



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church At
Home Worship
Sunday August 16, 2020**



Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan

Your Worship Space

*As we continue our time apart, due to restrictions related to the pandemic, we offer to you this service of worship, for your use personally, and with your friends and family. You are welcome to share it with others. **You will also be able to find a recorded version of this service on our Facebook group, Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge.***

Try to create a special space for your time of worship. 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. I sometimes like to sit by a window, so I can look out on the garden, and on nice days, I sit on my deck for my worship time.

You might want to write in 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. For interest, and further reflection, consider seeking out another church's offerings and how their message speaks to you, as well. You will find a listing of other churches within Chinook Winds Region that are offering online worship on our website www.oldsunited.ca or www.sundreunited.ca

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.*

Opening Call

These summer months offer us much needed time for rest and renewal. Let us come to this time of worship to receive that gift for our souls. As the sun shines, as the rain falls on the earth, may we praise God together.

Prayer

O God we come, grateful for these summer days, and secure in the faith that you are with us, surrounding us with your love. We come to reconnect with our faith, with our community, as together – yet apart – we worship. Give us what we need for our journey in this time, peace, rest, and hope. Amen.

Reading for today

Genesis 45:1-28

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. ⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹²And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

A Message for Today

I haven't been preaching the Hebrew Scriptures story line for a while, however it had been following the saga of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. We find ourselves today, hearing the last story for the year's lectionary...with the story of Joseph's reconnection with his brothers...the brothers who had once wronged him to the point of estrangement.

There's a whole lot of background to today's story. I chose it over the other lectionary readings for a variety of reasons – not the least of which was an otherwise really busy week, and the other readings required a whole lot more unpacking than I had time for this week.

Besides that – the story has some merit for our world today. One of the commentaries I read a few years ago on this passage (my apologies, I can't remember which one) said something to the effect that long before the world

knew Tony Soprano, there was Joseph...who manipulated people, abused the power given to him, and was generally not a good guy, most of the time, that is.

I don't know how many of you ever watched the Soprano's series. I didn't watch my first episode until about ten years ago, after it had gone into the re-run circuit.

Tony Soprano had all sorts of power, but at the end of the day, he had a real softness at times too. Family mattered. Relationships, in his own strange way, mattered.

And then there was Joseph. Today's story seems to portray him in a pretty positive light – being quite benevolent towards his family, who are suffering in poverty as a result of a long time of agricultural crisis, of famine.

But, prior to today's story, there's a whole piece on how Joseph set up his brothers, making it clear to them that he remembered how he had been treated by them when he was younger, that he held them to account for selling him into slavery, because they were jealous of the attention he got from their father. Its as if Joseph was letting them know that now the tables had turned – that he – Joseph had community respect, and wealth and power on his side.

Its as if he was attempting - and succeeding - at making his brothers fear him, and feel as if they were at his mercy, and his command.

If we go back to last week's piece of this story, we learn that Joseph, for some reason, is indeed his father Jacob's favourite. From previous passages that give us this history of the whole line of descendants of Abraham and Sarah, we know, that can't be good. We know, even from our own experience of family, that parents showing favouritism towards one child over another is never good. It creates all manner of self-esteem problems, as well as conflicts in relationships. It hurts not just the "unfavoured" child or children – it hurts the whole family.

In his time away from his family, Joseph becomes a very successful person, rising to the position of overseer over his fellow slaves, gaining the respect of his Egyptian leaders, and of the community in which he works.

Earlier in Genesis we learn that Joseph is skilled in dream interpretation, and, upon interpreting Pharaoh's dream, he advises Pharaoh to store up 20% of the harvest in seven years of abundance to feed the land in seven years of famine. He becomes Pharaoh's second-in-command, as a result of his visionary foresight.

Meanwhile, Joseph's family, his father, Jacob and his brothers and their families back in Canaan are facing starvation, and Jacob has heard that there is grain in Egypt...so he sends his sons – all but the youngest - to buy some, so that they all might survive.

When the brothers get to Egypt, and find Joseph – who controls the grain stocks, Joseph recognizes his brothers - even though they do not recognize him.

That recognition of his brothers, combined with his control over the largest known food supply during that time of famine, gives Joseph all kinds of power over his brothers. And this is where he behaves all Tony Soprano vindictive.

Rather than reconcile with his brothers, Joseph manipulates them. He pretends not to know them, accuses them of spying, throws them all in jail for three days, and demands that after they take their grain home, they return to Egypt with Benjamin, their youngest brother. He sneaks the money they paid for the grain back into their sacks, which might be a Tony Soprano “softy” act of generosity, but is understood by the brothers, who are terrified of this man, as a sure sign that stealing will be added to their spying charges.

As you read on, you realize that part of Joseph’s plan is to get to see his youngest brother, and spend time with him...he arranges to have a feast with the whole family, and gets quite emotional about seeing Benjamin.

But then he sets Benjamin up so that it appears that he has stolen a silver cup – a cup that Joseph plants in his travel sack. More sneaky manipulation, in an attempt to keep Benjamin with him...Tony Soprano, style. Be manipulative and deceitful, rather than open and honest about your feelings.

It’s when Joseph realizes – through his older brother’s honesty - that to loose Benjamin will kill Jacob...that Joseph breaks down and reveals his identity to all of his brothers.

And that’s the point where the reading we heard today begins – the climax of the whole Joseph story. In spite of his manipulation and testing of his brothers, at the end of the day – what happens is Joseph realizes the depth of connection he has with this family, and how much he values them, and how much he needs to let go of the past wrongs, and reconcile with them.

He realizes that he can use his status and power for good – sharing out of his abundance so that all of Jacob’s descendants may have what they need to live, too. There’s something in his claim that what gave him that power was his ability to see what the future had in store, and his giving credit for that ability to God, who gifted him with the power of vision.

Will this be the fairy tale happy ending? If you read on – you know that the brothers continue to fear Joseph; and he continues to have power over who will have enough food to survive the famine and who won’t; but there are steps toward hope – his family coming together; his chance to see his father again.

So where does this story connect with us today – beyond it's connection to Tony Soprano?

I can't help but see it in the light of what is happening in places like Israel and Palestine today; and how one nation is dominating another, in cruel and inhumane ways.

And the devastation in Beirut following the explosion last week has woken the world to the corruption and greed of the Lebanese government – and the cost of that greed. That's just 2 places in our world where power and might has, or is, being used to make people fear others, even to the point of hating others.

Closer to home, to the south of us, and to some extent, right here in Canada, there are levels of deceit, of mismanagement, of greed and misuse of power within our own government leadership. I don't often get political in preaching, but there comes a point where you need to voice the truth. There are some pretty unjust things happening federally – The WE scandal most recently; and provincially – ask doctors, nurses, educators, power and greed has transformed much of how our society functions...in the midst of a pandemic, no less.

Throughout the saga of Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants, the focus has primarily been on the characters in each story who carry on the covenant promise with God—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Each of them, in his own way, ended up becoming a representative of the whole of the people, a marker of what faithful covenant living with this God might look like.

Joseph understood himself to have been **sent by God** to help save the lives of others – both the Egyptians and the people of his land of origin, Canaan.

His brothers, we see carry the guilt of plotting to kill him, then sending him away...and fear retribution. Yet Joseph understands all that has transpired in his life to be part of the journey towards being sent by God to serve, and to save his people.

Interesting to note that Joseph wasn't a high priest, or a wise elder. He was a manager of food stocks...he was at first a slave of Pharaoh...later after a time of trust building, his status changes to employee. Joseph wasn't a member of an elite group; he was just an ordinary person...from an ordinary family with its own set of dynamics that affected how those family members treated one another.

Ordinary...like you and I are just ordinary people.

Yet, Joseph came to a point where he saw that he had the power to hurt or help. And, he chooses to help, to serve, and to save.

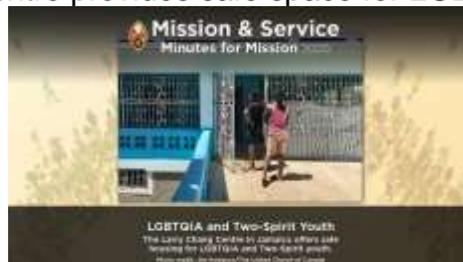
We too – have the potential to serve – and save – people – by how we live...by seeing ourselves as sent by God to do the work we do in community...in such a way that we honour the lives of those with whom we live and work, play and share our lives with. That could be as simple as wearing a face mask in places where social distancing can be a challenge. It could be as simple as supporting agencies that help the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed in our society. It might be as simple as speaking out against injustice, or signing a petition, or writing a letter to your MP or MLA, or voting, when the time comes.

The reality is that together we can build a better world, if we live and play and work in a way that creates relationships that are based on care and compassion – in a way that is a response to God’s sending us to live according to the way of justice and right relationship – and in turn, invites others on the journey. Amen.

Hymn VU 634 To Abraham and Sarah (tune is 633)

This Week’s Minute for Mission

Larry Chang Centre provides safe space for LGBTQIA2S+ youth.



Published on: June 30, 2020

Our gifts for Mission & Service support partners around the world where being LGBTQIA or Two-Spirit is punishable by death or imprisonment. Here is a story about one of those partners.

In Jamaica, the Larry Chang Centre provides housing to young adults who would otherwise be homeless. The youth shelter provides a safe space and supports mental and physical health and well-being; it also provides access to education and skills training and helps the young people get essential documentation and ID. Outreach to youth at risk is critical, as well as working to increase sensitivity among providers of related health and education services. Church support for the shelter has had a positive impact on the developing ecumenical and public conversation on the importance of dignity, rights, and inclusion.

Your gifts to Mission & Service have made a real contribution in the global work of LGBTQIA and Two-Spirit rights and care for individuals facing oppression, discrimination, and risk because of their sexual orientation.

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

Prayers for this day

O God, we are seeking hope in a world that sometimes overwhelms us.

When we have heard difficult news – stories of conflict, of hardship around the world – help us see that you are with those who suffer; sharing in the burdens and the tears. We pray for justice and peace in our world.

When we are lonely or afraid, help us to trust in your presence with us. We pray for those in the world who are in need of companionship, of the support of a friend. We especially think of those who in this time of pandemic, have been particularly isolated by the restrictions, and efforts to stay healthy.

We pray for those we know, and those unknown to us, that are struggling with illness or injury. May healing light shine for them. We give thanks for the gifts of medical professionals, and compassionate care-givers.

As we go prepare to go into the week ahead, we pray for those who are living with loss, and we think of families in our own communities of faith, and the loss of loved ones – including long time Olds community member, and church member, Don. We also pray for the family friends, of doctor Reynolds, so brutally murdered in Red Deer this week, as well as first responders, staff and patients traumatized by this tragedy.

God of grace, you do send us to carry our mission and ministry wherever we work and live. Give us wisdom to know how and where to do that. Give us courage to go where you send us. Help us to reach out to those in need, in love and compassion.

Gracious and loving God, we trust that you hold our prayers, and the prayers of our hearts close to your heart. Wrap us in love as we share the words of Jesus.



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 MV 221 I am Walking a Path of Peace (sing twice)

A Blessing for Today

May the love that brought us into being fill us with hope.
May the peace that passes understanding be upon us all.
May the joy that lives where justice is be alive in each and every one of us. Amen.



Thank you so much for using this worship resource! Feel free to share it! You will also find worship and reflective posts on our Facebook Group – Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge. Feel free to invite others to join that group.

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 social 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 support 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 so, call the church office for assistance with that.

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. Our church mailing addresses are:

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

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