

March 10th, 2024 Full Order of Service

Lent IV

Rev Dr. Bob Cruickshank

Announcement/Life and Work

National Affirming Day Message: Debi Hoefling

Introit (VU 368 vs 4) "Holy Spirit, Truth Devine"

Opening Prayer

Lent IV Meditation (Debi Hoefling)

It's Sunday morning. Last week, with all its demands, is over. The coming week, with yet another round of challenges and demands, is not quite here. I invite you to close your eyes and be in the moment. No matter where you are in your thoughts and feelings-relieved about what you have accomplished, anxious about what's left undone, concerned about people or projects- no matter where you are in your journey this day- I encourage you to set all that aside and consider where you are right now. Whatever is true for you right now, in this moment, whether it be joy or sadness, gratitude or anxiety, let it come forward. When it is fully present, then listen... for God is present in these moments too. God meets you where you are and calls you forward, moment by

moment, guiding you slowly but surely toward transformation.

(silent time)

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain caused by the lack of basic needs-lack of food, of shelter, of education, of healthcare, of love.

(A candle is extinguished)

Let us pray:

All: Loving God, we thank you that you are with us, and that we may call upon you no matter where we are, or what we are feeling. Keep us mindful of your presence and trusting in your promise-that you are working with us in the moment-by-moment unfolding of our lives. Amen.

✠Procession of Christ Candle

“Long, long, long ago, before there was anything, before there was a world, before there was light, before there was darkness, there was God: Creator and Source of Life. God moved and God breathed the world into being, and God said, “Let there be light.” We present this worship

candle as a visible reminder of the Creator's great light and love."

Land Acknowledgement

"Today as we gather to worship let us remember that we worship God on the historic and unceded territory of nations of Treaty 7. As Christ's people, let us be people of Love, of Truth, and Reconciliation. May we live with respect on this land, and peace and friendship with its people."

Affirming Vision Statement

"As a community church that gathers from many smaller communities in the Medicine Hat area, Westminster United Church publicly declares our commitment to creating a space where people are welcome, safe, and encouraged to participate in the life of the church inclusive of: Sexual orientation, gender identity, two spirited people, differing abilities, age, ethnic background, race, marital status, or economic circumstance.

Participation in the life of the church includes leadership, membership, sacraments, marriage, and celebrating milestones of life's journey.

We celebrate the richness of diversity, and we commit ourselves to openness, growth, education and to influencing the community for social justice.

In our dedication to living our God's word and with God's help, we devote ourselves to proactive learning and inclusion."

Lighting of the Affirming Candle

"Not quite as long but still very long ago, One was born who embodied the light of the Creator in a way that sparked a movement and a new understanding God. We light this rainbow candle as a visible reminder of the radical inclusivity shown to us by Jesus, who calls us to follow him."

Lighting of Peace Candle

"We light the candle of Peace to remind ourselves that Christ is the Prince of Peace. We pray for peace for ourselves and for the world."

Call to Worship

Cong.: **Come away and be still.**

Leader: We come to worship God.

C: **Come find rest for your weariness.**

L. We come to worship God.

C: **Come with your joy and sorrow.**

L: We come to worship God.

C: **In this time, in this place, God waits for us.**

All: Let us worship together!

✠OPENING HYMN (VU 574) “Come Let us Sing of a Wonderful Love”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, we offer thanks this day for the forgiveness we offer. Thank you for the salvaging of our brokenness that we find in Jesus the Christ.

Thank you for your continued efforts to help us salvage our relationships with each other and with you.

Though life is confusing and healing a long road, we find our certainty and security in the salvation you offer through Jesus the Christ.

At this time we silently lift to you the prayers that lie heavy on our hearts.....

May we be restored and renewed as you hear our prayers. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God so loved the world that God sent God's only son to redeem us. Jesus so loved his Father that he humbled himself to come to earth to save us. We are promised eternal life, by God's grace and love. Thanks be to God!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE LORD'S PRAYER (VU 959)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy One, the words you speak have power: power to create, power to destroy, power to critique and power to heal.

Help us to receive your word today and to respond with a love so great, it has the power to change the world.

Thanks be to God!

SCRIPTURE READINGS (Read by Debi Hoefling)

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Made Alive in Christ

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the

ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

One: This is the witness of the Church.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 107 (VU 831 pt.1 &2)

O give thanks to God for steadfast love.

O give thanks, for God is gracious;

God's steadfast love endures for ever.

Let the redeemed of God say so, those redeemed from trouble,
whom God gathered in from the lands,
from the east and the west,
from the north and the south.

O give thanks to God for steadfast love.

Some lost their way in desert wastes, finding no place to settle;
hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to you, God, in their trouble;
you rescued them from their distress.

**You led them by a straight path,
till they reached a place to settle.**

Let them thank you, O God, for your steadfast love,
for the wonders you do for us.

**For you satisfy the thirsty,
and fill the hungry with good things**

O give thanks to God for steadfast love.

Gospel Reading

John 3: 14-21

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[a] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[b]

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

ALL: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.

SERMON:

✠HYMN: (VU356) “Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”

MINUTES FOR MISSION “Public Explicit Inclusion” (Read by Sharon Clay)

March 14 is PIE Day. In church circles it has nothing to do with math. PIE is short for “public, intentional, and explicit.” These are the standards we hold ourselves to when we seek to be affirming, welcoming, and inclusive. PIE Day was co-founded by Affirm United/S’affirmer Ensemble and Affirming Connections. Every year, [Affirm United](#) invites us to celebrate the full inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in faith communities and beyond. The day challenges us to widen our welcome, to embody love, and to celebrate gender and sexual diversity. It’s critical that we do. Gender identity and sexual orientation are used to justify human rights violations around the world. Same-sex sexual activity is a crime in 71 countries; in 11 of these the death penalty can be imposed.

Here in Canada, 1 million people identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. In 2019, police reported 263 hate crimes targeting people for their sexual orientation. This was a 41 percent increase over the previous year and the highest number since 2009.*

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](#) sustain life-transforming advocacy and education. They support refugees fleeing for their lives because they identify as

2SLGBTQIA+. They support safe shelters, community awareness education, human rights programs, and safe spaces.

Thank you for giving through [Mission and Service](#). God's compassionate love knows no boundaries. Your generosity shows ours doesn't either.

Invitation to the Offering

In praise and thanksgiving to our God, in response to Christ's love shown in the cross, and as a sign of our faithfulness, let us offer our gifts to the work of Christ's church here on earth. Let us join together in our morning offering.

Offertory (Offering Gathered with Reflection Music)

Doxology (VU 539 vs 1) "God of All Good"

Offertory Prayer

O Jesus, work in us so that we might live holy lives, bearing fruit for your coming Kingdom.

May we hold loosely to our wealth and to our mortal lives upon the earth.

Through our offering today, we seek to serve you and follow you.

May it be so, as we pray in your name. Amen.

A NEW CREED (Vu 918)

✠CLOSING HYMN: (VU 633) “Bless Now, O God, The Journey”

✠BENEDICTION/COMMISSIONING

Go in peace.

And on your journey, may you have the boldness to come to Jesus just as you are, ready to be transformed into followers led by the Spirit, who journey through this world in peace, in faith, and in love.

May the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

Be with you now and forever. Amen

✠CHORAL AMEN (VU 971)

✠SENDING FORTH HYMN “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”

POSTLUDE: