



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday September 13, 2020



9:30 Olds 1:30 Sundre

Minister: Rev. Tammy Allan

Our Worship Space

We're back...after 6 long months...here we are! Some of us, that is. I know that for some – not yet. As so we worship, some in person, because of the pandemic, still needing to be cautious and so not gathering with us in person. We will endeavour to continue posting the bulletin and sermon to the website. Please feel welcome to share this printed service with others.

For those of us who gather, for now, we will worship in the hall – as we are sharing our space with rental guests from The Redemption Church.

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.

Musical Introit MV 130 Rise Up, Rise Up

Call to Worship adapted from a prayer written by **Robin Wardlaw, Gathering,** Pentecost 2 2020, pg. Used with permission.

As on a first day, God made the world. As on a first day, God raised the Beloved from destruction, so on this extra-ordinary first day, God calls you here: to make joyful praise, to make possible a vision of peace, and to befriend all of God's creation.

Opening Prayer adapted from a prayer written by **Wanda Winfield, Gathering,** Pentecost 2 2020, pg. Used with permission.

O God of mountains and seas, of dry land and living waters, may we always look for you, where your Spirit leads us, in truth. May we always notice you, where hope does not disappoint us, because we know that your love surrounds us and all of creation. Amen.

Time with the Children

Musical reflection VU 395 Come in and Sit Down
<https://youtu.be/9XTaTRFcaNg>

Reading for today

Exodus 14: 19- 31



¹⁹The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. ²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and

chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." ²⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ³⁰Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Reflection

Today's reading is not exactly one of harmony and love. It does have, though, a theme of journey, as do the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures readings for the next few weeks. In some ways, that connects to our time, as we journey in these days.

The scriptures focus on a journey of creating a "people of God." This week's theme looks at "creating a new vision," based on today's story of the crossing of

the Red Sea. As I reflect on the question of what God is calling us to be about in this time, I think this is an important connecting point.

In Olds, we are have the United Futures Team...busily working away while we have been apart – to help us make some decisions based on what we want for the future of this 126 year old congregation. The letter you (they) received this past week, as well as today and Thursday's open house are part of that work, as has been renewed connections with the other protestant mainline churches in Olds.

In both Olds and Sundre, we will be doing some discernment work with Edge – the United Church network for ministry development, specifically with the facilitation of rural ministry specialist Christine Jerrett. Also joining this work are most of the congregations along the corridor between Innisfail and Airdrie and 3 or 4 congregations along the highway 21 corridor.

All of this work, combined, will help us forge a path ahead, and help us set priorities for mission and ministry as a Pastoral Charge, as clusters of churches, and as individual communities of faith– so that we can share with the wider community in service to God. It will help us create a vision for our future.

A few years back, one of our Gathering Ministry resource magazines said this about *vision*:

Vision can be someone's idea or hope of how something should be done or how it will be in the future. Words related to vision are *hope* and *expectation*. Sometimes it takes a challenging situation to bring new vision. *Sometimes*, we have to be in that difficult position of knowing the only way to move forward is to change...you know...when there is NO going back, and no option to just tread water and stay put.

No doubt we've all been, at some point in our lives, in a place where our only option is to make a change. Ideally, we can take time to consider possible options, to weigh the pros and cons of each, and then discern the best way forward. Even in the best of situations, moving into change or transition involves a level of faith and hope.

Today's scripture reading, for many of us, raises many questions. The Israelites needed to have a vision of a new beginning, after a long, long, journey. Yet they were in danger, the Egyptians were in pursuit.

So, in drying up the sea or parting the waters, what was God's purpose?

Was it to help the Israelites realize God's tremendous power? When they reached the other side, the passage tells us that they were in awe and now trusted in God and Moses. Yet, how could they feel victorious when they looked

back and saw the Egyptian cavalry and chariots engulfed in the sea? The Israelites success came at the cost of the lives of the Egyptian soldiers.

How do we understand that violence? Is this the God we believe in, a God who chooses sides, one people over another?

That same Gathering Resource I mentioned earlier writes of a Jewish midrash story – midrash being a way of retelling, and re-interpreting a biblical story to make it more relevant to contemporary times. This midrash story says that while the Israelites were celebrating, the crossing of the sea, God was crying for the Egyptians who had died that day.

When I read this story in 2020, I can't help but see in my mind's eye those images from the media over the past few years that show refugees crossing the sea - people who put their lives in peril in search of a better world, a world free from war. The reality is that some of those people perished. I can't imagine – in my world of relative safety and privilege - that willingness to risk, to find a better place to call home - yet it is a story of our own time.

The God I believe in does, indeed, cry for those who are forced into such precarious situations as a result of corruption and war.

So, what about the connection of this story to our story? What about the work of seeking a new vision for the future? I can't help but wonder about all the things those refugees had to let go of in order to create a different life for themselves and their families. I can't help but wonder how they found the courage to change their lives so drastically.

We in our humanity, we tend to resist change – yet there are for some, times when change is the only option, the only way. Yet, sometimes, that can be a good thing, indeed. Sometimes, it is good to let go of our resistance, our fears, and let God lead us.

No doubt, sometimes change brings mixed feelings – there can be relief, hope, at a new beginning, along with a sense of grief and loss at what once was.

This time of COVID has shown us that...COVID has brought families closer together, given them more time to be with one another – a good thing; while COVID has taken others and put them in positions of deep isolation and loneliness. COVID has created opportunity for some to change direction, envision new possibilities, in positive ways, while at the same time taken work and economic security from others.

Beyond the personal...when we look at change, and this story of the parting of the seas; where is the connection to our story, particularly as it relates to our church, and the changes we are discerning?

Is the church really at a Red Sea crossing? Are we standing on the edge of something new...yet so unknown that we fear going forward?

Are we ready to believe that we can't turn back the clock to the way the church was when it was bursting at the seams in the post war years?

Can we, continue to just keep doing the same old, same old?

And if we safely cross the Red Sea of change, what are the losses and what are the gains?

One of the things I have learned from my time of sabbatical, last year, and from further study, is that those churches that we would consider to be thriving, healthy communities of faith are those that are reaching out beyond their doors and serving. They have a strong sense that their mission is about building a better world. And that sense of mission has brought about connections with the wider community, that in turn foster ecumenical and interfaith relationships, and relationships with other human service groups – religious or not.

We will lose some things...some of comfort points may need to be shaken up or let go of, to make space to try new things. Some changes will emerge as we move forward, we may not have imagined what they'll be, yet.

Yet we stand to gain much. New relationships with other communities of faith – United Church or others, new ways of learning, new ways of sharing the good news, new ways of serving God in the world.

The Israelites trusted that God was leading them.

Can we trust that God is leading us, even when the way forward seems uncertain and possibly a little risky? Are we open to letting go, and letting God guide us, so that we can be the church of today, and tomorrow. Let that be our prayer. Amen.

Musical reflection VU 651 Guide Me, O, Thou Great Jehovah
<https://youtu.be/K5uwi04ttjA>

Prayers for this day

God of grace, we give thanks for those in our in our communities, in our church, who are open to discernment, and seeking new ways of being in the world.

We know the courage and care it takes to do that work. We celebrate the history of our church, and of our communities, yet, we look to the future trusting in your presence among us, wherever the journey takes us.

Teach us all, we pray, O God, to be open to your guidance. Help us all to be open to your vision for our lives.

We are grateful to be together this week, while holding in prayer all those who are not able to be with us.

As we journey through this week, we hold in prayer those who are alone or lonely, and those struggling with illness; those awaiting test results or surgeries; those living with a sense of loss – of work, or relationship. Bring comfort and peace we pray.

We pray for those affected by the horrible fires on the American west coast, and by natural disasters around the world. May we pay attention to the realities of climate change, and do our part to be better stewards of creation.

God of compassion...we lift up the prayers that come from this gathered community that is the Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge... for those families that have recently experienced the loss of loved one, and those undergoing treatments for illness.

We take a moment of silence to lift up the prayers held deep in our hearts...

God of grace, hear us as we pray in unison, the words that Jesus taught us...Our Father....

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

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.

Choral Blessing Go Now in Peace, Never Be Afraid
<https://youtu.be/sNqaWGmjUok>



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 have been 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, thanks for your continued support.

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

Did you know we have a FACEBOOK group for the Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge. You will also find reflective posts there, and also soon, notices of special events. Feel free to invite others to join that group.

We also have websites – www.oldsunited.ca and www.sundreunited.ca

And the good news...Olds and Sundre United Churches have resumed in-person worship, effective TODAY, September 13th, 2020

A letter was sent out explaining all precautions and COVID safe protocol, this past week. It is our hope that you will discern your own personal risk level, and decide if you will join us. We will also be posting worship to our website.

*Please note that effective September 13 – Olds will worship at 9:30, to accommodate Redemption Church's worship at 11:00
Sundre will worship at the usual time of 1:30.*

Praise be!

