



Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge of the United Church
Sunday January 10th, 2021
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

The voice of God proclaims

That all of creation is good.

The voice of God affirms that we are God's beloved, with whom God is pleased.

May God bless us this day with peace, as we worship together.

Let us listen for the voice of God, as we gather.

Music for meditation MV 115 Behold, Behold

Opening Prayer

In this season of light, we have received enduring light in the world.

It is the light of God's presence and the light of God's guidance. It is the light that illuminates God's hopes for peace and justice in the world.

O God, let us come to the light. Show us how to follow the light. Help us to remember that the light is always with us, that we are not alone.

Amen.

Time with Children Share the story "The Twelve Gifts of Birth" by Charlene Costanzo, 1999, Harper Collins publisher

Music for meditation SoS 38 This Little Light of Mine (3 verses)

Scripture

Genesis 1: 1-5

Mark 1: 4-11

Reflection

There's a long held piece of wisdom that says that a good preacher works with a bible AND a newspaper. It's an old saying...now more realistically, it's a bible and an electronic device that allows you to access current news. Never-the-less,

the idea is that good preachers are aware of the events of the world around them. And between the vacation fiasco involving our own provincial leaders and the chaos this week in Washington DC, media sources have certainly been full of things to watch, read, and reflect on.

How does this relate to us, how does one preach this week – when the focus of our lectionary is on the story of Jesus' baptism...and in turn our own?

I bought that book I shared earlier last year...with a plan to use it on a baptism Sunday with the children among us. And now, with COVID, families with young children are cautiously staying away – I have talked to them, and their main concern is apprehension around being asymptomatic, and bringing COVID in to the church unknowingly. Their concern is for us, in older age groups.

As I reflected on what to say today, on how to address the craziness of the past couple of weeks' events, I turned again to this book, and to those 12 gifts - Strength. Beauty. Courage. Compassion. Hope. Joy. Talent. Imagination. Reverence. Wisdom. Love. Faith.

Can we look at those 12 gifts of birth, in relation to who we are as a baptised, and baptising people, and how we are called to live as citizens of the world, especially in these days of pandemic, of political challenges, of economic and social strife?

The gift of strength, I believe this is more about strength of character than it is about physical strength. In today's world, there is a lot to be said about standing strong to one's convictions, and speaking out and being heard when you see injustice or wrong doing. Sometimes we need to do that in the moment, sometimes we need to sit down and write a letter, sometimes we do that by exercising our civic duty and right to vote. We know that Jesus taught his disciples to live according to that kind of strength. We know that that strength in Jesus himself led to the elite and powerful of the day to fear his strength and influence, to the point of wanting to remove him – even when he was a little babe.

The gift of beauty – again...this isn't just about surface beauty. It's about deep down appreciation for the good things of life, and for the inner beauty of each person we meet. Jesus saw that beauty in sinners, in social outcasts, in people that most of his world chose to ignore or isolate.

Courage – relates to strength, I believe. It's not that you don't sometimes experience fear as you seek to find your path. It's about not letting that fear immobilize you or cause you to give up on your vision and hope for moving forward on your path. I can't imagine that throughout his life Jesus didn't ever

experience fear – yet I believe he faced that fear and followed the path that God had set before him.

The gift of Compassion...in the book the words are “May you be gentle with yourself and others. May you forgive those who hurt you and yourself when you make mistakes.” From “The Twelve Gifts of Birth” by Charlene Costanzo, 1999, Harper Collins pub.

It’s the being gentle with ourselves that I think sometimes we’re not very good at. We can second guess ourselves, we can be really hard on ourselves, and not take the time we need to rest and renew. Remember that Jesus did – he took time to go off alone and pray – often leading up to or following a time in his life that was difficult or challenging in some way. We can learn from that. I believe sometimes it can mean turning off the computer and the TV, and taking a break from the constant bombardments of news...to take time to reflect and pray.

The gift of hope... Costanzo writes of trusting the goodness of life. Is the glass half full or half empty. I know that with the past year we’ve had it’s pretty easy to see the glass as empty – some days it feels like it’s bone dry...but the cornerstone of our faith is hope for a better tomorrow – the key though, is that we need to be active participants in building hope. We need to prayerfully discern where God is calling us to serve and act to be bearers of hope to the world.

The gift of joy...Follows the gift of hope for a reason. To have hope inspires joy. It’s hard to be joyful when you are in despair, or lacking hope. God’s desire for us is to be people of joy, and to share that with those we meet. Jesus brought joy every time he shared a meal, reached out to a hurting soul, showed compassion to a person in need.

Talent...we all have them. We all have some gift or skill that we can employ to build a better world. It’s actually about stewardship – being faithful stewards of the gifts that God has entrusted to us, for the betterment of the world around us.

The gift of imagination...the gift of dreaming. I think we are being called to really exercise that gift in these days, as we discern a way forward for our church – with the support of the work that the United Futures Team has done, and the work that the QE 2 Mission Discernment project is doing, we are being asked to dream and envision our mission for the future. Can we imagine what we will be doing 5 years down the road, 10 years to serve God and community?

The gift of reverence...I look at the events of this week, in the US and I have to ask where the sense of reverence for an American institution was? How could people act in aggression and violence as they did. That was not peaceful protest, it was violence, bullying behaviour, incited by someone who has lost his way. We know there was a time when Jesus turned the tables outside the temple, but he did so as a response to already irreverent behaviours of moneylenders and

swindlers. He did it as a stand for justice, and to get people to see how they were not acting with the reverence expected within the temple.

The gift of wisdom...remember that capital 'W' Wisdom is one of the ways of naming God, naming the sacred. And as the author says "Wisdom will lead you to understanding." "The Twelve Gifts of Birth" by Charlene Costanzo, 1999, Harper Collins pub.

The 11th gift – Love. The whole of Jesus' life and mission...it was about love. And we are called to follow. We sing that little ditty – love is something you give it away...from the Magic Penny song. Again – it's the essence of our call. To love. To love God, self and neighbor.

And finally...the 12th gift...Faith. Our lives are guided by our faith. In the United Church Creed, we speak of a belief that we are never alone. God is always with us. I hurts me to hear that some of the people that support the actions perpetrated by those who stormed Washington claim a faith in God, then turn around and act in ways contrary to that.

The best I can do is to offer an alternate vision to the world, an alternate view of what being a person of faith looks like, and acts like. For that is what my faith calls me to do. I believe that's what our faith calls all of us to do. Which in turn requires us to call up those other gifts, like courage and strength, wisdom and hope. For really, isn't that what we promise at baptism, as parents, as community of faith? We promise to seek justice, to resist evil. We promise to live our faith and all of our God given gifts, and share them with the world.

May we live in the light of that promise. Amen.

This Week's Minute for Mission

Offertory Music VU 542 We Give You But Your Own

Offertory Prayer

O God, we come to you with all that we are, as you made us, with all that we have to offer. We come, knowing that in us, you are well pleased. Accept the gifts we bring, and bless them we pray, that they may be used to bring hope and justice to our world. Amen.

Music for meditation VU 644 I Was There to Hear Your Borneing Cry

Prayers for This Day

O God of Grace and Love, we live our faith in everything we do. We share our faith as we engage with others, and support one another.

We reveal our faith in the words we use, the thoughts we share, and the gifts we offer not just for the work of the church, but gifts we share beyond the church, in family, in community, in the world.

You call us to be faithful disciples, and we pray for wisdom and guidance to live in that manner.

O God of compassion, we offer our prayers of concern and need for those facing health concerns, surgeries, illness. We pray for all for whom the extended restrictions related to COVID continue to create feelings of isolation and loss.

We pray also for our wider world, we think of the voices of dissent that have risen in the US, and we pray that love and justice will prevail.

We think of the places in the world torn by war and conflict, and we pray that peace will prevail.

We think of places where people live in poverty, hunger, oppression, and we pray for hope and transformation.

We pray for our church – nationally, locally, regionally...as we move into the new year, and struggle with the impacts the pandemic has had on how we ministry to our communities and to the world. May we hold to the truth that at the end of the day, what we are called to be is the church – people living your love, and caring for the world.

We take a moment of silence to lift up our unspoken prayers...

O God, we are grateful that our prayers are heard, and held in your love...and we knit our voices together sharing the words Jesus taught us to pray.

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 here empowered by the Spirit to spread the light of Christ.

We go, knowing that God's love goes with us, for we are God's beloved and God's blessed. Amen.

Happy New Year!

Thanks for taking time to be part of the Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge worship experience. We are having in- person worship with careful COVID precautions: Olds – 9:30am and Sundre - 1:30pm.

The bulletin and sermon will to be posted to the websites, for those who are unable to join us. Messages will also be posted to the Facebook Group, Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge.

Questions? Wish to financially support our ministries?

Please call or email...

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