

# WE CAN CONNECT



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DECEMBER 4, 2020

## COVID UPDATE

The Board of Okotoks United Church met Thursday, Nov 26 to discuss the rising numbers of COVID cases in Alberta and the Government's new restrictions. We wanted to determine if we were meeting the spiritual and emotional needs of our community of faith while still keeping everyone as safe as possible. We decided that since we are still following the government guidelines for worship gatherings and everyone who attends has been diligent in observing those guidelines, we would continue in-person worship services for a limited number of attendees until Sunday Dec. 20th. Christmas Eve will be entirely online and at least the two services following Christmas, Dec 27 and Jan 3 will also be online. The situation that would change this is:

1. a sudden significant increase in cases in Okotoks,
2. Chinook Winds Region mandates that all churches in the region close,
3. or the Government of Alberta closes in-person worship services.

If you have any concerns or comments, please call Karen Pryznyk.

### Please Pray For:



- High River United Church
- Lea Stordahl who donated a kidney and is recovering from surgery
- Those making difficult decisions
- Leaders in government
- Those who are facing financial uncertainty
- People working and living in long term care facilities
- Tired, overworked health care workers

### In-person Worship Seating Registration Reminder

In order not to exceed our maximum numbers, you will be asked to register to attend the service. Each week, you may phone the office (403-938-4357) or email ([okunited@telus.net](mailto:okunited@telus.net)) to register for the upcoming Sunday. Seating will be assigned. If we exceed the number allowed you will be placed on the list for the following week.

### 1st Annual Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest



Don you now, your ugly sweater, fa la la la la, la la la la.

Please join us for an ugly Christmas sweater contest on Sunday, December 13, 2020 after the service. You can join in person or join us through Zoom to show your Ugly Christmas Sweater.



**Remember, the uglier the better!**

You can win a prize of a food or gas card donated in your name to the 2020 White Gift donations.





## “Let it Be”

This past Sunday marked the first Sunday of Advent. A time of preparation and expectation. Of course, it is an understatement to say that this year will be anything like any other Advent or Christmas in memory. We are dealing with so many restrictions and concern for the growing numbers of CoViD-19 in our community and province.

This year, during Advent, I want to focus on the theme of HOPE, exploring the characters in the nativity stories through the lens of the hope they offer us in these times. This time of year has always been a time of anticipation and hope. And it will be this year as long as we keep our focus on what is important through the season. While we will miss some of the traditions we have enjoyed other years, perhaps we can reflect on the importance of what really matters and determine to create new traditions that nurture our need for peace, hope, joy and love.

This Sunday past, I read the passage from Luke 1:26-38 announcing Mary’s pregnancy and the birth of Jesus.

It is always remarkable to me that every time I delve into a passage of scripture, a new insight or revelation will jump out. This story was no exception. In the story, after the angel’s message was delivered to Mary, her response to this surprising life twist floored me. Her response to the angel was, “Let it Be as you have said.” Not, “please take this away, I don’t want it.” Not, “that is not fair, I am not prepared.” It was not anger, fear, despondency or denial. It was a simple, “Let it Be.” What a remarkable response to what must have been a significant shock to a young, unwed woman in a small village in Galilee. What Mary essentially said was, “I understand what you’re saying and I accept this responsibility. I will do my best to serve God in the midst of challenging circumstances.”

At the risk of oversimplification, there seems to be two types of people these days. Those who accept life as it is, not as they might wish it would be, and those who are resisting what is and expending an incredible amount of energy, time and resources to protest the situation and its consequences.

Mary’s message to us is, “Let it Be!” It is what it is, so how can we make the best of it, taking responsibility for our actions and our attitude toward others. We can be patient, compassionate and courteous toward others or we can be angry, belligerent and aggressive toward others who didn’t ask for this situation. People are doing their best to protect us and do their jobs. It’s not perfect but most people are doing what they have to in order to get by.

“Let it Be” means that we will take the difficulties along with the blessings and make them into something worthy of God. Mary takes this life complication and turns it into a blessing for the world, being the mother of the Messiah, the Saviour.

Like Mary, our responsibility is to make the world a better place and bring glory to the God we worship. “Let it Be.” Don’t try to change what you can’t. Just be better in the midst of the challenges that life will always throw at us.

### Enjoy Some Quiet Time

As we have done for Christmas each year, we have decorated the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas (thanks to some very industrious angels). We want you to enjoy the beauty of the sanctuary and the peace it offers.



You are welcome to come and sit in the sanctuary for prayer, meditation and reflection, or simply to sit and enjoy, even cry if you need to. Masked and physically distanced of course.

The sanctuary will be available for your use from **Monday – Friday from 9:30 – 1:00 each day until December 23<sup>rd</sup>**. We ask that you call (403-938-4357) to let us know you’re coming so we have a list of attendees and we can “light up” the sanctuary. You are free to stay as long as you want. Please enter via the office doors where you will be “checked in.” Bring your own mask. We have sanitizer on the front table.

Please take time to experience the light of Christ in whatever way is meaningful and comfortable for you. You are welcome as often as you like. Blessings in this Advent Season.



## White Gifts This Christmas

As we are all aware, this year has been challenging and while we have hope for the possibility of a vaccine for the coming year, we don't know when this will be and what challenges people will face in 2021.

In the past we have had a White Gift Sunday, usually Pageant Sunday, where we offered gift cards for the Benevolent Fund. We are going to continue that tradition this year but ask that you drop your gift cards off at the church office, mail them in or drop them in the offering if you attend Sunday worship in person.

The gift cards will go to the Benevolent Fund to distribute as needed. The cards most used are grocery and gas cards. Please make sure you note your name and envelope number (if you have one) on the envelope. Or, just use a regular offering envelope for the cards. Also, please make sure that the gift cards are clearly marked with the dollar amount as the donation will be noted on your tax receipts for 2020.

We will be taking gift cards up until the end of December. Thank you in advance for your contribution. You are a generous community. I hear it all the time from the wider community.



### ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH HAPPENINGS Written by P. Marie Wedderburn



#### Birthday Drive-Bys

On Friday (the 27<sup>th</sup>) afternoon thirteen vehicles gathered at St. Andrew's United from where we proceeded to go and celebrate two birthdays. As we travelled the sun shone brightly and as we arrived at one of the birthday celebrant's home we loudly honked our horns and waved to extend birthday greetings. This birthday celebrant greeted us with a smile and treat. Meanwhile the other birthday celebrant stood physically distanced away (as they are not of the same household) and also smiled and waved as we drove by. Later on this birthday celebrant wrote a poem about birthday drive-bys which was e-mailed to the community of faith in thanksgiving for celebrating birthdays this way during the pandemic.

#### Christmas Concert

This year's St. Andrew's United's Christmas Concert will be held virtually *next* Sunday, December 13 at 7 p.m. via Zoom. The concert will feature many of the same musicians that we have heard in the past.

To reiterate once again no tickets are being sold. However, this year St. Andrew's United Church has decided to support the Veterans' Association Food Bank of Calgary.

However, you can financially support the concert if you are led to do so. To make it easier to financially support the concert, you can do so in one of three ways: send a cheque to Okotoks United Church, give cash to Okotoks United Church, or arrange an e-transfer to Okotoks United Church. Whichever way you may decide to support the concert, please ear-mark your donations for the concert. Then the total of all the donations collected will be forwarded to St. Andrew's United Church's treasurer who will then send a cheque for the total amount to the Veterans' Association Food Bank of Calgary.

Hope to see you at the concert next Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Thank you also, if you are able, for financially supporting this annual event.





DECEMBER 4, 2020

## Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile

Over the last few months, Matthew Heesing and the United Church in the Valley have journeyed through a series called **"Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile."** How might the Psalms relate to our lives today? What meaning might these ancient, sacred songs hold for us? How are our own present-day emotions and experiences mirrored in these holy, human words?

Now, **you** can join in the journey too! For just **\$15** (the cost of printing), you can order a printed collection of all of the Psalms, Sunday Sermons, and corresponding short "Friday Reflections" from this series! If you are interested, please **place an order** with the Okotoks United Church office. Books will be available starting mid-December. (P.S.: It might even make a meaningful Christmas gift!). Please see sample below.

### Friday Reflection: Psalm 13

When I was starting out as a student minister, a mentor of mine showed me a little exercise called the "**Circles of Control.**"

Imagine a bullseye with three circles—  
a small inner circle,  
a medium middle circle,  
and a large outer circle.

The small inner circle, as my mentor taught me, represents those things in life that are *directly in your control*.

The medium middle circle represents those things in life that *you can try to influence*.

Finally, the larger outer circle represents those things in life that are *completely outside of your control*.

The size of the circle matters, my mentor explained, because the vast majority of things in life are completely *outside* of our control; likewise, there are only a small number of things that are directly *in* our control.

Even our own *emotions* exist in the larger outer circle: after all, we can't control how we feel. What we **can** control is how we act and react, how we address, exhibit and express such emotions.

In many ways, my mentor concluded, **anxiety** comes from **focusing on the wrong circle**.

Are you focused on what's out of your control? Or are you focused on the small number of things that you *can* control in any given situation? Now, you might be wondering what any of this has to do with our Psalm for this week.

But the fascinating thing is that the three stanzas—the three paragraphs—of *Psalm 13* actually correspond to the three "Circles of Control."

*Psalm 13* opens with anxious lament, because the Psalmist is utterly focused on all of the things that are completely **outside of their control**:

"How long, O God, how long?...  
How long will I be left all alone,  
with pain in my soul  
and sorrow filling my heart?...  
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" (13:1-2).

In the second stanza, the Psalmist focuses on what they might be able to **influence**: "Consider my plea, and respond, O God:  
Restore sight to my eyes;  
light up my life!" (13:3).



Finally, in the third stanza, the Psalmist shifts their focus to the things that **are in their control**: "But I do trust in your steadfast love, O God. My heart shall rejoice in your saving grace. Yes, I will sing to you, because you bestow abundance on me" (13:5-6).

In the end, even in the midst of many difficult situations completely outside of their control—*loneliness, pain, sorrow, defeat*—the Psalmist makes an intentional choice *to trust, to rejoice, to sing, to practice gratitude*.

By shifting their focus from the "larger outer circle" to the "smaller inner circle,"

the Psalmist finds a sense of purpose, agency, and inner peace.

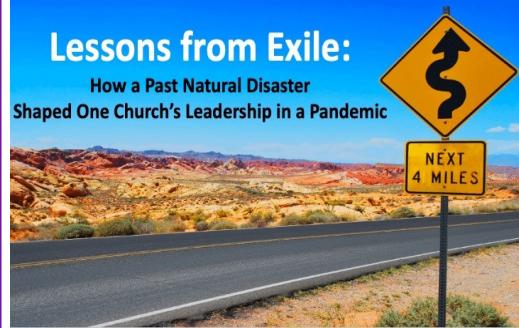
Friends, what "circle of control" are you focused on, these days?

How might *Psalm 13* help us faithfully shift our energy and attention?

Until next week,

Matthew

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## Lessons from Exile:

How a Past Natural Disaster  
Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic

## "Lessons from Exile: How a Past Natural Disaster Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic":

As part of his Masters of Divinity program, Matthew Heesing had to undertake a comprehensive research process on a unique topic of his choosing. He chose to examine the concept of "congregational exile": in particular, how a past natural disaster influenced ministerial leadership during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This process involved conducting detailed interviews with clergy and lay congregation members, along with analyzing many written materials. What Matthew found were five "*lessons from exile*": lessons that can give all of us direction as we navigate through the territory of this "unprecedented" period.

You can find Matthew's webinar presentation on these "lessons" at:

<https://youtu.be/wyC7wcoUul>



### Poinsettias for Sale

We have 7 decorative poinsettias of various colours for sale for \$20 each. They are currently hung on the windows in the foyer. If you are interested in purchasing one please get in touch with the office at 403-938-4357 or by email at [okunited@telus.net](mailto:okunited@telus.net).



### Kid's Korner:

We will be having Zoom-only Sunday School following our morning worship service. Youth group will meet every Friday by Zoom until the Christmas break and we will reevaluate in the New Year. Also, a reminder that the nursery is closed during this time. Any questions, please contact Candice at [cndcsutton@gmail.com](mailto:cndcsutton@gmail.com).



### Okotoks United Church Office - We're here for you!

The office continues to remain open at this time Monday to Friday 9:00 - 2:00. Please contact Diane at [okunited@telus.net](mailto:okunited@telus.net) or 403-938-4357 for church related news.

Please contact Julia at [okiulia@telus.net](mailto:okiulia@telus.net) or 403-702-2249 (cell) at any time.

**Congregational Care Team** invites you to reach out for confidential spiritual and compassionate care by email at: [okcongregationalcare@telus.net](mailto:okcongregationalcare@telus.net)

