

Westminster United Church

March 30th, 2025

✝ You are invited to stand as you are able

ANNOUNCEMENTS/LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

INTROIT (VU 114 VS 4) 'Forty Days and Forty Nights'

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Meditation:

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.**

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: How blessed we are that God forgives us and loves us!

P: For all those times when we have fallen short of what God would

have us be, we have been forgiven.

L: God makes us new in God's Spirit!

P: Now is the time to joyfully accept the newness of life which God offers to us.

L: Come, let us worship and be thankful.

P: Let us open our hearts to the peace and joy of 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 559 'Come, O Fount of Every Blessing' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

✠ OPENING PRAYER

How incredible is your love, O God! We have been made new in your love and reconciled to you and to each other in peace and joy. Be with

us this day as we hear your words of comfort and hope. Guide our lives that we may serve you more fully all of our days. **AMEN.**

Prayer of Confession

Lord, it is interesting that it is easy for us to identify with today's scripture about the "Prodigal Son". Some of us are easily reminded of our own selfishness and stubbornness when we willfully sought our own way. Others are reminded about how angry we were when others were not held accountable for their actions, when we have been so careful not to displease anyone. Still others can identify with the father who, feeling the loss of his son, welcomes him home again, reminding the brother that he has always been in the love and care of the Father. We hear this story and it's a pleasant memory. But do we really understand what it is about? Do we know that we have also been stubborn and selfish, angry and unforgiving, sorrowful and caught between two conflicting factions? We are no different from these characters, in our own unique way. Yet, in God's infinite love, we also are forgiven and healed. We are called to turn our lives back to God's care, which is always extended to us. Forgive us and heal us, gracious God. Open our hearts and our spirits to truly receive the blessings of your healing love. For it is in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, that we pray. **AMEN.**

Words of Assurance

Once we were "dead" to all the things that God hoped for us; but in God's love we are again brought to life. Rejoice, dear ones, you are forgiven!

Prayers of the People

THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

God of all today as we hear your scripture help us to hear it not only with our ears but also with our hearts that we as children of God will not stray from your love.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 32 VU 759

Refrain: Be glad in God you righteous. Rejoice, O saints, rejoice.

Blessed are those whose offences are forgiven,
whose sin has been put away.

**Blessed are those to whom God imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

Refrain: Be glad in God you righteous. Rejoice, O saints, rejoice.

When I kept silence, my body wasted away,
While I groaned all the day long.

**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night,
my strength dried up as in a summer drought.**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
my guilt I did not hide.

**I said " I will confess my sins to God",
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you in time of trouble,
**when great floodwater rises,
it shall not come near them.**

You are a hiding place for me,
you will preserve me from trouble,

you will surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Refrain: Be glad in God you righteous. Rejoice, O saints, rejoice.

I will teach you,
and guide you in the way you should go.

I will keep you under my eye and instruct you.

Be not like a horse or mule, without understanding,

whose course must be checked with bit and bridle.

Many pains are in store for the wicked,

but whoever trusts in God,

is surrounded by steadfast love.

Refrain: Be glad in God you righteous. Rejoice, O saints, rejoice.

One: These are the words of the ancient songwriters.

All: Thanks be to God for the Word.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;^[a] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,^[b] we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^[c] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

All: Praise to Christ, the Living Word.

ANTHEM: Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire

Luke 15:1-3

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15 Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

³ So he told them this parable:

Luke 15:11-32

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

¹¹ Then Jesus^[a] said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with^[b] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put

his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”^[c] ²² But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ ‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” ³¹ Then the father^[d] said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”’

One: This is the witness of the Church.

All: Thanks be to God for the Word.

SERMON:

✠**HYMN: VU 716** ‘My Life Flows On’ (lyrics on powerpoint)

MINUTES FOR MISSION

“Breaking Barriers: Women in Theology and Leadership”

In India, social and cultural factors limit access to theological education for women in comparison to men. The Rev. B. Silpa Rani is actively encouraging women to pursue theological education and engage in leadership roles.

When Silpa started her first degree in Theology, she spent two years as the only woman in a class of 16. Now, years later, as she works on her doctoral dissertation, she has seen a gradual increase in the enrolment of women in theological programs. While this is encouraging, Silpa recognizes that there is still a long journey forward. While she seeks to empower modern women, she is also working to shed light on the experiences of women and minorities of the past.

Silpa was the recipient of a theological education scholarship, which paved her way to join the faculty at Bishop's College, Kolkata. She has been exploring the unique identity of the Qumran community within the context of the Dead Sea Scrolls. She is actively researching to identify the women, children, and minority groups of the society, drawing parallels between the Qumran context and contemporary Indian context.

Your [Mission and Service](#) gifts provide support to leaders like Silpa, who are actively working to empower women and change the world.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

As God has provided for the children of Israel so does God provide for us. Let us be grateful and share that which has been provided for us.

✠ **DOXOLOGY: VU 539 Vs 3** ‘God of All Good’ (lyrics on power point)

✠ **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Eternal and ever-present God, we offer our gifts in thanksgiving for the work of Jesus in our lives.

Bless them and us with the power of the Spirit, and use all our gifts for the work of reconciliation Christ has given us to do in the world you love. Amen.

✠A NEW CREED (VU 918)

✠Closing Hymn VU 574 'Come, Let Us Sing of a Wonderful Love' (Lyrics on powerpoint)

✠BENEDICTION/COMMISSIONING

As we move ever closer to the dreadful time of the cross let us serve God with more energy as we go about our daily activities. May God bless you in your work and play bringing you ever closer to wisdom and hope. **Amen.**

✠CHORAL AMEN (VU 971)

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