

Westminster United Church

March 16th, 2025

✝ You are invited to stand as you are able

ANNOUNCEMENTS/LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

INTROIT (VU 114 VS 2) 'Forty Days and Forty Nights'

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Meditation:

On Sunday morning, for a brief space of time, we leave behind the world of home and work and school—the world where we have our lists of things to do, activities to participate in, tasks to complete. We come here this morning seeking something else. We come here seeking a shift—from the ordinary to the sacred, from doing to being. I invite you to close your eyes. Let go of your list. Recall that it is the season of Lent. Remember the parable of the sower. The sower throws the seed . . . and where it lands determines if it will grow or not grow. Think of it this way: think of the season of Lent as the sower, the time when seeds of faith are thrown with special intensity, as a time a time when God calls to us in a low, urgent voice. Listen. Jesus is being drawn to Jerusalem. Where is God calling you to? What is God calling you to do?

(Silent time.)

As we extinguish this light, we acknowledge the darkness and pain of injury done to the Earth and its ecosystems.

(A candle is extinguished.)

Let us pray:

All: Loving God, as we journey through this holy season of Lent, may we be open to your presence. Give us the strength to make the changes that are needed in our lives and the courage to take on the work of transforming the world. Amen.

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: Open your hearts to God's love today.

P: In the midst of winter darkness, we seek the brightness of God's love.

L: Don't be afraid. God is with you.

P: With the Lord's help, we can overcome the darkness.

L: The Lord is your light and your salvation.

P: Even though everything around us is disturbing, yet God's love is constant. Thanks be to God. 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 VU 104 'We Have Come at Christ's Own Bidding'
(Lyrics on powerpoint)

† OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we come to you this morning with so many concerns and issues that demand our attention. Our lives are burdened; our spirits are tired. Guide our lives and our steps as we walk this Lenten journey, inward

and outward. Help us to discern what you would have us do, that others may be healed. In Jesus' name, we pray. **AMEN.**

Prayer of Confession

There is a certain winter in our spirits today, O Lord. We feel that the journey on which we have embarked will demand too much of us. There are so many other things in our lives which claim our spirits, our energy, our hopes and fears. It is easy to be like Jerusalem, turning our backs on those whom you send. The world shouts its solutions to us and then deserts us when we are in need. Forgive us for the many times in which we have strayed from your pathway of life; when we have chosen not to hear the cries of those in need; when we have belittled the gifts and skills you have given us in order to avoid serving others. Heal us, O Lord. Place us back on your path to Jerusalem, to live, for we ask this in Jesus' name. **AMEN.**

Words of Assurance

When God called your name, God called you to a journey of faith. Do not be afraid to look inside to see those things which are holding you back from being who God created you to be. Place your trust in God who is always with you, loving you into wholeness. **AMEN.**

Prayers of the People

THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

As we begin our journey with Jesus to the cross today we pray that through the words we hear that our knowledge will grow closer to the real truth of your love for all things. Open our ears and our hearts that we may know the truth and find a pathway for ourselves that is pleasing to you. **AMEN.**

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 27 VU 754

Refrain: God is my light and saving health, I shall not be afraid.

God is my light and my salvation, whom then shall I fear?

God is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked close in to devour me,

it is they, my enemies and my foes, who stumble and fall.

If an army should encamp against me,

my heart shall not be afraid;

if war should arise against me,

even then I will not be dismayed.

Refrain: God is my light and saving health, I shall not be afraid.

One thing I have asked of God, for which I long:

that I may dwell in God's house all the days of my life,

to gaze on your beauty, O God,

and to seek you in your temple.

For in the time of trouble you will give me shelter;

you will hide me under the cover of your tent,

you will set me high upon a rock.

And now you have raised my head

above my enemies round about me.

Therefore I will offer in your dwelling

a sacrifice with great gladness.

Refrain: God is my light and saving health, I shall not be afraid.

Hear my voice, O God, when I call; have mercy and answer me.

Your face, O God, I seek.

Do not hide your face from me;

**do not reject your servant in anger,
you who have been my helper.**

Do not cast me off, or forsake me, O God my saviour.

**Though my father and mother forsake me,
my God will take me up.**

Refrain: God is my light and saving health, I shall not be afraid.

Teach me your way, O God,

lead me on a level path, safe from those who lie in wait for me.

Do not give me up to the will of my enemies,

for liars and false witnesses arise against me.

I believe that I shall see God's goodness
in the land of the living.

**Wait for God; be strong, and take courage;
yes, wait for God!**

Refrain: God is my light and saving health, I shall not be afraid.

One: These are the words of the ancient songwriters.

All: Thanks be to God for the Word.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, ^[a] join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship ^[b] is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation ^[c] so that it may be conformed to the body of

his glory,^[d] by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. **4** ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters,^[e] whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

All: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.

ANTHEM: Jesus, Lover of My Soul

Luke 13:31-35

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

The Lament over Jerusalem

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ ³²He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me,^[a] “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.” ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when^[b] you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”’

One: This is the witness of the Church.

All: Thanks be to God for the Word.

SERMON:

✠HYMN: VU 660 ‘How Firm a Foundation’ (lyrics on powerpoint)

MINUTES FOR MISSION “Building Climate Resiliency”

In areas where historically there has been little rain, now there are floods, and where there were floods, now there are droughts. That’s how Shadrick Chembe, the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager at Women for Change—an organization in Zambia that strives to improve conditions in rural communities by empowering women and girls—describes the changing climate in Zambia. Women bear the brunt. “In Zambia, women are still responsible for collecting firewood and charcoal and making food. Now, because of climate change, they have to walk a longer distance to gather firewood. Charcoal is harder to get. That means it’s harder to make food. At the same time, women aren’t involved in the decision-making processes that impact this work,” explains Chembe.

Women for Change was established in 1992, and its long-standing partnership with the United Church stretches back to 1995. From the beginning, mobilizing communities to share ideas and best practices has been key to the work. Since its inception, 1,500 community groups have been established, with 25–40 people in each group and representatives from each forming associations. The groups discuss a variety of justice-related topics. Building climate resiliency by preparing for, recovering from, and adapting to drastically changing weather patterns is a priority.

Weather extremes due to climate change coupled with companies promoting seeds that only produce a single crop increasingly put people at risk.

“The majority of farmers are poor. They can’t buy seeds, but companies have created seeds that force farmers to have to purchase them each year,” says Chembe. “Groups discuss how they can save and share seeds, what they can plant with longer or shorter rains, and if there are traditional methods that can increase food production,” he says, adding, “We are grateful for the United Church’s support. The church has really been there for many years, helping us build awareness and resiliency. It’s been a real partnership.”

Your gifts through [Mission and Service](#) support long-term, life-changing work through committed partners like Women for Change. Thank you.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

In Christ God gave us the ultimate gift. Let us now return a portion of that which God has given us for our lives here on earth.

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

✝ **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Loving God as you sustain us for the journey we thank you for all you have provided for us. We want to give back to you for your work here on earth. Please accept these gifts and use them for the betterment of people who are in need. In the giving make us stronger in our faith and trust in you. **AMEN.**

✝ **A NEW CREED (VU 918)**

✝ **Closing Hymn VU 262** 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

✝ **BENEDICTION/COMMISSIONING**

Be strong in the Lord. You can walk in God's ways, for God is with you, offering you peace, hope, courage, and joy. God's love abides with you always. Go now in peace to demonstrate God's love in the world.
AMEN.

✝ **CHORAL AMEN (VU 971)**

✝ **SENDING FORTH HYMN VU 506 vs 1** 'Take My Life and Let It Be'
(Lyrics on powerpoint)