



Pioneer Pastoral Charge
Sunday March 22, 2020
Lent 4 – God with us.

Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Welcome & Announcements
Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

The Season of Lent...

is a time when we are called to search our selves...

God asks questions of us.

We ask questions of God.

Are we listening for God's answer?

Are we willing to hear

when God wants us to make different choices?

Are we ready to be God's voice and action in the world?

Can we live as though faith is more important than fear?

Lent is a journey of letting go, of learning, of growing.

It is not meant to be comfortable

Acknowledging the History of the Land we share.^{1,2}

The land we share is God's land.

We worship God on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot, Niitsitapi, Metis, Cree and Sioux Indigenous people.

We are partners together in the agreements of Treaty Six and Treaty Seven.

As God's people, followers of the way of Jesus, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and of Reconciliation.

☞ Gathering Song: ♪ VU#14 When Two Or Three are gathered.

Call to Worship

As neighbours, friends and partners in faith,
we travel this Lenten pathway together.

Today, on this part of our faith journey,

May we gather courage

to practise our faith:

Living Christ's call

To love God with all that we are,

To love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Prayer of Approach

Loving God,

As we continue this Lenten journey,

remind us that, with faith,

we can trust that you will guide

our living and decisions.

There are times when we

yearn for your presence,

but we don't always know

how to recognize when you are with us.

We come to this place

to ask, to listen, to learn.

In this time of worship,

May we feel your spirit push us forward,

May we feel our hearts fill with your love

May your spirit fulfill our yearning

in our prayers, in our worship.

Amen.

Scripture Reading(s):

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word passed
on from generation to generation to guide and inspire.

God calls us to be doers of the word

and not hearers only.

Psalm 23 is the best known and most beloved psalm in the collection. Surprisingly, it casts humanity as sheep—stupid, helpless sheep. But the long-lasting appeal of Psalm 23 is a direct result of that casting because the imagery is both soothing and accessible.

When he was a boy, King David was a shepherd watching his father’s flocks in the hills around Bethlehem. In those days, too, it was common to refer to kings in the Near East as shepherds; but not all shepherd-kings cared for their sheep. Though David tried to shepherd his people well, he knew the truth: the Eternal is the true Shepherd.

In John 10:11 Jesus makes a bold claim. He declares that He is the good shepherd. Immediately His disciples detected the resonance of Psalm 23 in His words. Those of us who follow Jesus today come to know Him as that gentle but strong shepherd who guides us through life if we will follow Him.

Psalm 23 A song of David. Scripture from “The Voice”

- 1 The Eternal is my shepherd, He cares for me always.
- 2 He provides me rest in rich, green fields
beside streams of refreshing water.
He soothes my fears;
- 3 He makes me whole again,
steering me off worn, hard paths
to roads where truth and righteousness echo His name.
- 4 Even in the unending shadows of death’s darkness,
I am not overcome by fear.
Because You are with me in those dark moments,
near with Your protection and guidance,
I am comforted.
- 5 You spread out a table before me,
provisions in the midst of attack from my enemies;

You care for all my needs,
anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil,
filling my cup again and again with Your grace.
6 Certainly Your faithful protection and loving provision
will pursue me
where I go, always, everywhere.
I will always be with the Eternal,
in Your house forever.

Prayer for Grace

*During the season of Lent, we are asked,
through story and conversation
to explore what living in faith means for us.
We are asked to consider our commitment to God.
We are to think about the attitudes, decisions
and words we use.
What would God have us choose?*

Faithful and Patient God,
In this Lenten time of contemplation
and faith-filled searching for your truth,
**We recognize that we need
to take time to really listen for you.**
We say that we love you
and follow the example that Jesus gave us...but...
**we get caught up in our moments of challenge,
we forget to stop and feel
your presence beside us.**
We let fear replace our faith.
We make decisions based on our own needs
We ask the question
“Why are you doing this to me, God?”
Instead of admitting **“I need your strength to do this”**
**Shake us up, God,
Make us uncomfortable.**

**Remind us again that you stand with us
offering courage, strength and wisdom**

**Remind us again
that the world does not revolve around us
it revolves around you.
May your words and wisdom soak into our soul,
loving us, leading us,
Be with us as we learn to journey together with you.
Amen**

Words of Assurance

In all of our stories of God,
we hear God's voice with us.
Every day, God gives us boundaries to hold us close
and sign posts to move us forward.
Every day, God is with us, waiting for us, loving us.
God said: I will be their God, and they will be my people.
God is. We are.
God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Message/Reflections... God with Us.

We are in the midst of unsettling times. Instead of gathering together as God's flock, we are asked to pick a spot in the field and rest there for a while, meditate and wait.

For some of us the resting is almost the hardest part. We are used to milling around with others. We enjoy the hustle and bustle of being part of a group and we miss that.

For others it's the fact that we might know and see that others are so close, but we're not supposed to go up close and be with them. So close and yet so far.

We are concerned for the sick and elderly in our midst. We want to hold them, to hug them but with the wisdom shared by our community elders we know that we could do more harm than good.

So we wait... sometimes not graciously, sometimes with impatience, sometimes with resistance and frustration.

This is a hard place to be.

Psalm 23 is one of our most familiar scriptures. The image of the good shepherd leading us to our most favourite place gives us comfort. Makes us feel good and cared for and whole.

But this story also reminds us that in those moments when the flock moves through dark and unknown places, that the Shepherd is with them. A gentle tap of the staff is a reminder that we have a place to be, a herd to be respectful of and that we travel together.

With the crook or rod, the Shepherd lifts us up and gathers us in when we stray or get lost.

We are reminded that God offers us what we need – even in those times when it feels as though our security, our comfort are being attacked. God is there. Where ever we are, separated in the field, gathered together for comfort for safety, God is there.

The COVID19 virus is shaking our world. We are frustrated and angry with the restrictions that are deemed to be necessary to stop it's spread. We are feeling hemmed in, separated, lonely and lost as our routines are shredded and thrown away.

But in this scripture we hear the call to recognize that we are part of a much bigger picture. That, in those times when we are asked to move in different directions, unfamiliar places, God is with us.

There are times when we might feel the tap of the guiding staff pushing us to where we need to be, rather than where we want to go.

There are times when we may feel lifted up when we thought we were totally lost.

If you've ever been near a flock of sheep, you will know that they are typically very noisy. They don't move easily, and complain a lot!

We do that. We complain a lot and we don't move easily. However, if we listen to the One who guides us, if we will follow directions, travelling together we will find ourselves coming together again in those green pastures, surrounded by our favourite people in our favourite places.

As people of faith we need to stop and listen for God's voice. We need to let go of our need for control, and allow ourselves to be guided.

If our shepherd has us sitting in different places in our field and we can still see each other, we can still talk to each other. We can still shout across the field and say how are you doing? Isn't this awful? I hope we get to travel together again soon.

I wonder if God is simply waiting beside us to see how we do with this. How we will continue to be the family, the flock of love that we are called to be? Can we pass messages between each other so that needs are met? Can we simply wave across the spaces so that each one knows they are cared for and seen? Hmm... I wonder if we could perhaps be God's helper – the sheep dog – running around the outside, checking to see who needs support and who is OK, keeping us together in our separateness?

It's Lent, a time for contemplation and wondering. Talk to God. Complain to God. Listen for God.

Can we change how we look at this trying time and see that it is a time for reconnecting with our faith and our God?

To think about what and who we are missing so that we can work on appreciating that when our seclusion is ended?

God is with us in this time and place. God is with us in the self-giving spirit of Health Workers, caregivers, store workers, neighbours and friends. God is with us in the words and wisdom shared by those who have the skills to lead us with integrity and courage. God is with us as we travel this valley together.

God is with us, we are not alone, Thanks be to God.

✠: 🎵 ***VU#62 There Is Room For All***

Offering Invitation¹

On the journey that we are on today,
in a time when it feels that we are in a valley,
it is important that we remember
that we travel that journey together.

What can we bring on the journey
that can be shared?

Our offering is only one way to do that,
Please remember to continue to share your
hands and hearts to enable the church
to love our neighbours with us and for us.

Prayers of God's people for God's creation.

God of all generations:

Past, Present and Future.

We gather today to remember
our connections you and to all of your people.
In the name of the One who showed us how,

We pray for the earth
and that all people will
remember our responsibility to look after it,
to care for it, to be aware of our impact on it.

We belong to one another.

We pray for leaders
entrusted with the responsibility
of making decisions to care for your world.
May leaders in our churches, in our communities,
in our country, throughout your world
feel your presence reminding them
that all people and places are precious
to be valued and cared for.
We belong to one another.

We pray for the vulnerable:
the youngest and oldest, the sick,
the lost and alone, those who are mourning,
those who need help to live in a world
that is in turmoil and full of unknowns.
victims of violence, of discrimination.
We belong to one another.

We pray for the helpers:
those who put their own lives on hold
to teach, to heal, to speak out for justice,
to listen, to learn.
We belong to one another

We pray for ourselves.
May our minds be open to your presence surrounding us,
May our yearning for you
reveal to us who we are, who we are becoming,
and how we may love and be loved.
We belong to one another. Amen.

☩ Blessing & Sending Forth

Filled with the love, spirit and promises of God,
Let us go to seek justice for others
to love kindness more than ever,
Let us look for opportunities to
give strength to the weak, give voice to the silenced.
May we see, hear and care for all of God's people.
May our yearning hearts feel
God's loving presence with us always.

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth, showing us
where we are and where we are meant to be.
The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us wherever
we go.

**☩ Sending Song: ♪ VU#541 Praise God from whom all
blessings flow.**

Postlude

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Acknowledgements

¹*Called to be the Church. Congregational Giving Program 2020. United Church
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²*CalgaryFoundation.org*

³*Gathering L/E 2020 (Year A)*

⁴*Seasons of the Spirit. Season Fusion Lent. Easter 2020*

