

## **Westminster United Church**

February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025

✝ You are invited to stand as you are able

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS/LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH**

#### **CELEBRATIONS**

#### **INTROIT (VU 258 VS 1) 'O World of God'**

#### **Land Acknowledgement**

Today as we gather to worship let us remember that we worship God on the historic and unceded lands of Treaty 7 and neighbouring treaty 4. Traditional lands of the Metis, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney Nakoda and the T'suut'ina as well as the Cree and Ojibwa people. As Christ's people, let us be people of love, truth and reconciliation. May we live with respect on this land, and peace and friendship with its people.

#### **Affirming 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."

## ✠ **PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

### ✠ **CALL TO WORSHIP**

L: God has called us to share the good news of God's love.

**P: But who am I, that God should call me?**

L: You are a beloved child of God.

**P: But I am weak I'm not a great speaker or preacher.**

L: God is with us; don't be afraid.

**All: Lord, help us to trust in your presence with us. Help us to serve you in faith and love. AMEN**

### ✠ **Procession of Christ Candle**

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." Not quite so long but still very long ago, one was born who embodied the light of the Creator. We present this candle to remind ourselves and to celebrate Christ's constant presence. May we always seek His guiding light in our lives, as we are called to carry that light into the world.

### **Lighting of the Rainbow Candle**

Jesus taught us to love one another in a way that sparked a movement and a new understanding of 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.”

✝ **OPENING HYMN** ‘Gather Us In’ (Lyrics on powerpoint)

## ✝ **OPENING PRAYER**

Gracious God, we come to you this day, seeking your guidance and strength. You have called us to ministries for which we feel inadequate. Help us to understand that it is your love that will support and sustain our efforts. Give us the courage to place our trust in your abiding presence. We ask this in Jesus' Name. **AMEN.**

## **Prayer of Confession**

**God of great expectations, you know how easy it is for us to make excuses for inactivity. We love to run and hide when a task is set before us. We look at the expectation and think that we don't have the abilities, strength, or wisdom to accomplish this task. We think, too often, that we are doing these things all by ourselves. Forgive our ignorance, our stubbornness, and our stupidity, O Lord. Help us to understand that the opportunities for service that you offer to us also come with your abiding presence, love and support. It is your love which makes the impossible possible. Turn us around and place us back on the path of joyful service. Let our work be part of the fulfillment of the mandate of Jesus Christ when he made his proclamation in the synagogue so long ago. For it is in His Name that we pray. AMEN.**

## **Words of Assurance**

Even before we were born, God knew us. God has always been with us. Place your trust in God's presence and forgiving love. Rejoice! In the name of Jesus Christ, we all are forgiven! **AMEN**

**Prayers of the People**  
**THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Teaching God we pray that you will enlighten us as we hear Your Holy Word. Let us take the word to our hearts and live lives that honour and glorify you. **Amen**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

**Psalm 71 VU 789 Part 1**

In you, O God, I seek refuge; may I never be disappointed.

**In your righteousness, save and rescue me;  
incline your ear and deliver me.**

Be a sheltering rock for me,  
a fortress where I may find safety;

**for you are my rock and my stronghold.**

Rescue me, O God, from the hand of the wicked,  
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

**For you are my hope, my trust from my youth;  
from the time of my birth I have leaned on you.**

**Refrain: A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.**

One: These are the words of the ancient songwriters.

**All: Thanks be to God for the word.**

**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised**

**The Gift of Love**

**13** If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,<sup>[a]</sup> but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly,<sup>[b]</sup> but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**All: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.**

**ANTHEM:** The Beatitudes

**Luke 6:17-25**

**New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised  
Jesus Teaches and Heals**

<sup>17</sup> He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

### **Blessings and Woes**

<sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you<sup>[a]</sup> on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> ‘But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

One: This is the witness of the Church.

**All: Thanks be to God for the Word.**

## **SERMON:**

✠**HYMN: VU 389** 'God Is Here' (lyrics on powerpoint)

### **MINUTES FOR MISSION "When Faith Meets Understanding"**

In the Rift Valley of Kenya, over 200,000 people are HIV positive, and many will not survive. Grandmothers whose children have died of AIDS are often left alone to care for their grandchildren, and to add insult to injury, their church community condemns them, leaving them without support as they raise their grandchildren.

Some pastors in the Rift Valley, as in many other places, believe and teach that faithful Christians cannot contract the disease and that it is a judgment from God—a disease for sexual sinners.

"The pastors had little information about HIV and AIDS; to them, and others in the community, it was a strange disease.... [They believed] HIV was a result of sexual sin and was a judgement from God for the sexually immoral," writes Esther Mombo of the World Council of Churches.

In partnership with the United Church of Canada, Mombo and Pauline Wanjuru of St. Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya, led a series of workshops in one Rift Valley community that has been hit especially hard by HIV/AIDS. They invited grandmothers and pastors to connect and learn from each other.

One grandmother who attended the workshops was 70 years old. She was raising three grandchildren on her own after losing both her daughter and her son. Instead of stepping up to help, her neighbours refused to visit her because they said her daughter and son had been sexually immoral. Her pastor wouldn't even attend her children's funerals because he didn't want to be seen associating with her family. When she went to church, the pastor preached about the punishment for sexual immorality.

At the workshops, this woman bravely told her story to the pastors who attended. She also shared with them how it felt to be shamed for loving

her children and caring for her grandchildren. Another grandmother explained that her grandchildren were born with the virus and couldn't have been involved in any sexual immorality. Yet another spoke of God's love for everyone. Pastors listened and learned, and moved forward by making a commitment to extend compassion and offer pastoral care to the grandmothers.

All of us know from our own life experience that when we know better, we do better. Your [Mission and Service](#) gifts gave these grandmothers the opportunity to help their pastors learn to do better by connecting their love for their grandchildren to God's love for all. Thank you.

### **INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

We are fortunate people. God continues to bestow love upon us with blessings in Christ and for all time. Let us show our love for God as we give our offerings in love and dedication.

✠ **DOXOLOGY: VU 537 Vs 2** 'Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands'  
(lyrics on power point)

### ✠ **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Gracious and ever-present God of all, in response to your love we give our love and our gifts in Christ. Bless the offerings and us as we do your work in love here on earth. **Amen**

### ✠ **A NEW CREED (VU 918)**

✠ **Closing Hymn VU 896** 'Blest Are They' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

### ✠ **BENEDICTION/COMMISSIONING**

God did not say that it would be easy to bring the good news to all people, but God did say that God would be with you. So go now in peace, walking humbly with God. Bring the good news of hope to all the people. **AMEN.**



**✠CHORAL AMEN (VU 974)**

**✠SENDING FORTH HYMN: VU 424 vs 1** 'May the God of Hope Go with Us' (Lyrics on powerpoint)