



## Christmas Eve Service

Christmas Eve will not be the same this year with no in-person services or social gatherings. We will miss the joy of singing favourite Christmas hymns together, sharing a meal at the Lord's table and lighting candles to sing "Silent Night" in the stillness of a candle-lit sanctuary. While we cannot meet we will be providing a Christmas Eve service for you to watch.

The service will be posted to YouTube (same as the Daily Faith Videos). We will be sending out the link next week. All you have to do is click on the link which will take you directly to the service. It will be available to view from 4:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. You can watch as many times as you like.

Julia will be hosting a live Zoom gathering at 7:00 p.m. for anyone who would like to get together for conversation on Christmas Eve and to wish each other a Blessed Christmas. This link will be included with the YouTube link for the service.

If you are adventurous, you might like to experiment with putting the service on your television to watch if you have a small TV. This requires hooking your laptop up to your TV or casting the feed from your digital device to your TV. One senior from De Winton recently amazed herself when she figured out how to do it. She remarked that she was the "least technical person in the world." If she can do it maybe you can too.

Stay tuned for more information coming next week.

### Please Pray For:



- Balzac United Church
- Tired, overworked health care workers
- Those distributing and receiving vaccines

## COVID-19 UPDATE FROM THE BOARD

Worship services will be held on Zoom alone until at least the end of January to give the new rules time to flatten the curve. We will reconsider opening only when it is safe. In the meantime, we will make every effort to stay in touch, especially with those people who do not have access to the internet.

The Board would like to thank everyone who attended in person and followed all the safety guidelines. You did a great job of helping to keep services open but as we all know the situation is deteriorating and we have to move with the times.

The church office personnel, Diane and Rev. Julia, have been deemed essential by the Board for the operation of the church and the office will remain open from 9 – 2, Monday to Friday. Please call or email the church if you need to chat or you have a specific need. You are welcome to drop by as long as you wear a mask and observe all the usual precautions.

We regret having to make this difficult decision but we are not alone. Many churches and many families and friends are having to make similarly difficult choices during these strange times. We will be together again and what a wonderful reunion that will be!

Merry Christmas from our church family to your home. Stay safe, be well, be blessed.

## 1st Annual Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest



And the winner is.....**Gail Lafond!** Thank you to our two judges Carol Price and Richard Puttee for helping out by being the best judges.

A \$50 food gift card will be given in Gail's name to the 2020 White Gift donations.



## Seeking Seekers

What does it mean to be a spiritual seeker? Often we think of spiritual seekers as religious people or followers of a particular tradition. While spiritual seekers can be adherents of a religious tradition, this is not always the case. Spiritual seekers are those who are looking for truth, wisdom, enlightenment.

The Magi of the biblical Nativity story were spiritual seekers. They were willing to look far and wide to find sources of wisdom and truth, which can be found in all spiritual and religious traditions.

What is the wisdom and truth the Magi sought that we seek today? Humans have always sought knowledge that transcends the individual and applies to all people at all times. Truth that explains the human condition, even life itself at a fundamental level.

Wisdom is rarely found in the halls of power or wealth or privilege. It is found in humility, simplicity and beauty by people who set aside worldly pursuits to become spiritual seekers.

The Magi consulted King Herod and his religious advisors but they didn't remain in the palace to find the Messiah. They passed by the powerful and rich to seek the One who was found in a stable, a helpless infant born in very humble circumstances. The rich and the powerful seek to add to their wealth and status. The wise seek to knowledge that will benefit all creation.

Sometimes we are called to eschew the pursuit of worldly goods and knowledge to seek that which can bring peace, hope and joy.

The Advent journey is one of expectation and anticipation. It asks us to be patient and to seek that which most matters to life, to our lives.

What are we seeking? Where will we find what we seek?

Christmas has become a season of excess: excessive shopping; excessive socializing, excessive consumption; excessive exhaustion; excessive pressure; excessive competition and excessive expectation. This year, these excesses have been curtailed by circumstances. Perhaps we have an opportunity to reflect on what is most important. Perhaps this year we will seek Christ, found in the least expected places.

As we move toward Christmas, look around, where are you finding Christ this year? How can we recover the meaning of the birth of the Child, born to be our Saviour?

Blessings, Julia.

## Enjoy Some Quiet Time

As we have done for Christmas each year, we have decorated the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas (thanks to some very industrious angels). We want you to enjoy the beauty of the sanctuary and the peace it offers.

You are welcome to come and sit in the sanctuary for prayer, meditation and reflection, or simply to sit and enjoy, even cry if you need to. Masked and physically distanced of course.

The sanctuary will be available for your use from **Monday – Friday from 9:30 – 1:00 each day until December 23<sup>rd</sup>**. We ask that you call (403-938-4357) to let us know you're coming so we have a list of attendees and we can "light up" the sanctuary. You are free to stay as long as you want. Please enter via the office doors where you will be "checked in." Bring your own mask. We have sanitizer on the front table.

Please take time to experience the light of Christ in whatever way is meaningful and comfortable for you. You are welcome as often as you like. Blessings in this Advent Season.





## White Gifts This Christmas

As we are all aware, this year has been challenging and while we have hope for the possibility of a vaccine for the coming year, we don't know when this will be and what challenges people will face in 2021.

In the past we have had a White Gift Sunday, usually Pageant Sunday, where we offered gift cards for the Benevolent Fund. We are going to continue that tradition this year but ask that you drop your gift cards off at the church office, mail them in or drop them in the offering if you attend Sunday worship in person.

The gift cards will go to the Benevolent Fund to distribute as needed. The cards most used are grocery and gas cards. Please make sure you note your name and envelope number (if you have one) on the envelope. Or, just use a regular offering envelope for the cards. **Also, please make sure that the gift cards are clearly marked with the dollar amount as the donation will be noted on your tax receipts for 2020.**

We will be taking gift cards up until the end of December. Thank you in advance for your contribution. You are a generous community. I hear it all the time from the wider community.



### ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH HAPPENINGS

*Written by P. Marie Wedderburn*



### Christmas Concert

On Sunday evening we were blessed to view the annual DeWinton Christmas Concert virtually on You-Tube this year. And so I ask, which of the performances offered to us did each one of us enjoy. Perhaps it was the ukulele accompanied pandemic parody song of We Three Kings; perhaps it was the ukulele accompanied duet song of the 12 days of COVID; perhaps it was one of the three accordion solos; perhaps it was one of the three Christmas carol piano solos; perhaps it was one of the three solos offered by the musician who in past years has given us his own concert at St. Andrew's; perhaps it was the song sung in the wind of Wishing You a Merry Christmas; perhaps it was the singing of How Great Thou Art or this year's rendition of O Holy Night; perhaps it was the jokes from the concert's MC; perhaps it was the group MzBehavin' singing at the end; perhaps it was the three short songs about COVID; or perhaps it was the WHOLE concert! Whichever parts we enjoyed it was all GREAT!

Also what was special Sunday evening was the opportunity to gather via Zoom after the concert to see one another and to reflect on what we had just seen and heard. Thank you Julia for organizing and hosting that Zoom gathering.

So thanks to all the performers; thanks to all those who filmed the various artists at the various locations we saw; thanks to Julia for co-ordinating the concert on You-Tube; thanks to Bonnie for hosting the concert; thanks to Diane for collecting donations for the Veterans' Association Food Bank of Calgary, to whom St. Andrew's United Church's treasurer will send a cheque for at least \$1575.00; so thanks to all who chose to financially contribute.

In conclusion what a great concert! Hopefully we will see everyone at the church for next year's.





## ***Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile***

Over the last few months, Matthew Heesing and the United Church in the Valley have journeyed through a series called ***"Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile."*** How might the Psalms relate to our lives today? What meaning might these ancient, sacred songs hold for us? How are our own present-day emotions and experiences mirrored in these holy, human words?

Now, **you** can join in the journey too! For just **\$15** (the cost of printing), you can order a printed collection of all of the Psalms, Sunday Sermons, and corresponding short "Friday Reflections" from this series! If you are interested, please **place an order** with the Okotoks United Church office. Books will be available starting mid-December. (P.S.: It might even make a meaningful Christmas gift!). Please see sample below.

### **Friday Reflection: *Psalm 13***

When I was starting out as a student minister, a mentor of mine showed me a little exercise called the ***"Circles of Control."***

Imagine a bullseye with three circles—  
a small inner circle,  
a medium middle circle,  
and a large outer circle.

The small inner circle, as my mentor taught me, represents those things in life that are *directly in your control*.

The medium middle circle represents those things in life that *you can try to influence*.

Finally, the larger outer circle represents those things in life that *are completely outside of your control*.

The size of the circle matters, my mentor explained, because the vast majority of things in life are completely *outside* of our control; likewise, there are only a small number of things that are directly *in* our control.

Even our own *emotions* exist in the larger outer circle: after all, we can't control how we feel. What we **can** control is how we act and react, how we address, exhibit and express such emotions.

In many ways, my mentor concluded, ***anxiety*** comes from **focusing on the wrong circle**. Are you focused on what's out of your control? Or are you focused on the small number of things that you *can* control in any given situation? Now, you might be wondering what any of this has to do with our Psalm for this week.

But the fascinating thing is that the three stanzas—the three paragraphs—of *Psalm 13* actually correspond to the three "Circles of Control."

*Psalm 13* opens with anxious lament, because the Psalmist is utterly focused on all of the things that are completely **outside of their control**:  
*"How long, O God, how long?...  
How long will I be left all alone,  
with pain in my soul  
and sorrow filling my heart?...  
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"* (13:1-2).

In the second stanza, the Psalmist focuses on what they might be able to **influence**:  
*"Consider my plea, and respond, O God:  
Restore sight to my eyes;  
light up my life!"* (13:3).



Finally, in the third stanza, the Psalmist shifts their focus to the things that **are in their control**:  
*"But I do trust in your steadfast love, O God.  
My heart shall rejoice in your saving grace.  
Yes, I will sing to you,  
because you bestow abundance on me"* (13:5-6).

In the end, even in the midst of many difficult situations completely outside of their control—  
*loneliness, pain, sorrow, defeat*—the Psalmist makes an intentional choice *to trust, to rejoice, to sing, to practice gratitude*.

By shifting their focus from the "larger outer circle" to the "smaller inner circle,"

the Psalmist finds a sense of purpose, agency, and inner peace.

Friends, what "circle of control" are you focused on, these days? How might *Psalm 13* help us faithfully shift our energy and attention?

Until next week,

Matthew

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## Lessons from Exile:

How a Past Natural Disaster  
Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic



## "Lessons from Exile: How a Past Natural Disaster Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic":

As part of his Masters of Divinity program, Matthew Heesing had to undertake a comprehensive research process on a unique topic of his choosing. He chose to examine the concept of "congregational exile": in particular, how a past natural disaster influenced ministerial leadership during the

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This process involved conducting detailed interviews with clergy and lay congregation members, along with analyzing many written materials. What Matthew found were five *"lessons from exile"*: lessons that can give all of us direction as we navigate through the territory of this "unprecedented" period.

You can find Matthew's webinar presentation on these "lessons" at:

<https://youtu.be/wyC7wcoUul>

## Poinsettias for Sale

We have 7 decorative poinsettias of various colours for sale for \$20 each. They are currently hung on the windows in the foyer. If you are interested in purchasing one please get in touch with the office at 403-938-4357 or by email at [okunited@telus.net](mailto:okunited@telus.net).

## Kid's Korner:

We will be having Zoom-only Sunday School following our morning worship service. Youth group will meet every Friday by Zoom until the Christmas break and we will reevaluate in the New Year. Also, a reminder that the nursery is closed during this time. Any questions, please contact Candice at [cnedcsutton@gmail.com](mailto:cnedcsutton@gmail.com).



## Okotoks United Church Office - We're here for you!

The office continues to remain open at this time Monday to Friday 9:00 - 2:00. Please contact Diane at [okunited@telus.net](mailto:okunited@telus.net) or 403-938-4357 for church related news.

Please contact Julia at [okjulia@telus.net](mailto:okjulia@telus.net) or 403-702-2249 (cell) at any time.

**Congregational Care Team** invites you to reach out for confidential spiritual and compassionate care by email at: [okcongregationalcare@telus.net](mailto:okcongregationalcare@telus.net)





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SORRY FOLKS, WE'RE BOOKED SOLID ... GOD HIMSELF COULDN'T GET A ROOM HERE TONIGHT

