

**JUNE
2023**

CHURCH @ HOME

**staying connected with God,
each other, and ourselves**



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red deer lake
united church

SUMMER GREETINGS, DEAR FRIENDS!

It is so lovely to be able to enjoy special summer moments, isn't it... as the days grow longer and Mother Nature ushers in her vibrancy of noise, activity and colour!

It's a time of year when traditionally many of you go on holidays and get to spend some more time out-of-doors. I wish the same for you this summer.

It is important to also continue to join together in prayer for our stressed Earth, for the fires (and floods) consuming large areas of our land and for those displaced from their homes.

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At this time of year, I particularly crave to spend quiet moments outside. We live in a hectic and busy world and cannot seem to hold back time...or ever get enough time. This is a great season of the year to take that time, to commune with nature and to enjoy God's garden, outside and inside, to tend to both our gardens, externally and internally.



Sacred time is devoted to the heart,
to the self, to others, to eternity.
Sacred time is not measured in
minutes, hours or days.

- Gary Eberle -

In this garden, each moment has its own purpose and is part of the infinite Creator, as the words of Ecclesiastes 3 v.1 say: "for everything there is a season and time to every purpose under heaven."

This is the season of my life when I am stepping into the journey of "retirement" or "evolving", as I prefer to call it, of new beginnings and adventures. John and I intend to move to BC to live closer to our family.

It's a time of mixed emotions for sure as we say goodbye to our family community of Red Deer Lake United Church and many dear friends over these coming summer months. It is difficult to say goodbye to deeply loving friendships and we will grieve accordingly. I hope many of you will come to visit us in our new location!

There is so much gratitude in my heart for these past 23 years in your midst and the past 10 years as Congregational Care Counsellor. It has been a privilege and honour to serve this congregation and to get to know and love you. I will always carry each of you in my heart.

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I feel excitement and deep gratitude that members of the Congregational Care teams will continue to provide exemplary ongoing pastoral and congregational care amongst you. The interim leadership team is made up of Wilma Clark, Doreen McKinnon and Anne Welsh. To each one of them and ALL the many team members I have had the privilege to work alongside, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you to each of you for your constant and continued dedication in extending the light and love of Christ to others, always with caring, compassion and open hearts.

The Care Package teams will continue to create these amazing gifts of love. There will be no care packages or magazine in July or August and they will begin again in the Fall.

The RDLUC @Home magazine will continue thanks to Fran Porter who has graciously agreed to help Charlee produce the magazine with her writing and editorial skills. Your submissions are always enjoyed and appreciated....do keep them coming!

Please continue to reach out to our Cong. Care Team members if you need any support, they will be there for you. I encourage our seniors who are experiencing challenges getting to worship services to take advantage of the grant we received to obtain transportation to church. Contact Doreen, Anne or Wilma for further info.

This is a time of transition for you also as a church community. I know God will bless you on your journey.

I will sign off for now with a Celtic blessing to each of you,



. . . continued

. . . continued

*Deep peace of the running wave to you
Deep peace of the flowing air to you
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you
Deep peace of the shining stars to you
Deep peace of the gentle night to you
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you
Blessings of Deep Peace to you*

In Love,

Vi



Thank
You!



we are
going to



Miss
You!



A SUMMER PRAYER

May you breathe in the beauty of summer with its power of transformation.
May this beauty permeate all that feels un-beautiful in you.

May the God of summer give us beauty.

May you seek and find spaces of repose during these summer months.
May these moments refresh and restore the tired places within you.

May the God of summer give us rest.

May you be open to times of celebration and recreation that are so much a part
of summer.

May you find happiness in these times of play and leisure.

May the God of summer give us joy.

May your eyes see the wonders of summer's colors.

May these colors delight you and entice you into contemplation and joy.

May the God of summer give us inner light.

May you feel energy of summer rains penetrating thirsty gardens, golf courses,
lawns and farmlands.

May these rains remind you that your inner thirst needs quenching.

May your inner self be refreshed, restored, and renewed.

May the God of summer give us what we need for healing.

May you savor fresh produce that comes to your table and enjoy the fruits of
summer's bounty.

***May the God of summer give us a sense of satisfaction in the works of our
hands.***

May you find shelter when the stormy skies of summer threaten your safety.

May the God of summer give us shelter when inner storms threaten our peace of mind and heart.

May you enjoy the unexpected and find surprises of beauty and happiness as you travel the roads on summer vacation.

May the God of summer lead us to amazing discoveries as we travel the inner roads of our soul as well.

By Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr

From the book: The Circle of Life, The Heart's Journey through the Seasons



CELEBRATING

There was a town that was having a yearly celebration, and the mayor declared that this time, the people were going to be more directly involved. He proclaimed that everyone who wanted to participate should gather in the market square where there would be entertainment and the obligatory fireworks, But to make the celebration truly festive, they would have the country's largest punch bowl. And this was going to be filled with a sublime drink, made from the contributions that the people themselves would bring to put in it.

The idea caught the people's imagination, and they began talking about what they planned to contribute, and how wonderful this was going to be. They speculated about how the drink would taste, being made up of so many different brews and liqueurs. But they trusted in the mayor's judgement and looked forward to the evening with anticipation.

The great day arrived, and the people brought their bottles and casques and poured them ceremoniously into the giant vat on the platform. The beginning of the day went without flaw. There were dancers and singers. There were maypoles, and there were bands. Finally, the evening came, and, as the people went to the various stands in the marketplace to get their dinners, they were especially excited about the libations that were to follow. At last, the mayor called for everyone's attention. He then went over with a great cup, dipped it into the punch tub, scooping out the ingredients from within. Then, lifting it to his lips, he drank deeply, only to discover what he was imbibing was nothing more than water.

We do at times seem to spend an inordinate amount of our energy wishing that others would do something about something or other. The end result of this, however, is that often no one does anything about anything, because everyone is waiting for others to take on the task. Perhaps one mark of our faith is our courage and resolve and willingness to simply act and get things done.



Grant.

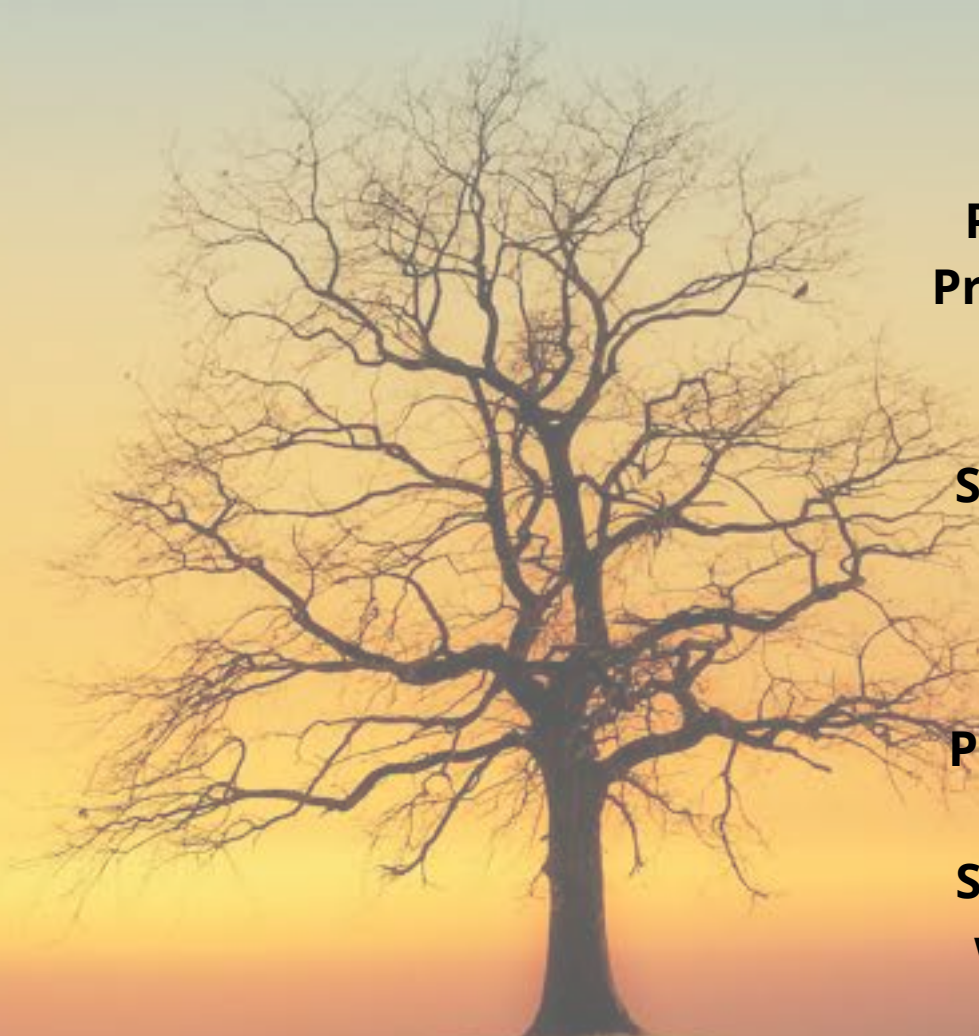
MORNING HAS BROKEN

Morning has broken
like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.

Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from Heaven,
Like the first dewfall
on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness
where God's feet pass.

Ours is the sunlight!
ours is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play.
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's re-creation
of the new day!



CHRISTIANS DOING SEDITIOUS THINGS

A SERMON BY REV GRANT

First this morning, I would like to clear up a misunderstanding centred around a couple of verses in our reading—verses that have caused confusion and at times have even sparked some rather heated debates about exactly how early Christians lived.

This morning I read from the Common English Bible; the most recent major translation of Scripture carried out by one hundred twenty scholars from twenty-four different denominations. It came out in 2011. I read from it this morning, because I believe that this version helps to clear up the uncertainty posed by earlier translations.

So, let's begin by looking at one of those "earlier translations," the New Revised Standard Version that reads like this:

NRSV

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Now the problem is, of course, that this does make the Christian community in Jerusalem sound very much like a commune of some kind. It appears that people sold everything and gave it away to everybody. And it has been put forward by some as proof that the early Christians were really closeted communists.

Now it is true that there were Jewish sects who did live in this way. The Qumran community that gave us the Dead Sea Scrolls and with whom John the Baptist had some connection, for example, did certainly live in a commune setting. But as to how the majority of early Christian communities functioned, I believe this is better expressed in the translation, from which I read this morning. It says:

CEB

All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of

property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them.

Not all early Christians sold everything all at once. No. Some may have done this, but the common practice was that people sold things as necessity dictated, so that those who were in need would have enough. In a sense they were saying, "God has given all of us whatever we have, and so we must be sure that none are in need. This is the spirit of Christ's love in action, and it is this that the early church exhibited with great skill and joy.

We know from other documents, for example, that some of the wealthier members of the church owned private residences in the city of Jerusalem. And these individuals, rather than selling their homes, they opened them up for the Christians to meet. Private homes were the principal gathering places of early Christians for the first three centuries of the church's existence.

As I said, last week, this sharing was one of the marks of the early Christian community. It was comprised of people who were passionate about the well-being of all. And so, it is in this morning's passage, that we read that this group shared meals and prayed together.

This, however, raises the question as to how this innocuous little group of caring people came to be so hated by the Romans and the leaders of the Jewish community. How could you become angry with those who simply said that they loved one another and supported one another? How was it that Christians became a group which, within a few years of the writing of Acts in the late first or early second century, would be persecuted, imprisoned, and killed for their beliefs? What was it about early Christians that so irked those in authority? This doesn't make sense at first reading. They prayed and went to the Temple and sang hymns together and helped out those who were in need. So, where's the criminal intent in all of that?

To begin, note that even in our passage there are hints that there was something different about them. It recalls that they made it so that "a sense of awe came over everyone." What was so awesome about them?

Well, we are told that “God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles.”

Again, that seems rather harmless. Maybe even a bit helpful? Unless you wanted to control the people around you and the world at large. If these Christian people were doing extraordinary things, then how would one expect the Roman officials or the hierarchy in religious institutions to react to this?

Not positively.

Christians were bringing healing and hope and well-being to the people. These were generally not high on the agenda of the Romans, who were trying to rule the world, nor of the religious officials who were trying to point to themselves as being the gateway to salvation.

The Romans were saying, “You people have got to pay attention to what those horrible barbarians out there are going to do to you, if we don’t protect you. We have to keep order, so you must follow us without questions.” But these Christians were going around proclaiming that the priorities set by the Romans needed to be changed in order for a new way of doing things more justly to arise. And there’s the conflict.

The Jewish authorities, on the other hand, were saying, “You people have got to come to the Temple and the synagogues and worship and do all the religious things that we say are important. And if we have to take away and sell some of your traditional land to keep us going, well, that’s just the price you have to pay. And remember, we’ve got the Romans to back us up.” But Christians continued to push the idea not just of hearty meals and help and healing, but more importantly of a new vision of how people could and should behave and a new understanding of how society could be ordered so all could find a worthy place.

Think for a moment of the disquiet that occurred in many little towns here in Alberta when they were cut off from the flow of traffic and trade by some new major roadway. That’s what Christians were doing. They were saying. “You don’t need the Temple necessarily or even the synagogues. They are great meeting

places, but it is the acts of love that the community shows that are the true heart of faith."

Not a popular idea with the priestly class.

Put bluntly the Romans and the priest were talking about maintaining the status quo. But Christians were talking about resurrection and newness. This was threatening.

When our passage speaks of the "miracles" the early apostles performed, you must remember that at the time, miracles were not just healing events or amazing things that people found it hard to explain, but rather more importantly, they were "signs" of something greater, something new, something exciting something transforming.

So, what about us? When did you last amaze someone? When did we? We don't expect that sort of thing in this world. We don't expect people to leave here today, saying, "That was amazing!" Nor do those around us say very often, "My goodness, you Christians are the most awesome people we know."

So how do we wow the world?

In a society of artificial friendship on the internet and bureaucracy that often stifles creativity and leaves some left out of the game, we can simply be our authentic selves, demonstrating that extravagant love that Jesus showed, being willing to support people who feel left out, being willing to hear people who are convinced they are never listened to, giving gifts, when gifts are not expected, being there, when people feel they are alone, challenging the details of the society around us, and changing our own behaviour to uplift the lives of others.

Those things should be, of course, normal behaviour. But they are so frequently forgotten in the world around us, and we are here to remind the world of them.

The awesome things we do lead to changes in individual and corporate

behaviour that will in some way bring into deeper focus the good news that we have to share.

Now the second annoying thing that early Christians did – and this is something that any group in power fears greatly—is that “all the believers were united and shared everything.”

Rule one of power is to keep the opposition divided into tiny, controllable groups. In fact, the phrase we use for this— “divide and conquer” is actually from the Latin phrase “Divide et impera.”

Now, first let’s become historically accurate here. The early church was not some great monolithic organization in which everyone agreed on everything that everybody was doing. Structure, theology, even rules for living varied greatly in early Christian communities. We know this from the letters of Paul, and other writers of the first, second, and third centuries. But to be united, did not mean that they agreed on everything, but that they were willing to work with one another. They were committed to loving their neighbours and to seeking the betterment of the world around them.

One of the earliest creeds in the church stands behind the famous passage from Galatians 3: 26 - 28

You are all God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus.

All of you who were baptized into Christ

have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek;

there is neither slave nor free;

nor is there male and female,

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are all one in Christ Jesus.

In other words, Christ overcomes the social boundaries that separate us, the prejudices, the false presuppositions, the self-seeking greed that separates us

from other people. The Spirit of Christ unifies.

The radical idea that the early Church proposed was that Romans and Jews, rich and poor, the powerful and the lowly could live together in peace. They met together and they found that while sharing meals, they learned to listen to one another and truly hear one another and share dreams. They discovered common ground on which they could work together for a better world.

And so, it is with us. We make room for everyone to have and express their own opinions. We make room for other people whose opinions are different from ours. We make room for people to express who they are, and you discover who the other people around us really are at their core.

Christian unity cannot mean and has never meant that all Christians think alike about all things. No. Now throughout history there have been communities that have tried that, and they have all failed miserably because they have ended up becoming dictatorships of those who define what is right and acceptable.

Christian unity means what the theologian Heinrich Seesemann referred to as “spiritual togetherness.”

It's a very practical and workable idea. People do not find unity because they think exactly alike. Most of thus know that from living in our own families. People do not find unity because they have the same goals. We want different things – all of us. People do not find unity because they have a common understanding of what “God” means or the purpose that life has.

No, we find unity when we work together to reach some common objective, learning to go beyond our own ideas that tend to separate us from others, in a spirit of learning and seeking the common good.

There is our unity. It's not about all liking the same kind of ice cream, or the same sorts of activities, but about having a common desire to reflect in our lives, the openness of the Holy Spirit, and to seek in our actions the well-being of all.

And it is not difficult to see why a centralized empire would be very upset by a group of people who were encouraging free thinking, with an openness in a spirit of support. The emperor was supposed to be the one to whom people turned when they needed help, and these Christians were saying that they were finding support and comfort in the new community they were creating.

And finally, we are told that these early seditious Christians "...praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone."

And here in lies the problem, they're a major threat to the empire around them, and those in power: they didn't just keep their ideas to themselves to form strong little communities and do whatever they wanted to do. No. They reached out and were successful getting more and more people to join them and to see the world in these brighter terms of Christ.

One of the comments I received when I asked for thoughts on these Bible passages was that Christianity seems to be so much more a religion of the people, and not as much a religion of the leaders. This is absolutely true. And that was their strength and also their threat. The Romans and the religious leaders of the time wanted people to listen only to them; Christians wanted people to experience and to share.

This is perhaps best seen, in the difference between the followers of John the Baptist and the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Both of these men were killed by the opposition, and they both had a large and active group of followers at the time of their deaths. And yet, the cult of John the Baptist died out after he had been beheaded, but the faith of Jesus spread rapidly after his crucifixion.

So, what was the difference between these two communities. Put simply, John preached and warned and called upon people to be baptized by him. Jesus, on the other hand also preached, but told people rather to follow him and to continue following him, holding the kind of faith he held. It was not all about him and what he did, but about his followers and what they could do in his name.

So naturally, when John was beheaded, his ministry collapsed. He could no longer baptize people, so people went somewhere else to find salvation. But after Jesus' death, his followers realized that his spirit was indeed alive in them and went out to change the world with the power of his vision.

As long as Christians stayed quietly "over there" doing good things for one another, the authorities left them alone. They were just harmless people behaving themselves. But Christians didn't just stay "over there" behaving themselves doing good things. No. They began doing good things for all those around them, and more than that, calling all those around them to be a part of what they were doing.

They "...praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone." Notice that word "everyone." They reached out to all in the name of Jesus: Jew and Gentile; Roman and Greek. They even seemed to love those outside of their group and those whom the emperor or the priests called "undesirable" or "unclean." This was treason. This was heresy. This was a disturbance of the given order.

And it was the given order that responded with force.

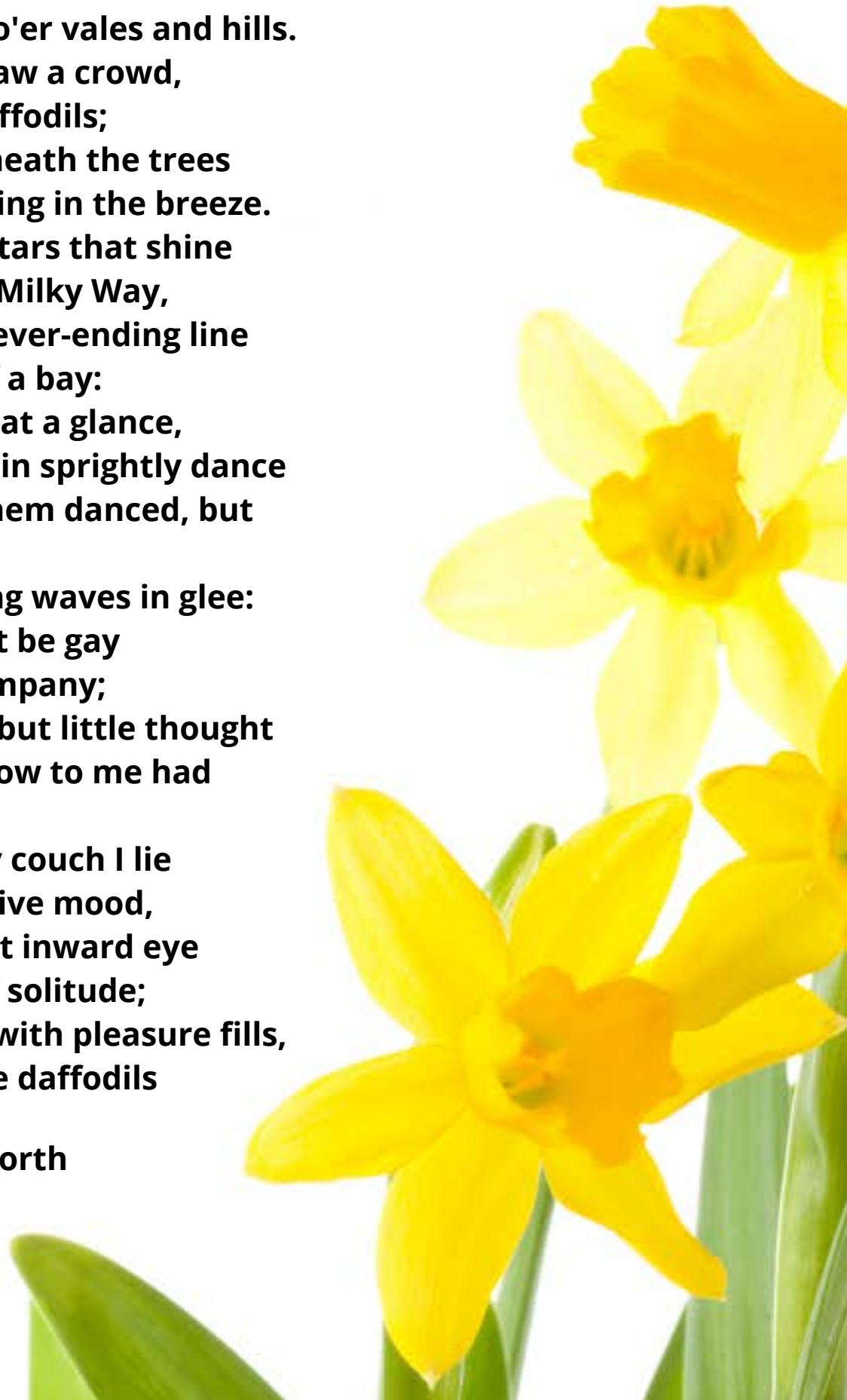
And that is what we are called to do as well. We are summoned at the very core of the gospel to be people who go out and demonstrate God's goodness to everyone. We are inclusive, breaking the boundaries that those in power like to maintain, tearing down the fences that those in power like to put in place. We are free, going beyond what has always been done or what we have been told to do to discover new ways to spread Jesus' love. And above all, we see our personal spiritual growth as a central part of who we are.

As Christians today, we have a delightful opportunity to continue to praise God, to do amazing, unexpected things, to share what we have with one another so all may have enough and to point out what is good in the world and demonstrate God's love to everyone. And for this opportunity, for this challenge, thanks be to God.

DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills.
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance
The waves beside them danced, but
they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company;
I gazed--and gazed--but little thought
What wealth the show to me had
brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils

- William Wordsworth





Celebration of a Dear Friend at the End of Life

This poem reminds me of you, an unfettered spirit,
free and dancing in the clouds, the hills and the
breeze

I will hold you in my heart as you dance on forever

Thank you for our years of treasured friendship, for
sharing the richness of life and all that it throws at
us, for the hours of profound conversation,
expanding us into the universe, the stars and
beyond: for the laughs, the fun and sharing the
sorrows. It's been quite the dance and I have
cherished every moment!

I see you dancing in the flowers always

Thank you, it has been a deep privilege

Your friend forever

**“YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU, BUT YOU
DO NOT ALWAYS HAVE ME.”
A SERMON BY REV GRANT**

That’s an odd phrase and would almost seem to belie a rather pessimistic fatalism in Jesus' view of the world. Judas wants to use the expensive oil that is being poured on his feet by Mary to help feed the poor and clothe the naked and house the homeless and accomplish any number of similarly worthwhile tasks. (Now the writer of John questions the real motives of Judas, but nonetheless this is the proposition he publicly puts forward to Jesus.) And Jesus seems almost to dismiss it out of hand, as if he feels that this little bit of aid can do nothing significant or lasting for the world. The poor are a permanent feature of society, so why even try to help them? Indeed, one may even detect a touch of egoism on Jesus' part here. It is almost as if he is saying:

“Why spend the money on the unsolvable problem of poverty when you can spend it instead on me?”

Looking at Jesus' entire ministry, however, we can see that these words are not a reflection of either a laissez faire attitude to social problems or a self-centered desire to be pampered. Jesus spent his life raising up the poor and freeing the captives of disease and fear.

Jesus upheld the model of the servant as the role he would fulfill, and indeed, on another occasion, actually washed the feet of his followers himself. There's obviously another point being made here which gives the words their meaning for then and for now.

So let's examine the situation more closely. The disciples were at a banquet. And as was the eastern tradition of the time, they would have been lying on couches with their arms resting on pillows. Thus, their legs would have been pointing outward, and it would have been the role of the servants of the

of the household to wash the grime of travel from their feet as a sign of respect and hospitality. However, at this meal, something most unexpected and disturbing happened.

Mary, who seems to have been one of the hosts of the event, took the servant's part, not only washing the feet of her guests, but anointing Jesus' feet not with water, but oil of pure nard.

More than this, she was obviously in an emotionally distraught state, for she wiped his feet with her hair. Her washing actions were inappropriate to say the least, and her touching of Jesus' feet with her hair was nothing short of obscene. Everyone was undoubtedly upset. I am sure that the disciples were straining to ignore what was going on, hoping that she would just go away or that somebody else would get rid of her. Judas, however, was not one to moderate words, and probably expressed the shock of all the others at the table when he asked why Jesus was allowing this to happen. Couldn't this oil be sold and spent on the poor?

To this Jesus replied, "My poor misguided friend, wonderful things you could do for the poor, if you really wanted to, but right now what is important is that this woman is pouring out her love for me and what I represent to her. Helping the poor is both meaningful and necessary, but they will still be around when this supper is through. At this moment what would be really helpful would be for us to allow this woman to show how she feels. Her openness is something from which the rest of you could learn."

Jesus was deeply aware of the necessity to love the world with acts of compassion and self-giving. He spent his life doing it, but he was equally firm in his understanding of the necessity of emotional outpouring and celebration as fundamental parts of human existence.

That is the point that he was stressing here. In the things we do we must include love and compassion and charity and help, but we must also incorporate into our lives worship, and thankfulness and celebration and other spontaneous expressions of joy.

We sometimes forget this in our work, and then life becomes drear and driven. We sometimes forget this when we face the great social issues of our time, and then we feel overextended and overwhelmed by the immensity of the world's problems.

Stephen R. Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, makes a similar point in his retelling of the Aesop fable of the golden goose. You remember this was the tale of the poor farmer who found a golden egg in the barn one morning, and tried scraping the gold from it, believing that this was but a poor joke, only to discover that the egg was indeed gold. So, day after day, the eggs arrived and with them came more land and houses and livestock and prestige. He got the new computer software he had been wanting and the new chariot and the vacation in Spain. But he also gained avarice and wanted eggs more than once a day. So he killed the goose that laid the golden egg and ripped it open to find all the gold lying hidden inside only to discover the visceral innards of an ordinary goose.

We need to produce things that are worthwhile in life, but in order for that to happen we also need patience and waiting.

Judas wanted Jesus to concentrate solely on solving all the problems of the poor, and Jesus reminded him of the immensity of those problems and of the fact that, in order to have the strength to tackle them effectively, he would need times of celebration like the one in which Mary was participating.

We too need the moments of celebration and relaxation. We find them in times like the one we are sharing now—in worship. But we need more than just this one hour a week.

Throughout our daily routines, we need art, and we need sport, and we need play. We need all of those activities in which we rebuild ourselves, if we are going to have the strength or the vision or the joy to produce the golden eggs.

So the question becomes, how do we set our priorities in life to accomplish this, especially in a world in which we are pushed to produce? Indeed, we are often measured by how much we accomplish or how much we do or how many committees we are on or how many goals we reach. I realize now that even we supposedly retired folks have busy schedules, cluttered with tasks others expect us to perform and appointments we must make.

We all need to make our time for renewal in life, and we can begin to do this by nurturing the image of God as a God of playfulness. Now that is not a common image. We remember God as the Creator and Judge and Ruler, but seldom as a God who wishes us to enjoy ourselves.

But remember our reading from Isaiah. There we are given a long list of the things which God had done and then we are told that these things are there: "...so that they might declare my praise." God expects us to worship. God wants us to take time to celebrate the good that is around us and within us.

Or remember Jesus. At least on ten occasions in the Gospels he is recorded as taking time to dine with his friends. In fact, one of the major criticisms raised against Jesus was that he wasted his time eating and drinking with sinners. He should have been out there doing something worthwhile, but instead he went to weddings and other celebrations of various kinds.

Or think of how many times we are told that Jesus went off by himself to pray.

Somewhere in our remembering of Christian scripture we have forgotten this and thus have distorted our priorities. We think about loving acts and believe that performing them is a full time job, and about caring for friends, and believe that that is a full time job, and about seeking justice for the poor, and believe that the search for that is our major task. The Bible, however, talks far more about praising, worshipping and eating together as our rightful activities. What was the first sign of the early Christian community? It wasn't its theology or its ethics, but the fact that they broke bread together. What an unproductive activity! But it made them who they were.

God is a God who calls us to celebrate- to take time in life to rebuild who we are and delight in what we have accomplished. So we must recognize this call to relax and enjoy as well as to work and to struggle, and then we must learn to make celebration, lightness, play and pleasure parts of our lives.

One of the most popular books of theological comment in the 70's was to a dancing god by Sam Keen, and in it the author remembers a day in his childhood:

Long ago, when I wore short pants and shot marbles with my left hand, I formed an impression of education which has recently returned to haunt me.

Mrs. Jones' first-grade classroom always seemed dark, but on this particular day, it was more depressing than usual. For an eternal afternoon I sat practicing my penmanship exercises, listening to Mrs. Jones' monotone:

"Make your i's come all the way up to the middle line. And don't forget to make your o's nice and round. Circle, circle, circle. Period. Now repeat." Caught somewhere between boredom and despair I struggled against tears and settled in to wait for the resurrection - the 3:00 o'clock bell. And then it happened. A movement in a tree outside the window caught my eye and there, in the sweet redeeming light of the springtime world, was a summer warbler building a nest. Caught in wonder I followed the progress of the nest construction and dreamt of the time when I would be a great ornithologist. My i's and o's were forgotten until Mrs. Jones materialized over my shoulder and demanded to know why three lines in my penmanship book were empty. Instinct warned me that no serendipitous warbler, no private fascination, could provide an excuse for the neglect of my serious educational duties. So I bit my tongue, cherished my wonder in silence, and stayed in after school to make up my lesson.

Mrs. Jones won more than the day. Schooling became a habit for me, and I remained in the classroom for twenty-five years and five degrees without

seriously questioning the maxim that private enthusiasm must be divorced from the educational task.

... It is not surprising that when I finally left the classroom I could dot my i's and make my o's round. But the warbler was gone.

We must teach ourselves to see the warblers in life- to pay attention to those wondrous impulses and events that call us away from work into moments of joy and renewal.

Now I know that spontaneousness is difficult to learn. It cannot be forced. That reminds me of the thank you notes I used to write my aunts as a child. "Dear Aunt So and-So, thank you for the beautiful shirt that you sent to me. I never added, "I would rather have received a toy."

No, we're looking here for that kind of thanksgiving that comes from the heart and that enthusiasm that springs from the depths of who we are.

One way to begin nurturing this in our daily lives is to put it on our schedule. The Jews in their wisdom put aside one day a week—one seventh of the time for worship, and more if you add in religious holidays of one kind or another. How much time do we take from our more pressured days to rebuild ourselves?

Now I realize that if you are not in the habit of doing this type of thing, you will probably spend your first free period sitting in a chair trying to think of productive, creative things you can do, but once it does indeed become a usual part of living, it is amazing how many wild and joyous ideas will flood into your waiting mind.

The next step is to begin paying attention to the marvellous moments in the rest of life when we sense God near us—times when we escape from what we thought would be doom, times when we suddenly encounter a friend on the street, times when we are given a pleasant task to do. And when we notice these good things occurring, then let us have the honesty to stop and quietly say thank you—to stop just to enjoy the moment.

We have trouble with just stopping and enjoying. We always want to control it. Even in our worship we speak about how God acts among us, but usually want to be in charge of everything to the nth degree.

Indeed, one of the most moving and meaningful services I have ever attended was in a small almost roofless Church in Cuernavaca, Mexico. The priest began by asking people to respond to what God was saying to them that day. It was amazing. We had forty-five minutes of extemporaneous comments, poems, songs, and prayers. We worshipped without a set order or even slides to help us, but rather with a deep understanding of who God was and what God had done and was doing.

The fascinating reality is that as we learn to let go at times in our lives—as we begin to spend some of our energy on self-building and the expression of joy, our self-worth and energy levels grow, and thus the work we do becomes more meaningful and more complete.

The playful side of life balances and gives power to the working aspect of reality. They are both necessary; they are both God-given.

Yes, we shall always have the poor with us, and we must be concerned with their welfare and with all the other tasks in life God gives us to do, but we must also set aside moments to celebrate life's goodness, for it is on these occasions that we rediscover our identity as people made by God for goodness and so gain the strength we need to serve and celebrate each day.



MEET JEDDA

Jackie Walters has been accepted into the CNIB guide dog puppy raising program. The puppy will be expected to go everywhere with her and be exposed to many different environments.

Jedda is very friendly and sociable and when she is not wearing her yellow CNIB Guide Dog in Training vest, she loves to say hi.

Jedda will wear her yellow vest when in working mode. While wearing her yellow vest, she will be learning and working hard to ignore and remain calm around distractions. Then it is really helpful for people to avoid petting her at those times.

It may help to put ourselves in the shoes of a blind person. It could be dangerous for them and adversely affect their movements and ability to get things done if people kept stopping them to pet their dog. Jedda appreciates the efforts of the congregation to support her training and for setting her up for success.

For those who are interested in learning more, go to www.cnib.ca for a 5 minute video explaining this great program. Jackie will also be available to answer any questions when at the church. CNIB have a webpage for further information on their services.

Footnote: CNIB = Canadian National Institute for the Blind



GARDENING

This picture certainly does not capture the beauty of the scene, but it is the only one I have of the location from this angle. It depicts the bottom of the garden of our first house in Kirkton, north of London, Ontario. The yard itself was actually quite large behind a brand new all electric house. There was a cement deck, and then the land sloped down in a lawn, ending in a stream behind which—although they do not appear in this picture—there were usually racehorses grazing.



You will note that between the yard and the stream, which is under the tree, there is a patch of what most people would refer to as “weeds.” (I prefer wildflowers in their natural setting). Also, you will note the cement top of our well, which was the best running artesian well in the village.

This patch of undergrowth is the centre of my thoughts today. It was about 1 or 2 metres wide, and I left it just as it grew: no planning, no planting, no pruning. The only exception to this rule I did put in place was that if any really noxious plants did sprout up, I cut them down. I left things this way, because I wanted to remind myself that, although I worked very diligently maintaining the garden, even without all my fretting and sweating beauty would naturally come from the ground without my toil.

And this, of course, relates to life in general. We don't need to do everything. Indeed, we can't do everything. So, we must learn to leave the rest of the universe that is beyond our reach in the hands of God.

The fact is that we can get so caught up obsessing about all the things we could do or should do that we lose sight of the fact that, although we have many dreams and can set up many items on our to do list, there is only so much time and energy we have been given to complete our tasks. But that should not give us cause to worry because other people work around us, and God works over all. So, we should learn to do what we can do and do it in the best way possible, but then leave the rest in God's quite adequate care.

A GRATEFUL DAY

You think this is just another day in your life

It's not just another day

It's the one day that is given to you

Today

It's a gift

It's the only gift that you have right now

And the only appropriate response is gratefulness.

If you learn to respond as if it were the first day in your life and the very last day

Then you will have spent this day very well

Begin by opening your eyes and be surprised that you have eyes you can open

to see that incredible wave of colours that is constantly offered to us for pure enjoyment

Look at the sky; we so rarely look at the sky

It looks so different from moment to moment with clouds coming and going

Open your eyes, look at that

Look at the faces of people whom you meet

Each one has an incredible story behind their face

Not only their own story, but the story of their ancestors

Find that life from generations and from so many places all over the world

Flows together and meets you here

Like a life-giving water, if only you open your heart and drink

Open your heart to all these blessings
and let them flow through you
That everyone you meet on this day
will be blessed by you
Just by your presence

Let the gratefulness overflow into blessing all around you

Then it will be a really good day

- Brother David Steindl-Rast



Every Day
is a Gift
make the most
of it

Footnote: Brother David Steindl- Rast is a Benedictine monk, spiritual leader and author, with a message that we should live our lives with ongoing awareness of the constant miracle in which we all live. He is also known for his work in interfaith dialogue.

FEATURING OUR GREATEST STRENGTH — OUR RDLUC PEOPLE

This series of monthly articles will profile—with their permission, of course—one of the individuals, couples, or families that make our church the unique and special place it is. Who is ‘important’ enough to be featured here? Everyone! This month, we get to know **Vi and John Sharpe**.



Twenty-three years ago, the Sharpes moved back from Malaysia (where John, an engineer, had been working) to settle on an acreage in Priddis, Alberta. Because church is important to their lives, they sought one right away and found RDLUC. Lo and behold, Pat and Martin Claydon were amongst the first to greet them! This was amazing because Vi and John had known the Claydons in Malaysia, where Martin was also doing engineering work, and both couples had attended the same church there! “It was a great reunion,” Vi recalls. “And everyone else was so friendly as well.”

They had four young children (two of whom they adopted, while still in Malaysia, from an orphanage where Vi volunteered!), so Vi got involved right away with teaching Sunday School. She also became part of the healing team, an interest dear to her heart. “As time went on,” she smiles, “it seems I participated in most other areas of church activity as well: worship, outreach, the board, and the

choir, to name a few. As for John, he was part of the 'Core Strategy Team', a group that made a presentation to the United Church Northwest Conference when RDLUC was grappling with the issue of expansion. And the outcome of that presentation led to the construction of our big new sanctuary that stands beside the old chapel!" Yes, we have ample reason for abundant gratitude to both members of this wonderful couple who have made so many contributions to our church community.

When Nick was hired ten years ago as our minister, he sought someone to help him out in the congregational care area. With her grief counselling and social work background, who was a better fit for that job than Vi? She took it on with all the dedication we have come to know her for. When COVID hit, a team of food preparers and literature-package assemblers materialized under her coordination, with the mission of reaching out to seniors and shut-ins and making them feel remembered and cared for by their church family. Packages (containing both the food and the literature) began to be delivered monthly by a volunteer delivery team set up by Vi. This project has been so successful that it continues to this day. "It's all about making people feel loved, included and connected," says Vi. "It's how we actualize Christ for each other in our world."

At the end of this May, after nearly ten years of outstanding service, Vi will retire from her position as Red Deer Lake United Church's Congregational Care Coordinator. John, too, is now retired. They plan on moving to B.C. to be closer to their children and grandchildren. As sorry as we are that they are leaving us, we wish them all the best as they embark on their next adventures. The shoes they leave behind will be huge ones to fill.

John and Vi, we love you, and we will carry you always with us in our hearts!



Our thanks to Fran Porter for writing this submission

YOUR SMILE FOR THE DAY



A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion



I thought I saw an eye doctor on an Alaskan island,
but it turned out to be an optical Aleutian.

She was only a whiskey maker, but he loved her still.

A rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra
class because it was a weapon of math disruption.

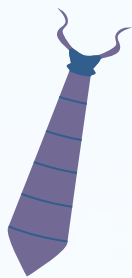


No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still
be stationary.

A dog gave birth to puppies near the road and was
cited for littering



A grenade thrown into a kitchen in France would result
in Linoleum Blowapart



Two silk worms had a race. They ended up in a tie.

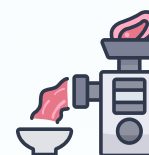
A backward poet writes inverse

When cannibals ate a missionary,
they got a taste of religion.



Don't join dangerous cults: Practice safe sects.

The butcher backed into the meat grinder and got a
little behind in his work



YOUR SMILE FOR THE DAY



WE ARE RED DEER LAKE UNITED CHURCH



We are an inclusive and affirming community of faith – people of all ages, perspectives, and stories, who gather to connect with God, each other, and ourselves, and find in Jesus a new way of being human and alive in the world.

**you're welcome, wanted,
and accepted. join us on
the journey.**

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CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Thursday

9am - 3pm

Do you have a story to share? A memory? A poem? A photograph? We would love to publish it in the next issue of this magazine.

Please call us at **(403) 256-3181** or send your submission to **info@reddeerlakeuc.com**

**The next submission deadline is
Sept 3, 2023**