



**Olds-Sundre Pastoral Charge
of the United Church
Sunday May 2nd, 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

Lighting the Christ Candle

The risen Christ lives today!

We are witnesses to these things.

We sing praise to God incarnate.

May Christ's love burn within us!

Opening Call

Come this day with hope, because God loves us.

Come this day with peace, because we are forgiven.

Come this day with joy, because Jesus is risen.

Our worship today is testament to our hope, love, peace, and joy.

Let us worship together!

Written by Elaine Bidgood Sweet, **Gathering**, Lent/Easter 2021, pg. 43

Music for meditation VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful

Opening Prayer

O God, our vine grower, we come to this time of worship to grow and learn. You offer us life, you nourish us, and create spaces for us to thrive. Shape our hearts as we hear your word, sing your praises, and seek your guidance in prayer. Strengthen us to be bearers of good fruit. We pray as followers of the one who proclaimed "I am the vine." Amen.

Time with Children A conversation about things growing in our gardens...

Music for meditation MV 174 Soil of God, You and I

Scripture

John 15: 1-8

This is one of the great "I am..." statements Jesus makes.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear

more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Reflection

This week, we have this great passage where Jesus uses another “I am” statement – this time “I am the true vine.” Had we followed the lectionary last week, we would have heard another “I am” statement – “I am the good shepherd” – a passage that reminds us of what Jesus was willing to sacrifice for his followers, a sacrifice that our faith tells us comes out of great depths of love.

In my study this week, I encountered a wonderful study on this passage, by Meda Stamper, on the website Working Preacher.org, from May 3rd, 2015.

Stamper looks at some of the deeper meaning of the language used in the passage. Some of her wisdom looks at the words ‘*bear fruit*,’ and the fact that those words appear six times in these eight verses. She writes:

“Fruit-bearing is not something that the branches do by force of will. The fruit happens organically because the vine is true and the gardener good. But the branches of this passage do choose to abide.”

The word ‘*abide*’ also appears often in this passage - eight times in four verses, and Stamper reminds us that:

Abiding is important in John, where love of God means mutual indwelling. ...

The verb *abide* is found in one of John’s most famous verses, - one we often reflect on as we celebrate a life passed - 14:2.

Stamper writes:

“The many *mansions* in the Father’s house are actually *abiding places*. As Jesus’ own have places prepared for them in God, so also the Son and Father will have *abiding places* in Jesus’ own (14:23). And the Holy Spirit will also *abide* in them (14:17). So the vine image is another way of talking about abiding places (places

where one is deeply at home), and both the vine and the abiding places are ways of talking about love.”

When I reflect on this passage in the context of a memorial service or celebration of life, that is indeed what I focus on - the deep, abiding love of God.

In further study, I encountered this brief quote that I resonated with:

“The vine branch doesn’t put “make grapes” on its to-do list. It just makes them.”
***Melissa Earley**, The Christian Century magazine, online www.christiancentury.org April 6, 2021*

Melissa Earley was writing about an experience as a pastor of a relatively small United Methodist Church. She had gone to all manner of courses and workshops on church growth and congregational development. She had read all the right books on the subject, and tried to implement many of the strategies she’d learned about, but still her church did not grow.

Yet, she writes about the many wonderful ministries the people in her community of faith are part of. Offering a monthly community meal, supporting a single mother in caring for her children, caring for families and individuals experiencing grief and loss in practical ways. As I read her article, I felt like I could have been reading our own community of faith’s story, and the stories of many of our United Churches – especially our rural churches.

I had a long conversation on Friday with my colleague Deborah Springer – she’s the minister at St. Paul’s United in Trochu. They are now working on a Memorandum of Agreement with Alix, Delburne and Knox -Three Hills. Those 4 churches are part of the cluster work we have been doing with several of the churches along highway 2; including our pastoral charge, and Knox- Didsbury; and Balzac United Churches, with Christine Jerrett, who came to us as a consultant with Edge, the United Church congregational development support network.

The process unfolding along the highway 21 corridor with the 4 churches Deborah is working with is very similar to the process unfolding with Olds, Sundre and Knox, in Didsbury, as we work towards developing our own Memorandum of Agreement. We’ve been through a similar process before – as Olds and Sundre first came together to discern how we might share resources – both human and financial.

Like Melissa Earley, Deborah and I have attended the workshops, read lots of literature, and followed the latest trends. Yet like many rural churches, especially in mainline denominations, many of us perceive that growth is not happening. I used the word ‘perceive’ for a reason.

What's our standard unit of measure for growth? If it's what one of my colleagues refers to as "bums in pews," true enough, there is little growth. But I honestly don't think Jesus was talking about "bums in pews" when he spoke of bearing fruit.

One of the things Deborah and I talked about connected closely with that idea that "The vine branch doesn't put "make grapes" on its to-do list. It just makes them." (Melissa Earley).

As we agreed, in our conversation, we need to stop feeling like we have to measure the worth of our communities of faith by standards that often are more reflective of the churches of larger urban centres. In fact both of us realize that many of the books and workshops we've encountered base their material and practice on urban church life.

We need to celebrate the ministries we offer in our own unique rural contexts. That was certainly affirmed in my sabbatical studies.

We really need to stop playing the numbers game of counting bums in pews...or more often contextually now, faces on ZOOM. What we need to be focusing more on is the mission that we can and do offer with the gifts God has given us.

We need to celebrate the fruit that we do bear, ...not because that fruit bearing is on some ecclesiastical "to do list", but because we are truly endeavouring to live as branches of the vine, Jesus, and as people of God – the vine-tender. We need to be about the work of embodying the love that Jesus lived. We need to abide in God's love, as much as God's love abides in us. And if we do, the fruits of love will organically emerge.

So, we do need to continue the conversations with our neighbouring communities of faith, talking about how we share our resources for ministry – however, the starting point, as Christine Jerrett has so often reminded us, needs to be how we understand God calling us to be in this world. How is God calling us to love? In seeking the answer to that question, we will, indeed bear fruit abundant. Thanks be.

Music for meditation VU 703 In the Bulb There is a Flower

This Week's Minute for Mission
In Zambia, girls struggle to go to school.

Published On: April 16, 2021

Heavy water drums. Scorching sun. Poor sanitation. Assault. Not being able to attend school. These are some of the issues faced by women and girls in charge of collecting water in Zambia and around the world.

And it's one of many women's issues that Mission & Service partner Women for Change is addressing in Zambia. Every day, your Mission & Service gifts are helping to empower women and girls in rural areas across the country. Zambia has one of the highest levels of poverty and inequality globally. There, 16.6 million people earn less than \$1.90 per day. Three-quarters of the poor live in rural areas, where women are the hardest hit. Gender discrimination prevents them from accessing land, education, healthcare, and jobs and puts them at higher risk of discrimination and violence.

"Women for Change works with local communities that determine their own needs. In one community, accessing safe water is a problem. So Women for Change is drilling wells and implementing clean-up processes. In another area, there is a lack of women's leadership. So the organization is training women to become political leaders. Girls' education is also a major concern," says Japhet Ndhlovu, who heads the United Church's Community In Mission Unit.

In Zambia, girls struggle to go to school. Traditional attitudes, poverty, early marriage, and priorities to educate boys means too many girls drop out. In 2018, the national United Church Women decided to do something about it. Through Women for Change, our church women are actively supporting an education program designed to motivate girls to stay in school. The project encourages girls, trains teachers, and impresses upon parents and leaders the importance of education.

Women for Change is just one of several life-changing organizations your special gifts to Mission & Service this Mother's Day will support.

When you give a **special Mother's Day gift**, you will directly help families in need at home and around the world through education, health clinics, respite care, and safe shelter. Give a gift **offline** or online at united-church.ca/donation. Don't forget to credit your congregation! When you give online, you can send a free e-card to honour, support, remember, or recognize your loved one. *Your support changes lives! Thank you.*



Photo Credit: Women for Change, Zambia

Offertory Music VU 541 Praise God From Whom All Blessings
Flow

Offertory Prayer

Ever-surprising God, the gathering of gifts reminds us of your eternal grace. Today, we offer the first fruits of our lives to you. We offer them with awe for the good of your world. May the gifts we share be used wisely and graciously to bring hope to the world. Amen.

Prayers for This Day

O God, as we join in prayer this day, we trust that you are with us. We bring to you the cares of our hearts.

We pray for the church universal, that it be filled with people who truly seek to live as the branches of the true vine, in harmony and peace in the world. We pray for our own local churches – as we discern our way forward, and develop plans and goals for mission and ministry.

We pray for the earth, that we may find ways to honour creation. May we remember that all aspects of creation are connected, and that everything we do impacts the health of all creation.

We pray also for hope and healing in relation to the on-going global pandemic - for those who have contracted COVID; for those who have recovered, and those who have lost loved ones. We pray also for those working on the front lines, and those who risk their own safety in doing so.

O God, as we reflect on what it means to abide in your love, help us to be more loving, not just to those known to us, but to all people. Give us words and actions to live your love, to abide in love, and be to be fruitful.

And we take a moment of silent reflection as we lift up the unspoken prayers of this day – of joy or concern...

God of grace, God who abides in each and everyone of us, God who abides in all of creation, we give thanks and praise to you, and join our voices saying the words prayed by so many throughout the world...

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.

Music for Meditation

VU 427 To Show By Touch and Word

A Blessing for Today

Go into the world to abide in the love of God, and to share that love with others.

We go to serve God as faithful followers of the way. Amen.

Thank you 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.

Worship will be posted each week on our church websites. Messages will also be posted to the Facebook Page: Olds and Sundre United Churches.

Questions? Wish to financially support our ministries? To Contact us:

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