



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church At
Home Worship
Sunday July 12, 2020**



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 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.

As you worship, 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. 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.

Opening Call

As people of God, we praise the one who so delighted in creating us.
Let us delight in the community of which we are a part, and the warm love that is all around us.
Let us feel the embrace of the Spirit as we worship – together, while apart, this day, and always.

Prayer

God of abundant grace, use our senses to open our hearts and minds to the richness of your word. Help us to receive what you sow so graciously and freely in our lives. Inspire us to share the bounty of your love generously with our neighbours, near and far. Amen.

Hymn VU 371 Open My Eyes That I May See

Reading for today

Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23

13That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower.¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

A Message for Today

I love how this passage gives us that image of a gathered community, sitting by a lake, sharing stories. You can imagine them sharing food, perhaps cooking over a fire, maybe roasting some fresh caught fish, some seasonal fruit, some flat bread...are you hungry yet? There would have been, in that gathering, people of all ages and stages.

It's a wonderful image, perfect for this season...we too can imagine scenes like that, gathered at a campfire, sharing our own traditions – maybe toasted smokies, or hotdogs, with some watermelon...and of course topping that meal off with some roasted marshmallows, or better yet, s'mores.

I said we can imagine those scenes – because for some of us, this year, caution says we need to be careful how we gather, how wide we let our circle get, or our bubble, or our cohort. COVID 19 has certainly given us some new ways of being in the world.

I hope that we are indeed all able to find ways to gather – even through the magic of social media, to share with friends and family in times that make memories, and times that we can tell stories, to create moments of memory.

I don't know about you, but I do have wonderful memories of those summer gatherings, those multi-generational family camp outs or picnics. And, as a child, I learned a lot by listening to my elders – be they older cousins, or aunts and uncles, and grandparents...about fishing, about safety around wildlife, about campfire cooking, about family stories, about joy in simple things.

I like to imagine that a similar thing was happening for those people gathered at the shore to hear Jesus share his stories and his lessons. People gathered, to share in memory making moments of learning, of story telling, of joy.

Jesus often used story and metaphor to make a point, to teach lessons to the gathered people. Today's passage is a clear example of that. We know it as The Parable of the Sower. A while back, I found a simple definition of a parable this week– it is “an earthly story with a spiritual truth.”

I remember this story from my Sunday School days, as I'm sure many of you do. Often, we would hear the story, then plant seeds in Styrofoam cups, to take home and transplant later in mom's garden. We've evolved...no more Styrofoam...peat moss cups...much better for our world, and our gardens!

The sower and the seeds. How many of you garden? Or know people who garden?

Is it wise to waste seeds on the garden path, where they'll surely get trodden on and never take root? Do you spread seeds on the rocky parts of the field...only for them to be weak and never survive the heat – never mind what might happen to any gardening or farm equipment you might use to tend them.

Do you toss your seeds in amongst the thorns and the weeds, where they'll get choked out and never flourish?

What's the point of all that? Of course, a careful gardener plants only on rich, fertile soil, soil that will nourish and feed the seeds. Unless, that is, you're a sower of grace.

Think about it. Think how liberally the sower in the parable scatters the seeds. They go everywhere, seemingly indiscriminately.

The sower...the Creator. The seeds – seeds of love and grace. You and I. The soil.

Some of us are kind of like the path. Things in our lives have not necessarily been easy going. Life has created in us a protective shell, kind of hard, tough to get through. Maybe its circumstance, maybe its some of the choices we've made. Yet, in spite of that – the sower, God – sends seeds of compassion our way. Seeds of persistent hope.

Some of us are like the rocky soil. Kind of rough around the edges, difficult at times, yet, between the rocks, are places where seeds might take root, they might struggle, but with care, they'll make it – and we too receive the gift of those seeds of grace and love.

And some of us are kind of thorny... prickly even. Have you ever noticed how those thorniest of plants often have the most gorgeous of blooms? We too, even with our thorny ways, we receive the gift of God's care.

The seeds of God's compassion, of mercy, of hope, fall equally on those hard places to grow as they do on the good soil. That mercy, that love, is for all – bestowed upon all, by the ultimate lover, the ultimate gardener. Seeds of love, sown indiscriminately. I like to imagine those seeds of love are like the dandelion seed...persistent, strong, filled with purpose, full of goodness, able to grow in even the most challenging of places. Seeds that some think of as weeds – yet the little dandelion makes richly nutrient salads, and healing teas, and produces a flower even the youngest child finds beauty and joy in.

Seeds scattered liberally, freely, unconditionally. Seeds that transform, create simple beauty and joy. Can we change the kind of people we are? Can God's love transform us? I've seen it happen. I've seen some pretty prickly, thorny, hard lives been changed through the out pouring of love.

Let's remember, too, that the parable speaks not only about hearing the word, but about understanding it. Essentially the point being that it's not good enough to just hear the story and go on being who you've always been, living as you've always lived.

It's about hearing the story and seeking meaning for your own life...it's about doing the work of discernment, to come to an understanding of what God is calling us to be about with this story.

The story – a parable of the extravagant grace of God – seeds sown for all. A parable, an earthly story with a spiritual truth. You can't get much more earthly than this parable...and the spiritual truth is indeed that the gift of grace is ours. It's for all of us.

We are called to live out of that place of grace, in gratitude and joy. To take the opportunities given to us each day, to treat those around us with the same kind of grace and compassion poured out upon us by God. We are called to liberally and freely sow seeds of love and compassion, to live according to the ways of Christ, God incarnate, in all that we do.

It can be as simple as smiling when you see a stranger on the street. Or offering a hand to someone struggling with something difficult, or a listening ear to a

friend in trouble. It can be as simple as sending out a word of prayer when you know someone is in need.

As a community, it might include discerning ways to expand of mission and ministry, especially in this time of pandemic, to discern how church needs to transform and change to meet the changing needs around us. We are entering a process of discernment with our neighbouring United Churches, seeking ways to sow seeds of love along the highway 2 corridor, along with our neighbours. That will involve a time of shared learning, and study, of prayerful consideration and conversations that matter.

I am grateful to the wider church – Chinook Winds Region, and Edge, the a network that helps congregations discern mission and ministry opportunities for the church of 2020 and beyond. I look forward to working with our neighbouring churches, more closely, and building networks of support and nurture, for our shared journey of faith.

I envision our journey over the next year to be like those gatherings at the shore with Jesus, listening to each community's stories, finding common ground, seeking ways to spread seeds of hope, compassion, love and grace.

May God continue to nourish us, that we might further spread that kind of love in the world. Amen.

Hymn MV 174 Soil of God

This Week's Minute for Mission

Community ministries are places where God is present and active.

Published on:
April 13, 2020

The term “partnership” can describe a wide range of relationships undertaken by the church. The work of the church is accomplished through working with others—some full ministries of the church, including community-based organizations, as well as through relationships with organizations and coalitions we know as national partners. Mission & Service supports partnerships with community ministries across Canada.

In addition to congregations, the church includes ministries such as camps, campus ministries, and community and social justice ministries that support people seeking basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, advocacy services, and spiritual guidance. There are over 60 community ministries.

Community ministries are often full ministries and expressions of the church, while some have developed into community-based organizations that partner with a variety of local government and non-governmental organizations. Through these relationships, the church is able to faithfully and more fully make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people. These ministries call the church to risk new forms of life and membership, to be willing to be transformed by those on the margins of society, and to join them as the place where God is present and active.

Through partner relationships, the church engages in advocacy and justice, research and policy, education and theological reflection, congregational engagement for justice-making, and community support.

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.

Watch the Community Ministry Video here: <https://youtu.be/wp2aBqXA31w>

Prayers for this day

O God, we bring our whole selves to you – and we know that you are closer to us than the very air that we breathe.

We come together today in prayer, and offer prayers for our world – for the regions of the world where violence and conflict cause people to live in fear, we pray for peace.

For the beauty of your created world, we are grateful, O God, and we pray for guidance as we strive to be faithful stewards of the earth and all its creatures.

We give thanks for our community of faith – for the people of The Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge, aware that in each person we meet, there is an opportunity to encounter Christ's love and compassion, as well as an opportunity to show Christ's love and compassion to others.

We know that there are people within our midst who are in need of prayer, O God. Those who are feeling isolated and alone; those who are experiencing loss or transition in their lives; those who are living with illness or awaiting test results. Enfold them in your love.

In a moment of silence, we lift up the prayers of our hearts...

Gracious and loving God, we trust that you hold our prayers close. 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 180 Sing, Sing Out!

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.

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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 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 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