**Author’s Note:** This service is meant to provide options for the different liturgical pieces of worship so that you can either use it “as is” or mix and match with the traditions that your own congregation holds. You are welcome to use what is helpful, change what you need to, and ignore what doesn’t work for your congregation. Thank you for leading worship on this Regional Council Sunday!

Blessings,

Janelle Shaw

Lafleche-Limerick Pastoral Charge

***Acknowledging the Territory***

We begin our worship by remembering where we gather. As people of Southern Saskatchewan, we live and love, worship and work on land that is the traditional territory of the Lakota, Nakota, Dakota, Saulteaux, Cree and Metis Peoples, an area which is more recently known as Treaty 4 land ***(replace with the Nations and Treaties in your own area)*** and we give thanks for the spirituality and stewardship of this land’s first inhabitants.

As people of the United Church of Canada, we remember the harm that has been and continues to be done to our Indigenous kindred in the name of God, and by the authority of our Church, and we repent and ask forgiveness.

As people of this planet we call Earth, we remember that we are all connected and we seek to live in right relationship and reconciliation with other children of the Creator. We remember that we are Treaty People, and we seek to follow in the way of Jesus, who calls us to love one another as he has loved us.

***Call to Worship:***

**One:** Go deep, they say. But deep can be frightening. I am far from the safety of shore. And what if I run out of breath?

**All:** But deep can also be enlivening! It is when we leave the shallows that we truly connect with one another and with God and are reminded that the Breath of Life will always sustain us.

**One:** Be bold, they say. But being bold gets me noticed and sometimes labeled in ways I don’t want to be – bossy, pushy, strange.

**All:** But bold also means that we are courageous and confident in who and whose we are. We belong to God and we are called to share God’s love and do God’s work in this world.

**One:** Be daring, they say. But being daring inevitably puts me outside my comfort zone and that can be dangerous.

**All:** But God never said a life of faith would be safe or easy. Sometimes we have to set aside our comfort for the good of all and the sake of justice and righteousness.

**One:** So, come, let us worship today, the One who calls us to Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice.

**All:** We are here! Let us worship!

***OR***

**One:** Today we gather to worship God – the One who calls, teaches, and encourages us. We come from our daily living to this place where we are renewed for the work of our lives and our church – Deep Spiritualty, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice. Let us gather in that spirit and go out to share this love with one another and with God.

***Lighting the Christ Candle***

We light our Christ Candle as a reminder that God is present in this place – the One who is Creator, Christ, and Spirit will never leave us or forsake us. And so we light this candle as a physical symbol of the love that surrounds, sustains, and nurtures us in this place and when we extinguish it at the end of the service, we remember that this love continues on in us as we go out into the world.

***Prayer of Approach:***

**Holy One, you have called us into this time and place of worship and so we come, ready to meet you here. Make your presence known as we gather and so fill us with your love and Spirit, that we might be strengthened in our faith and in our living. Help us to deeply share our lives with you, teach us the ways in which we might be your disciples, and increase our hunger for justice that we might live out your call. All this we pray in the name of Jesus, our Saviour, Friend, and Guide. Amen.**

***Hymn:*** Choose one of the list below, or a hymn of your own liking…

MV6 Holy Spirit, Come Into Our Lives

MV 79 Spirit, Open My Heart

VU 401 Worship the Lord

VU 567 Will You Come and Follow Me

***Prayer of Confession:***

**Loving God, you have asked of us only to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you”, but so often we find those challenging to do and find excuses to walk our own path. Forgive us, we pray, when we have sought our own comfort over the care for the most vulnerable and your creation. Forgive us, we pray, when we have not lived as your disciples – that “they will know us by our love”. Forgive us, we pray, when we have not taken the time to truly break open our hearts and minds before you so that we might be in the relationship you desire. Help us to walk in the ways you call. Amen.**

***Words of Assurance:***

Friends, there is good news for us. There is nothing that separates us from the love of God. There is no where we can go and nothing we can do that we will be outside of God’s forgiving embrace. So take heart, you are loved and forgiven, and are never alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

***Scripture:*** Acts 16:16-40

***Time With All God’s Children***



*Show the above picture.*

This is the symbol that represents the Call and Vision of the United Church of Canada, what we believe God wants us to do and be in the world. What shapes to you see? *(accept all answers, but look for “flower” and/or “crest”)*. That’s right! This is a picture of a flower and each petal is in the shape of the United Church crest. Both of these things are really important in this symbol.

The crest reminds us that we are part of the United Church and that means we are not just part of our local congregation, but connected to congregations all across the country as we try our best to live like God wants us to. We can help each other, pray for each other, and work and worship together as we learn about God, live like Jesus, and make sure that people all around the world are treated fairly and kindly.

When you put all three crests together, you get a flower. Each petal is pretty and important on its own, but when they come together you get the beautiful flower. That’s the same way with the three parts of the Call and Vision. You can have each part by itself and it’s beautiful and important, but when you put them all together, you get something extra special.

So let’s take a minute to talk about each of the three phrases in our Call and Vision: Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice.

“Spirituality is not something we can see; it is something we feel inside ourselves. It is about awe and wonder, asking questions, inspiration and being aware of something ‘bigger’ outside of ourselves.” *(from St. Andrew’s Church of England Primary School in Woodhall Spa, England)* It is often explained as our relationship to God or nature and when we talk about “Deep Spirituality” we mean that we spend time with God, sharing what’s on our hearts and minds – the good things, the bad things, and everything in between – and letting God talk to us to in many different ways.

Bold Discipleship means following the things that Jesus taught his closest friends to do and be. Sometimes following Jesus isn’t easy because it means doing something that is hard (like loving people who are mean) or a bit dangerous (like standing up to the bully so they stop picking on someone else). But being bold means to remember that we can do hard things when we walk with Jesus beside us.

Daring Justice means to be courageous and brave when we speak out to make sure that everyone is treated fairly no matter who they are, what they look like, what they believe, or who they love. We remember that God loves everyone and that as humans, we are supposed to make sure that everyone has access to the important things of life – like food and water, safety, and love.

Thanks for joining me to learn a bit more about this beautiful flower that is created by our Call and Vision!

***Hymn:*** Choose one of the list below, or a hymn of your own liking…

MV 156 Dance With the Spirit

MV 161 I Have Called You By Your Name

VU 509 Here I Am Lord

VU 578 As A Fire Is Meant for Burning

***Sermon:*** Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice

Love them or hate them (and there are plenty of reasons to do both in Paul’s case), in the twenty-four verses of today’s scripture reading, Paul and Silas teach us what it is to live out your faith – in the words of Micah, to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God” and in the words of the Call and Vision of the United Church to live out “deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.”

Paul and Silas are in Phillipi where they have recently met Lydia, a “dealer in purple cloth” (a high-end business woman) who likes what they are teaching and has her entire household baptized. She becomes a leader in the Church at Phillipi and Paul and Silas have been staying at her house. One day when they are on the way to the place of prayer, they encounter a young girl who has been enslaved and is being exploited for her talents in fortune-telling. Seeing this, Paul and Silas have two choices: they can walk away and pretend that they have not seen this young woman or her plight, or they can do something about it. It’s a moment of decision and it is not devoid of consequences either way.

Initially, it seems, Paul chooses the first option, because for many days, she follows them each time they walk past her, crying out that they are proclaiming a way of salvation – presumably the same things that Paul himself is saying when he teaches and argues in the places of prayer and in the market-place – but not in the way or place he wants, because in annoyance, he turns and commands the spirit inside her to vacate the premise and it does so immediately.

In his irritation, he frees this young woman from the spirit but also takes away her value to her enslavers and puts her in danger, as well as placing himself and Silas in a difficult situation when they are brought before the Magistrates. In doing so, he reminds us that Daring Justice is complicated.

Some days we absolutely know what to do to bring about justice – it is right for the other person/people, right for us, and safe for all involved. Those are the easy days. Other times we come to questions of justice weighing what harm might come to those involved and trying to decide what course of action will do the LEAST harm, recognizing that someone is always going to get hurt. And yet other times, we come at these issues of justice not with the best for another in our heart, but our own annoyance or discomfort with a situation, and almost as a by-product, bring justice to the world. Daring Justice looks like all of these and more. It is not always easy, but it is the Call of God that we are to care for the most vulnerable and work for a world where everyone can be free of exploitation and fear, and can live to their fullest potential.

So Paul and Silas end up arrested and thrown in prison and as the night grows late and the shadows grow long, they pass the time singing hymns and praying in their cell. This is not a good day for them. It is the first time in the book of Acts that we see them imprisoned. They have been flogged and are now in the innermost part of the prison, shackled and unable to move. And so they pray and sing. In this moment of what I imagine must have been great fear and uncertainty, in the grips of a challenge that could see their travelling ministry stopped before it has even really gotten started, Paul and Silas take time for prayer and song.

We know from the letters that Paul writes to the churches he has started and left behind as he moves from one place to another sharing the story of Jesus, that he is constantly in prayer of thanksgiving, praying when things are going well. But here we hear of their prayers in the depths of despair and I have to wonder, do we do the same?

When Jesus’ disciples asked him how to pray, he taught them simple words and themes to use to make their prayers a conversation with God and said specifically not to worry about having fancy language because it doesn’t make your prayers heard any more than just speaking from your heart. This is the Deep Spirituality of which we speak in the Call and Vision, the walking humbly with God which Micah proclaims. It is having a relationship with the One who Created Us, the One who Walked with Us, and the One who Enlivens Us Still, experiencing a connection bigger than yourself – whatever that might be and however you would name it. It’s about finding time to develop that relationship – in the good times and the bad times – so that no matter where the road might lead, you know that you are not alone as you journey down it.

So as is the case when you are in confinement and cannot move away from your cell-mates, the other prisoners begin to listen to Paul and Silas as they sing and pray. And suddenly, there is an earthquake so fierce as to open the doors to the cells and break apart the shackles that bind them all. It doesn’t say why they all didn’t immediately run for the exit (though it is certainly implied that Paul and Silas had something to do with it), only that everyone of them stayed, so that when the jailer was awakened and found the doors unlocked, he was surprised to find that not one of his prisoners had escaped as he presumed.

The jailer brings Paul and Silas out and they take the opportunity to share with him the same kind of things they have been saying all night in their prayers and hymns. Through this sharing of story and building of relationship, the jailer decides that he and his household will be baptised that very night. Paul and Silas have taken bold steps in discipleship in order to share the good news that they believe. First Peter 3:15-16 says, “always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.” Paul and Silas are ready. How do we do the same?

Bold Discipleship isn’t about beating someone over the head with a Bible and hoping that they will convert to Christianity. It is about being willing to proclaim that which you believe – not hiding it for fear of being judged, criticized, or challenged. It is about making God a part of your life so that people know that what you do is because of what you believe. It is about building relationship, not on force, but on mutual learning, interest, kindness, and care. It is first and foremost about being a Disciple and secondly about making Disciples.

At the end of the day, Paul and Silas are released from prison and return to Lydia’s house before continuing on to their next destination where they continue to live their lives with Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice. Though these are stories of the great people of our faith, they are also the stories of ordinary life lived out for God in ways that do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. They are their stories, but they are also our stories. Let us tell our stories of Deep, Bold, and Daring and know that we are not alone. Amen.

***Proclaiming Our Faith:*** A New Creed

We are not alone, we live in God’s world.

 We believe in God:

 who has created and is creating,

 who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,

to reconcile and make new,

 who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

 to celebrate God’s presence,

 to live with respect in Creation,

 to love and serve others,

 to seek justice and resist evil,

 to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God!

***Invitation to the Offering***

God has given us so many gifts, and so we give back to God and to God’s work with our whole selves. We take the time to think about how we share our time, how we use our talents, and how we give of our treasure here in this church and in the world around us as we sing our offertory hymn.

***Offertory:*** Choose one of the list below, or a hymn of your own liking…

MV 182 Grateful

MV 191 What Can I Do?

VU 537 Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands

VU 541 Praise Go from Whom All Blessings Flow

***Offertory Prayer***

O God, these are the works of our hands and the love of our hearts. We ask that you accept and bless the gifts that we offer now as a token of the love that we have for you. May they be used to further your work in this church and in the world around us. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

***Prayers of the People***

Holy God, at the beginning of time, you created all life and breathed your Spirit into us. And so we gather here today as your children, eager to share our lives with you. We come running to our Parent, with all the excitement and good news of the day bubbling up within us and escaping our lips with hardly a break for breath. We come in thanksgiving for the joyous moments of our days – the celebrations and moments where life is wonder-full, the times we experience your presence and the moments where we can do nothing else but shout “hallelujah!” We see the places in the world where neighbour helps neighbour, where small actions make big impacts, and where love overcomes hatred, and we rejoice. We share it all with you now, knowing that you rejoice with us.

And we also come, knowing that to be human is to experience the sorrows of life and so we bring our hearts to you, holding them tenderly for they are heavy indeed. We come with many different experiences of the pains of life – grief and loss, pain and illness, fear and uncertainty, and so much more. We see the places in our world where war is the order of the day, where hunger and poverty are something from which you cannot hide, where fire, and flood, and drought make life dangerous and unpredictable and we lament and cry. We share it all with you now, knowing that you weep with us and that you enfold each one in your loving embrace.

Today as representatives of the local communities of faith gather for the closing worship of the Regional Council Gathering, we pray especially that you would send your Spirit upon all those who are being admitted, commissioned, ordained and recognized to continue in leadership within the United Church of Canada. Strengthen them, O God, for the road ahead and remind them that they do not journey alone.

We pray also for those who are retiring this year and we give you thanks for their years of service. Stay with them in their rest and guide them in the next stage of their journey, reminding them that where you lead, they need not fear to tread.

And we pray for all of us, who make up the United Church of Canada within Living Skies Regional Council. We give thanks for those who share their gifts of time, talent, and treasure as we live out our Call and Vision and ask that we might continue to know your presence as we journey the road of life and faith.

O God, you know the prayers of our hearts. The ones we lift up for your creation and the ones that we cry deep in our souls for those who grieve, those who hunger, and those who flee the terrors of their homeland. The ones that we shout from the rafters as we celebrate, and the ones for which we cannot find the words. So we pray in silence for the people, places and situations that are on our hearts this day. *(Time of Silent Prayer)*

Creator, Word, and Spirit, we continue our prayers in the words that Jesus taught the first disciples, who then passed it on to their disciples and down through the generations until they fall from our lips now as we unite our hearts and voices. We pray together: *(Use whichever version of the Lord’s Prayer/Prayer of Jesus that is custom in your community of faith.)* Amen.

***Hymn:*** Choose one of the list below, or a hymn of your own liking…

MV 154 Deep In Our Hearts

MV 209 Go Make A Diff’rence

VU 510 We Have This Ministry

VU 884 You Shall Go Out with Joy

***Commissioning and Blessing***

Friends, as you go from this time and place of worship, may you Go Deep, Go Bold, and Go Daring as you live out your faith and share the love of God with all the world.

And as you go, may you go with the blessing and love of God who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, Jesus, who is our Elder Brother, and the Holy Spirit of Life, within you this day and evermore. Amen.