March 15, 2020 Third Sunday in Lent

GREETING OF PEACE

Peace be with you.

**And also with you.**

LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

Good morning and welcome to this online gathering of Rosedale United Church. It’s good to be with you and to be together during this season of Lent. What a week it’s been – everything is different from just one week ago. We hope you’re settled someplace comfy and that you have a coffee or tea to enjoy. Hello to any of the kids listening, we hope you’re comfy too colouring, or building Lego, or whatever as you listen. It is so meaningful to this community that you have chosen to be here.

Our core practices at Rosedale United are to learn, to grow, and to serve, regardless of whether we’re gathering online or in person. As you know, all of us are working to curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease, so for as long as necessary we’ll work to put together these online gatherings to support you in your spiritual practice at home. Our goal is to keep these gatherings as similar as possible to what you’re used to when you come to church, but of course they won’t be entirely the same.

The beautiful flowers we have today are in loving memory of Nancy Adams MacDonnell wife to Phil MacDonnell, mother to Samantha, Sally and Susie, and sister to Sally Medland.

So let’s center ourselves, and settle into this time together with our gathering prayer…

GATHERING PRAYER, CONFESSION, LORD’S PRAYER

***Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.***

THEME TIME

Talk about going through a change you didn’t anticipate…

WE BRING OUR GIFTS

We encourage you during this time to donate online or by mail. Your support of this community matters, especially now.

FIRST READING Exodus 17:1–7

Water from the rock.

MESSAGE- Rev. Kristin Philipson

May the blessing of God go before you. May God's Grace and peace abound. May God's Spirit live within you.  
May God's Love wrap you ‘round. May God’s Blessing remain with you always. May you walk on holy ground.

Drawing Water from a Rock

Exodus 17:1-7

By Rev. Kristin Philipson

March 15, 2020, Lent 3

The sacred stories we encounter in this season of Lent all touch on what it means to be faithful; the characters all exhibit a radical faithful virtue that becomes a kind of take-away for us in living our own lives as people of faith in the world. In the first week of Lent we lifted up the virtue of trust. Last week we talked about taking risks. So, let’s dig into this week’s story to see what it holds for us to learn.

The story about the “water from the rock” in the book of Exodus is a story about a group of people who are anxious; they’re worried, afraid. They’re are on a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, but they don’t know where that is or how to get there. They’re all starting to feel really vulnerable and full of questions and when we meet them, they’ve just arrived at this place called Rephidim. It’s a new place for them – they’ve never been there before – they have no idea how things will go for them in the next 24 hours, a week out. Doubt is seeping in, like a drink spilled on the carpet, like a leak in the ceiling.

As people do when they’re feeling vulnerable and anxious, the group lashed out at Moses: “Where are we? Why did you bring us to this place? How are we going to survive here?” The people of Israel don’t actually say it out loud, but there’s another question on their minds; it’s what they’re really concerned about: “is the Lord – is God, is Spirit – among us or not?” Are we facing all of *this* – this journey, this wilderness, these places we’ve never been before, these situations we couldn’t anticipate and don’t know how to manage – on our own? Is our faith really something solid we can lean on right now? Will it bring us water – nourishment, refreshment – in this desert? Will it do any good?

All of us are also on a journey, of sorts, right now. In the past few days global events have seen us all move deeper into a kind of wilderness, to places we’ve never been. We’re all looking now at a landscape that’s totally new and unfamiliar. Italy, Spain, France – countries to which many of us have travelled to enjoy the art, the food, maybe we’ve cycled the old roads – all of them now are under total quarantine to try to prevent the spread of the infectious COVID-19 virus. We weren’t predicting this, even a week ago, but this is the unfamiliar land in which we now find ourselves. And where will we be 24 hours from now? A week from now? Like the people of Israel, we might be worried, anxious, wondering where we go from here, thirsting for some kind of refreshment in this desert, some nourishment. And underneath all our anxiety the same, ancient, question: Is the Lord – is God, is Spirit – among us or not? Is faith something we can really lean on right now? How will it conjure water for us in this desert? What good will it do in this strange territory?

In our sacred story from Exodus, God says to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people…take in your hands the staff with which you struck the Nile…[and] I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” It’s one of our deepest convictions as people of faith that God provides; that the Spirit is at work in our world, filling us, nourishing us, empowering us, healing us, caring for us. It’s also one of our deepest convictions that God’s Spirit works through us and others. God’s medium of choice is the human being. Was God there with the people of Israel when they were in wilderness? Yes; God was working through Moses. Moses strikes the rock – he partners with God, works with God, incarnates God – and the water flowed.

I want you to think back to other “wilderness” times in your life – those times when you were on some kind of a journey – be it emotional, spiritual, physical – whatever kind of journey it was, you were in unchartered territory, in a place you’d never been. You were anxious and you needed refreshment, nourishment. You wondered where it would come from. Maybe you wondered if God was with you or not. Was there a Moses in your life? Was there someone who worked with God and so you felt healing flow into you, like water, hope flow like water, calm and peace flow like water? Roberta – what about you?

In this week of Lent and particularly at this juncture in our history, here’s the radical virtue of faithfulness that our story lifts up and ask us to embrace: partnership, incarnation, working with God, with Spirit, that God’s Spirit might be in us and work through us to nourish and heal others. Here’s the invitation for today and the next few days: people around us are thirsty for hope, for peace, for joy, for love, so be like Moses and strike the rock, partner with Spirit to allow those waters to flow. Who do you know who is struggling right now? Who is on their own? What if each of us phoned five or ten people not in our own family? What if we checked in with three neighbours by phone or email? What if we offered to listen, to help as we are able? What would suddenly flow but the waters of healing, and peace?

“Like a healing stream in a barren desert,  
Spirit water bringing life to dusty earth,  
God is trickling through our lives as in a dream unfolding, promising revival and rebirth...  
Like a healing stream.”

Amen.