with them. It's the same good news that Paul continued to teach and preach about – that God's love is never far away.

We are called to live out of a place of gratitude for that ever present love ourselves – living in accordance with God's commandments. What does that mean in today's age? Not much different than it did in Jesus' age.

It means living a life that embraces truth and justice, a life that gives preferential option to the poor and oppressed; that does not abuse power and authority, but shares power equitably, that follows the power of God, as opposed to the power of economics or politics, or social pressure. For when we vest power and authority in things other than God are we not denying the power and authority of God's vision of shalom – a vision of justice, equity, and peace for all?

Just as it was not always easy in Jesus' time, it is not always easy in our time. This time of social change brought upon by pandemic conditions has certainly been teaching us that.

Walking the way of Jesus can take us down some lonely roads. That is, until we remember the truth that God is not as far away as we think, that we are never left orphaned, but are always accompanied by The Advocate, the Spirit of Truth.

What makes the road a little easier to walk – for me - is knowing that there is community, others of faith, walking alongside (or Zooming along with). We are part of a world wide unity of faith; people committed to living out of that place of unconditional love; people committed to loving as God loves –people, who like us, can be the face of Christ in the world, for the world, and for each other. People who, like us, seek to live out those words of Paul – to live and move and have our being in God.

It was part of my study time this week, that I learned more about the many ways our United Church of Canada is indeed part of that world wide unity of faith, as we heard about our national churches relationship with the Canadian Council of Churches, the Reformed Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, The Diaconate of the Americas and the Caribbean, The World Diakonia, and more. Again, in times such as this, during this world pandemic, those organizations are working even more cooperatively to support mission and ministry in places that most need it in our world.

We are the church, here in little Olds and Sundre, and we are part of a world wide church. We are not alone...as church, as community, as followers of the way.

Together – even though we must be apart for now, together, in God we live and move and have our being.
Together, in God, is everything we do, and everything we are. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn Christ Be with Me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ustIEvg1LU>

This Week's Minute for Mission video

Our gifts for Mission & Service make the Wampum-Neechi program at Five Oaks Education and Retreat Centre in Paris, Ontario, possible. This week-long program brings together 10 Indigenous and 10 non-Indigenous youth (ages 12–14) for six days in the summer. They forge new friendships across cultures, enjoy summer days together, and learn about Indigenous (Haudenosaunee and Cree) history and cultural values.

Download the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVdkzsG6JxQ>

Prayers for this day

Loving God, creator of all that is, we bring our prayers to you this day.

For those who suffer for speaking truth, for the prophets of generations past and current, for people imprisoned for their beliefs, and those who work to release people unjustly imprisoned, we pray for freedom and peace.

God of compassion, we pray for those who live in fear of war, for those who live in poverty, for those who live not knowing what the next day will bring. We pray for peace and security for all peoples of the earth, young and old.

For those who live alone, or are lonely, for those who have lost a beloved one, may they know the presence of the Spirit of Love.

We pray for this community; for those who are in positions of power and responsibility, for those who lead and govern, both within our churches and in the secular community, especially as difficult decisions around “relaunching and recovery” in this time of pandemic begin to be made. God we pray for wisdom and courage, patience and integrity in this time.

Help us to be agents of your love and peace, to walk the way of Jesus each day of our lives. And as we journey, help us to know the presence of the Spirit, accompanying us as we live and serve as disciples.

We lift in prayer those who are in need this day...in the silence of our hearts....

O God of grace, enfold us all in your love as pray the words that Jesus taught his disciples to pray...

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 into the week ahead with joy in our hearts, and certain that God's love is with us and will never leave us. Thanks be to God! 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:

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