

Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
At Home Worship
April 19, 2020 Second 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, we come to you with our questions and our doubts. We come to you grateful for your presence among us, in times of joy and in times of uncertainty and fear. We reach out to you, that you might lead us in the ways of peace and love. And we sing praises to your name, and in the name of the risen one. Hallelujah! Christ is risen!
Amen.

Hymn – Jesus Christ is Risen Today Click on the link below to hear (and sing along)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8sFpgDSbU8>

An Easter Gospel Reading



John 20:19-31

This familiar passage tells us that Jesus appeared to some of his most important disciples “on the first day of the week.”

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” ²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them,

“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” ³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



A Message for Today

The disciples were behind locked doors in the same house where they had shared their final meal with Jesus – a meal we remember each time we celebrate the sacrament of communion. The story tells us these gathered people were behind locked doors. Why locked doors? What were they hiding from? What were they afraid of?

Earlier that week, the women who had gone to anoint Jesus' body had found a stone rolled away, and an empty tomb. And after an assurance to NOT be afraid, from an angel, Jesus appeared to Mary in the garden – and asked her to go and tell the others.

Jesus had risen. You'd think his followers would be out in the open, celebrating that good news. Yet there they were, locked in that room.

Could it be that they feared that those who had the power to crucify Jesus would come for them next? After all, it was no secret that they were aligned with Jesus. It would have been a fair assumption on their part, don't you think, that their lives might be threatened, too. It would have been reasonable to expect that they might want to lay low for a while, at least until the excitement had passed some.

But Thomas wasn't in the room. Do you ever wonder why? Perhaps this one that is known as “the doubting one” didn't share in the fear that his brothers and sisters in faith did. Maybe he really did know the presence of God with him, and perhaps that gave him the courage to go out, beyond those closed doors.

Or perhaps, in his fear, he just needed to get out, to be alone with his thoughts.

And then again, maybe the disciples were getting hungry, and Thomas drew the short straw and got to be the one to go find food for their evening meal. Who knows? Food for thought, either way.

So there sat the disciples – a gathered community. Church, if you will - where 2 or 3 are gathered. They were safe and secure behind closed doors – locked doors. And appearing into that place of sanctuary comes the Risen One, Jesus. And does he admonish them for their fear, for staying in that upper room?

No. He does what he always did – he offers peace to this gathering of followers; to this gathering of his friends.

Peace be with you.

And in that moment, wouldn't all of their fear be released? With those words, peace be with you, wouldn't they know that they were in the presence of the Holy, of God's risen one? What profound joy!

Joy, which only would grow, as Jesus instilled them with the gift of the Spirit, and then commissioned them to go and offer peace to others, with those words, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

It is with those words, "so I send you" that Jesus gave the disciples the call to follow in his way, to carry on the ministry that they had shared for 3 years.

But Thomas was not there –for whatever reason, he wasn't there to hear those words, and through them, to come to believe in what had transpired in that room.

And so when he returned, he declared that he needed to see for himself. He was only expressing a need for what the others had already had a chance to experience.

And, indeed, when Thomas did then SEE Jesus, the biblical story tells us he exclaimed, in recognition, those words "My Lord and my God." His doubt was satisfied in seeing the Risen One with his own eyes – he no longer needed to touch the wounds – those wounds that remained, even after the resurrection.

And so for us, today...how does this story relate to our world, to our time?

The clearest parallel, for me, is being together in the upper room. We are staying there. Many of us are staying behind doors, in our homes. Staying, and distancing from the wider community. We are staying put, for safety. There is some degree of fear in that, but we are trusting and following advice of public health professionals. Some of us are together with family members in that, some, by circumstance, are alone.

Thomas, in the biblical story was not staying in, for whatever reason. He was taking a risk, in leaving the safety of that space. So many in our community are doing that – for so many reasons. Medical professionals – doctors, nurses, respiratory technicians, hospital support staff, pharmacists and their staff, grocery workers, emergency personnel, semi truck drivers,

transportation staff – trains, airlines, etc. The list could go on. Many of us can safely cocoon in our homes and wait this COVID 19 thing out; however many are considered to be essential service, and just by the nature of being in public settings, doing their jobs, there is risk. We know that.

For them, and for those who love them, there is fear, worry, doubt. Feelings that run deep. For them, we must do our best to curtail this crazy virus, to flatten the curve. For them, we must trust the wisdom of the professionals, so they can trust in us. We are in this together.

We need to, together, seek ways to move beyond the places of fear and find the good, find the resurrection stories. And we need to do that not just with our fears around COVID 19. Before COVID 19, there were other things that could keep us in places of fear or anxiety.

There have been, in both of our congregations, worries and fears around our future as communities of faith. We are aging, the number of youth and younger adults who participate in our church life is small. What will our churches look like in 5 years? In 10 years? And now, how will the newness that COVID brings change how we continue to be church into the future?

Where will we find hope?

I invite you, I encourage you, to look for the faces of resurrection around you. Lots of them can be seen behind medical masks, and behind retail store Plexiglas partitions. Lots can be found in the voice on the other end of the telephone, calling to make sure we're okay. There are faces of resurrection in the kids who are drawing chalk pictures on their sidewalks to make their neighbours smile. There are faces of resurrection in the fast food servers who smile at us as we grab our much need Tim's.

Beyond and before COVID 19, I have found faces of resurrection at the Food Bank; on the Indigenous Connections team the plans National Indigenous Day events in our region, in the leadership teams of our churches, in the many ways our community members reach out in love and care.

There's another place to find the face of resurrection, too. Look in the mirror. Recognize the face of resurrection, reflecting back at you. For each of us has the potential to be the face of Christ for another. And isn't that what Jesus would have us do?

Amen.

Hymn In the Bulb There is a Flower *(click on the link below)*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=37&v=24OK2BziOJk&feature=emb_logo

Prayers for this day

God of our doubts, God of our certainties, we give thanks that we can bring our questions, and our fears to you, and to one another. We give thanks that even in our uncertainty, you are present with us, guiding us, inspiring us, and filling us with your peace and love.

We are an Easter people, called, as the disciples were, to carry on the story of the life of Jesus, called to live the love that he revealed to the world. Grant us, O God, the courage and the wisdom to do that.

We bring to you this day, our prayers for the community in which we live; we pray for those who are ill, or awaiting tests, or treatments...and for the added stress of needing care in the midst of this time of pandemic.

We bring prayers for the wider church, for those called into roles of leadership and mission, and for the support that comes with being part of something bigger than ourselves. The faces of Christ, of resurrection, within this United Church of ours are many.

We pray for the wider world, for health and wholeness, for those who live with the tensions and fear that comes with conflict and oppression. May the political powers of those regions, and the world powers who have influence around the globe be guided by your wisdom.

We think of those in our world, both near and far, that struggle to make ends meet, that find it hard to put food on the table, who live with less than sustainable income. Help us to reach out and share with others.

Gracious God, we take a moment of silence to lift to you the prayers of our hearts.

(A moment of silent reflection and prayer)

O God of resurrection, we pray the words that Jesus taught his disciples,
Our Father 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

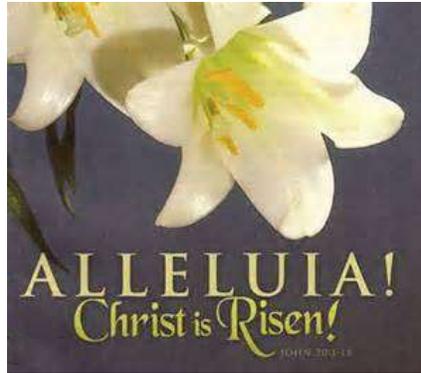
The everlasting love of the God of life surrounds us;

the presence of the risen Christ gives us hope;

the strength of the Spirit gives us confidence;

So let us live as witnesses to the life and love of God, let us live in joy and peace.

Alleluia, and 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 invite you to prayerfully consider making an Easter offering to either Olds United or Sundre United. If you already give to the church with PAR (Pre-Authorized Giving) things will carry on as usual. 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 be gratefully accept your gift.

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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/>