



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday November 1, 2020
All Saints Day
Olds 9:30 am Sundre 1:30 pm



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

Opening Call

Blessings abound! Good things are all around us.

God's love surrounds us.

Blessings abound! In gratitude we gather for worship this day.

We gather and celebrate the saints of our past, present and future.

Come, let us worship God together.

Prayer

For all the saints who went before us, who have spoken to our hearts and touched us with your fire,

We praise you, O God.

For all the saints who live beside us, whose weaknesses and struggles are woven with our own,

We praise you, O God.

For all the saints who live beyond us, who challenge us to change us and to change the world with them,

We praise you, O God. Amen.

Musical Interlude SoS 104 When The Saints Go Marching In

Time with Children

Readings for today

Matthew 5: 1-12

This is the beginning of what is known as "The Sermon on the Mount." In this passage, we are reminded that what we count as valuable is not necessarily measured in the same way in the realm of God.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

A Message for Today

It was in the summer that I realized that All Saints Day actually fell on a Sunday this year. At the same time I was already beginning to reflect on how we need to take time on a Sunday morning, as a community of faith, to honour those who have gone before, those Saints of our lives. I was particularly feeling so because with COVID restrictions, we have not been able to do that in the ways we normally would, and I could tell that was starting to create some angst in our communities. We have missed those opportunities to gather and be present for one another in those sacred times.

As church, I don’t have to tell you how much we value those times, and being part of something bigger than any one of us is on our own – times that remind us of the importance of being connected, and of being community together, supporting each other.

I remembered that several years ago, I had offered a similar service to what I am offering today– and that for some, it held deep meaning. I knew it was time to do so again.

It also is significant that All Saints Day falls in the month that we have been acknowledging our church anniversaries – 126 years for Olds and 96 years for Sundre this year. Those anniversaries offer cause to celebrate the many years of mission and ministry – of being United Church – and before that - Methodist Church, in our communities for these many years. It is good to celebrate the lives of those who have contributed to all of that ministry, too.

Today’s scripture is one that is well known. A number of years ago, I patterned a sermon on this passage, using the biblical translation of Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*. I looked back on it this week, and offer it to you again – updated for the times we are in now. Peterson entitles this passage as “You’re Blessed.”

Matthew 5:1-12 The Message (MSG)

You're Blessed

5 1-2 When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

These last few months seem to affirm the wisdom and truth here. For when I am at the end of the rope – when I am stressed, worried, frightened...I turn to God. And I confess – I turn to God in those times of my life more than when things are all good and fine. Most people do. And it is a blessing to know, to be able to trust, that as I cling to the end of that rope, God is there...waiting for me. The Spirit's presence - it's there in spite of my wandering ways.

Church numbers people tell us that although we may not have many people in our pews in these days, many people are turning to church websites, or to reading spiritually based books, and connecting with resources that are faith based, in their search for meaning as we live through this time of pandemic. We are blessed, as we connect and seek God in these days.

4 "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

This verse connects directly to what we will do in a few moments, with the candle lighting –letting the light shine before us, as we remember the lights of love that walked among us and now are part of the great communion of saints everlasting.

Totally unrelated to COVID, our pastoral charge has had many losses this year. Normally, there would have been many community gatherings, with safe space to grieve, and to celebrate and remember those saints. But we are living a new normal, and things have to be done differently. Even still, I so appreciate the community, and the care that happens in the new normal.

God is clearly present in community – embracing us, in our grief, and in our celebrations of the lives of our saints. Blessing indeed, to be held in the love of community that way.

I've seen you, so often, as a community of faith be that presence of the Holy for others in this community. And I know that gift of pastorally caring for each other is a huge part of the legacy of the both Olds and Sundre United Churches, over their many years of being church families.

5 "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

I can't help think of the old "keep up with the Joneses" stuff here. Our society, our media, feeds the idea that we aren't tall enough, or strong enough, or beautiful enough ...or we need to buy more, or work less....What else has made an industry out of botox and cosmetics; of fad diet and self help books? That's what I said a number of years ago...and then COVID...and times of lock down and self isolation happened. I think many people had time to dig deep into the well of reflection and consider what is really important in life. Do we really miss being able to wander shopping malls?

There is a place for growing and learning, and deepening one's self-awareness. For deepening one's relationships with others, and with God. There is rich blessing in that pursuit of being a full participant in life's opportunities for learning. We do, in many cases, have to find new, creative ways to do some of that – that allow us to be cautious and safe, as we pursue new experiences. Many have found rich reflective time in the midst of trying new things, while our world has been turned on its head. Things that are in shortage besides toilet paper in these days – cross country skis, snow shoes, canoes and kayaks, yeast for new bread bakers, in Toronto, lately, parchment paper...we are becoming culinary creators and outdoor enthusiasts.

Many have also found that time with one another – carefully – is what matters. And many have learned that, sadly, by losing that. I have heard the lament of grandparents missing hugs from grandkids, from seniors' home residents missing face to face contact with loved ones, from family members who cannot cross borders to visit loved ones.

COVID has indeed made many people content with simpler things in life, like those hugs, and good conversations with ones we love, walks in parks and a nice fire and a good book.

6 "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

In the NRSV reading shared earlier – we heard ⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. I think this verse connects with the previous one – in that, if you're searching for fulfillment in cosmetic bottles, or in driving the 'right' car; in keeping in step with the Joneses, you might find some level of satisfaction – but you will likely miss the boat on fulfillment.

True fulfillment is found in the pursuit of righteousness – of being right with God...and connected to that – being right with one's neighbour, and with all of Creation. That good appetite for God that Eugene Peterson writes of – I believe that's the appetite for relationships rooted in justice and love.

I like that image of working up a good appetite for God. It speaks of expending energy in good ways...working toward a vision that is life-giving and fulfilling. It speaks of hope.

7 “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

If that isn’t the best description of effective pastoral care, I don’t know what is. Talk to anyone that has participated in that kind of ministry. It is about being blessed to be a blessing...it’s about the gift of both giving and receiving. I have witnessed so much of that – even when we were closed, and couldn’t be together, I knew through my conversations with people, that care was happening. We don’t need to be together in this building to live out God’s call to be compassionate and loving.

8 “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

And that would be the best prescription for healthy living – healthy spiritual living – taking time to be still and listen to the quiet voice of God within. Perhaps that’s time in prayer or mediation, perhaps it’s time walking and contemplating the Spirit’s voice as you experience the holy in creation; perhaps it’s in reading scripture or poetry, and letting the words enter into the depth of your heart and soul. For me, the other day, it was sitting at the piano in the Olds sanctuary...all alone, playing some of my favourites from the More Voices hymnal. And Thursday evening, it was sitting with my phone, sending a prayer by text to a loved one in hospital, who can’t speak because she’s fighting COVID.

Take time to be blessed by the voice of God...and you will know God more fully. Take time to make room for the sacred to enter into your soul.

9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

Blessed are the peacemakers, as the NSRV says. You are blessed when you can mentor cooperative relationships; consensus in decision making, win-win in times of struggle and conflict instead of win-lose. Would that we could find better ways to live this one out – not just on a person to person level, but on a global scale, too - such that no child would ever again have to grow up in a place of conflict or war, and all could claim their place in God’s family without fear or discrimination. Politics would be about healthy debate and the common good, not seeing who can trash their opponent the most.

10 “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

Think Martin Luther King Jr. ; Ghandi, Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero...to name a few of the great ones. Think of those who are taking risks to stand for justice. Think of Alberta Health Workers on picket lines this week. Those workers, people like you and I...they are seeking justice, not for themselves, but for a system that was designed to offer care for all...a

system that is suffering.

11-12 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, / do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

I’ve spoken of one of my mentors, Betty Marlin before...and words she taught me that will be with me always... “Our job, as people of faith...as people in ministry, is to comfort the afflicted...AND to afflict the comfortable.” I hold on to those words dearly now, as Betty struggles with dementia.

I have learned over the years that people who are most challenged by that work of being afflicted tends to make them get defensive. Sometimes that defensiveness leads to acts of discrediting, of speaking lies...of hurtful behaviour. A prime example of this can be found in the current American President. And sadly, too many people follow his example, instead of following their own hearts.

Next week will tell...we can pray that change will come for our neighbours to the south, as we will experience the effects of the election result here. And perhaps heaven will applaud, too.

You’re blessed, as Eugene Peterson says. Blessed are you, we are part of a long story of blessedness. In our biblical story, we learn of those who were blessed to be blessing to the world, as they served God and one another. We learn of Jesus, who called his followers to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love neighbor as yourself.

We are part of the story of the saints of our church’s history –the World Wide Christian Church, The United Church of Canada, and our own corner of the world, the Olds Sunde Pastoral Charge. We are blessed to be counted among the communion of saints, living and past.

Thanks be to God for the many blessings we are privileged to give, and receive. And may God continue to give us the privilege of being able to share God’s blessings with the world around us, as we follow the path that Jesus set before us. Amen.

Musical Interlude VU 710 Shall We Gather at the River
<https://youtu.be/EoMJk0Z9EIM> (this one is Burl Ives...an extra verse that we don’t have in VU, but it’s nice, and words are already there)

Ritual of Remembering Our Saints

Candles are lit in memory of the “communion of saints” - people who have contributed to the life and work of our churches, our communities, our families.

O God, for each and every saint represented by these candles, we give thanks. For all our sisters and brothers upon whom your light shines, those with us, and those in your eternal home, we remember their love, reflected in your love. We remember their lives, lived in you. Bless them always, we pray. Throughout our lives, may we be open to your Word, and to serving you in love. Amen.

Musical Interlude MV 58 We Sing of Your Glory

This Week’s Minute for Mission

Offertory Music VU 542 We Give You But Your Own

Offertory Prayer

O God, receive the fullness of our offering. Increase the joy of our serving. Set free the love of doing your work. In the name of our Sustainer we pray. Amen.

Prayers for This Day

O God of grace and glory, we give thanks for the assurance of your love and for the beauty of our lives with you. We have gathered this day, with the saints that surround us here on earth and with the whole company of heaven, to give to you our praise. We hold in prayer those for whom it is not yet time to gather with us in worship, knowing that they are held in your love.

When we are struggling with burdens, O God, remind us of your ever-present love. Help us to walk together as community, as part of your body, growing together in faith.

We pray for those in our circles that are suffering – with pain, or illness; with the loss of a loved one.

We pray for our wider world – for peace and justice – for an end to violence and war, poverty and hunger. We think of our neighbours in the U.S., and we pray that as their election unfolds, peace will prevail.

As we go from here into our week – may we know the loving compassion that comes from being part of the body of Christ here in Olds and Sundre. Guide us to show that compassion to the world in which we live...to be the face of Christ to all we meet.

We take a moment of silence to offer to you, O God, the prayers of our hearts...

God, in thanksgiving and praise, we knit our voices together, saying the words that Jesus taught us...

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 go from this place knowing that we are surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses. Let us go, praising God in all that we do, today and always. **Amen.**

Choral Blessing Go Now in Peace, Never Be Afraid

*We are back to in person worship, with careful COVID precautions!
The bulletin and sermon will continue to be posted to the websites, for those who are unable to join us. Questions? Please call or email (contact info is below).*

Please note that Olds worship is now at 9:30, to accommodate Redemption Church's worship at 11:00
Sundre will worship at the usual time of 1:30.

Next week we will honour and celebrate Remembrance Day.



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