



Camrose United Church

Sunday February 28, 2021

Community of Faith: God, me, we

Lent 2

Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

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.

Call to Faith

(from A Song of Faith, The United Church of Canada, 2006).

"We sing of the Creator,
who made humans to live and move
and have their being in God.
In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward
right relationship with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.
Made in the image of God,
we yearn for the fulfillment that is life in God."

Leaning into Lent

*A time of self reflection... for ourselves, for our church?
Can we look at our living in the last year and see that we
have discovered that we are part of the weaving of life – a
strand among many strands in an ever evolving image?
Have we found kindred spirits to be nurtured, to be enjoyed?
What image of God are we showing to the world in our life
and Lenten journey?*

Hymn: ♪ VU#633 Bless Now, O God, the Journey

Genesis 17:1-8 The Message (MSG)

17 ¹⁻² When Abram was ninety-nine years old,
God showed up and said to him,

“I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt!
I’ll make a covenant between us and I’ll give you a huge
family.”

³⁻⁸ Overwhelmed, Abram fell flat on his face.

Then God said to him,

“This is my covenant with you: You’ll be the father of many
nations. Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham,
meaning that ‘I’m making you the father of many nations.’ I’ll
make you a father of fathers—I’ll make nations from you,
kings will issue from you. I’m establishing my covenant
between me and you, a covenant that includes your
descendants, a covenant that goes on and on and on, a
covenant that commits me to be your God and the God of
your descendants. And I’m giving you and your descendants
this land where you’re now just camping, this whole country
of Canaan, to own forever. And I’ll be their God.”

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ God continued speaking to Abraham, “And Sarai your
wife: Don’t call her Sarai any longer; call her Sarah. I’ll bless
her—yes! I’ll give you a son by her! Oh, how I’ll bless her!
Nations will come from her; kings of nations will come from
her.”

Focus on Faith...

Even the elders needed to be reminded, once in a while, that
they had much to offer the world, that their stories would be
shared through the generations, that they really didn’t know
what their story would reveal.

Even the elders need to remember that God made a
promise... more than once ... to care for and guide people.
The elders and the generations that follow them are part of a
covenant of faith where God and people promise to walk
with each other to learn from each other and to grow
together.

Prayer for Grace:

*(Based on words by Richard Bott, St. Andrew's (Haney) maple ridge, B.C. Gathering.
Lent/Easter/Pentecost 2009 page 29. Used with permission)*

Covenant. Promises made.

Covenant. Promises between people.

Promises between people and God.

Sometimes...

Covenant is broken. Promises are forgotten.

And then we grieve. And God grieves

Yet, even in our forgetfulness,

even when we are fearful,

even when we forget our role to protect, to hold, to love...

God invites us back.

God invites us back.

God invites us into the covenant again.

So with God's forgiveness and invitation

we gather...

To remember our brokenness.

To renew our promises with each other and with God.

♪ ***MV#65 When we are tested. V. 2***

When in the desert we cry for relief,

pleading for paths marked by certain belief,

lift us to love you beyond sign and test,

trusting your presence, our only true rest.

Words of Assurance:

God's love is all around us.

God has promised us to always be there for us.

Let us trust God's promise.

Let us open our hearts to feel the love of God

around us, within us, among us.

God is with us.

We are never alone.

Thanks be to God.

Mark 8:31-38 The Message (MSG)

³⁰⁻³² Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: “It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive.” He said this simply and clearly so they couldn’t miss it.

³²⁻³³ But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”

³⁴⁻³⁷ Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?

³⁸ “If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I’m leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you’ll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, with an army of the holy angels.”

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.**

Message/Reflections:

Lenten Learnings: Stories that remind us: Trust God.

Ninety nine years old and God says “you will have children.” No wonder Abram fell down and Sarai laughed. Who would want children then? Who would have the energy?

Like many others, this bible story begins with what would appear to be impossible. Seriously, God? Seriously, Abram.

Having dropped this unexpected news, God then shares a bit more of the unfolding story. God names and recognizes that Abram has more to offer the world than he realizes. That, as a man of great faith, he would become a legend for his dedication and unwavering following. God changes his name to foretell of the story ahead and Abram becomes Abraham ‘The Father of Many Nations’ and Sarai becomes Sarah which means “Princess” or “Princess of the multitudes.” God changed their story, which they may have thought was slowing down, and it continued much further and longer than they imagined it could.

Their stories are not filled with perfection – indeed they show us doubt, and jealousy, and bad decisions. But they also show us that, when the best of us make unfortunate decisions, God doesn’t give up on us and that we never know where faith will lead us.

Do you remember the children’s book by Robert Munsch “I’ll love you forever, I’ll love you for always...”?

The story shows that through all the stages of life the baby/child/teenager/adult’s parent continues to sing a song of love to them. God does that too, picks us up, climbs through windows and loves us.

We also see in an unexpected twist that there is a time when the love is reciprocated, when the grown-up realizes that power of love that has accompanied them through all of their life and they try to give it back -- not a rejection – but a

reflection of the dedication and steadfast love they were gifted with.

We look back on the stories of our parents and grandparents, on the Elders in our faith stories and we see that being loving, being faithful means following God and letting go of our wants to respond to God's direction.

As people delve more and more into their ancestry, stories emerge of young boys running away to fight for the truth, of strong women standing up for their rights, of people who put their own lives at risk so that others could experience freedom: stories of people following their heart so that others could have justice, and compassion and love in their lives.

How many times have we heard the story of walking to school uphill BOTH ways in deep blizzards? How many times have we heard "when I was a boy..." How many times have we heard that Mom fed all 15 kids and had left overs for the hired hand AND she grew all the food in her garden – no pre-packaged easy stuff for her!

The truth is that those stories aren't about the snow or the many pounds of potatoes. They are about looking after others. They are about never giving up. They are about being where you were supposed to be, digging in to what needs to be done and not looking for an easy way out.

Living our faith will never be taking the easy way out. In our Jesus story from the Gospel of Mark today, Jesus shares just enough of the unfolding story that he knows about that those around him are afraid. They don't understand what is coming, they are still not strong enough to faithfully follow.

Peter tries to change directions but Jesus will have none of it. He calls Peter "Satan" which seems a bit harsh.

But in the Hebrew language the word translated as Satan means an “Adversary, or One Who Resists.” Peter resists. He doesn’t understand how this story that is coming up fast in front of him can be real. Can’t you imagine him saying “Seriously, Jesus?” and Jesus replying with “Seriously, Peter”

Here is where schooling, uphill in all directions, happens. Jesus says, if we are going to succeed you have to trust that I know what I’m doing. If this is going to work, we have to give all we’ve got for the sake of others. This is not going to be easy.

We have given up our connections to family and friend for the sake of the vulnerable, the weak. Haven’t there been times in the last few months when we’ve been asked to give up more and we’ve said “Seriously?” and the answer has been “Seriously”

Abraham had to give up his retirement to raise a son. He would experience a lot of frustration, a lot of challenges. Sarah had to learn to mother at a very advance age too. Mistakes were made. God never gave up.

Peter had to listen to his friend and to follow him into possible, well, probable, danger. Peter had to let go of resistance to be where and who God needed him to be. Jesus had to share harsh truths to get people to be part of something that was unexpected, unpredictable so very necessary to show the strength of God’s love for the world. God never gave up.

God called Abraham and Sarah and they answered the call – imperfectly, yes – but they did their best to follow God’s way. God called the disciples and the imperfect Peter resisted but then answered the call to follow the way of God.

God calls us.

In this season of Lent, we may find ourselves feeling as though we are in the desert, or surrounded by danger. As we ask ourselves the Lenten question “How are we doing” we really aren’t sure if we know the answer or if we want to.

If we will only look up, we may see that God is twinkling at us through the darkness or standing beside us to hold us up. If we will only take that step forward into the storm, toward garden of God’s people that needs tending, God will get us through.

God calls us, as has happened through many generations, to follow the path of love, to trust that God will guide us through, to know that we can do this.

God calls us. What will we answer?

Come, Lent with me.

☞Hymn: ♪ MV#172 God Says

Responding to God’s call...

We are on a journey of mystery, of discovery together.

As people of God we are called to care
for all on the journey, wherever they may be.

We are called to be bold...

to be unafraid to follow God into new places

to hear how others did

to follow their example, to learn from their stories.

**As we boldly continue on our Lenten journey,
offering our hearts, our heads and our treasure
for God’s work in the world,
may our gifts be blessed and a blessing. Amen.**

Offertory: ♪ VU#545 You Nourish Us

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**You nourish us with food, O God,
for body and for soul;
our love and service is our thanks,
for life that's free and whole,
for life that's free and whole.**

Pastoral Prayers

God of Abram and Abraham, of Sarai and Sarah
At unexpected times and places in life
You remind us that we have much to offer the world.
You push us to be more than we think we can be.
Your faith in us is amazing.

Holy one, in this season we call Lent,
This season of self-reflection,
of self-checking,
help us to be honest with ourselves and our neighbours.

May our leaders be inspired by you to care for
all of the people they serve.

**May our voices, be loud and bold
in naming injustices in and for each other.**

May we be humble enough to know when we can do better,
May we be brave enough to be better.

We hold in our hearts your people
whose lives are torn apart.
Parents grieving children ...
Children grieving parents...
Friends grieving friends...
Taken by virus, taken by accident, taken by violence,
silently slipping away to you.
We know that you hold them in the very instant that we can't.

But hearts and lives are broken.
God, let your love-light shine into torn souls
Bring us comfort and healing on our journeys of goodbye.

As we move through our Lenten journey,
We ask for your presence to be with us,
Open our ears, our heads, our hearts to know
that the mysterious unknown is yours.
filled with your light.

We are not alone, we live in God's world
We trust in God
We are called to be the Church
God is with us
We are not alone
Thanks be to God.

♫SOTS 4 I will be your God
I will be your God
and you will be the people of the promise
Forever I will bless and give my life for you.

Blessing/Sending Forth

Based on words by Anne MacDermaid, Odessa P.C., Odessa, Ontario. Gathering
Lent/Easter/Pentecost 2009 page 33. Used With Permission.

May the God of all power, love and blessings
fill us with the grace of a trusting faith.
May the Christ who journeyed through the unknown
with courage and faith,
walk with us on our life's journey.
May the spirit of holiness empower us
and keep us strong and certain on our way.
Amen

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: ♪ MV#212 Sent Out In Jesus Name Postlude

Acknowledgements

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A Song of Faith. United Church of Canada 2006.
Gatherings L/E 2021 (Year B)

