

# Worship with McClure United Church

October 18, 2020

## Welcome

Welcome to worship with the McClure United Church. Thank you for spending this time with us. It is my prayer that what is offered here today will be a blessing to you as you live out your call as a disciple of Jesus.

McClure is a church of welcome and mission. It is with gratitude that we offer this ministry on Treaty 6 land and the traditional homeland of the Metis.

Here are a few things to keep in mind this coming week.

Some exciting news from our Outreach Committee to “Be the Church”.

If you need to get rid of all those cans and bottles that have been collecting during COVID - in your garage? They have the perfect solution!

Please bring your donation of cans and bottles in a bag which is securely tied at the top. Kindly deliver these items to the McClure United Church parking lot on:

Thursday, October 22, from 6-8 pm OR Friday, October 23, from 10-12noon.

The Cosmo Industries truck will be there to collect your donation. And Cosmo will benefit from your donation. Who is Cosmo? They are a non-profit organization in Saskatoon that exists to provide opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities. They offer a community-based approach which includes quality of life, satellite and supported work programs with the intent that each individual they serve can live a more meaningful productive life. To date, they receive funding from the government for participants and staff, but they rely fully on fundraisers for all their quality programming. Here's our chance to make a difference.

For further information you can check them out online at [www.cosmoindustries.com](http://www.cosmoindustries.com)

Cash donations are also welcome and will be sent to Cosmo Industries. They can be dropped off at the event on Thursday evening or Friday morning. Another option is to donate by cheque or e-transfer to McClure United Church as a specific donation to "Being the Church".

In addition to our upcoming Bottle Drive on October 22 and 23, We will also be selling honey.

"You know that delicious honey that was sold at the November sale for the last two years??? Well this local honey from The Lucky Bees Apiary of Joe and Janet Olson (who are family to a resident in the McClure tower) will be available during the bottle drive. We are so excited to partner with the Olson's again and thank them for their generosity. Proceeds will go toward caring for our refugee family that we hope will arrive later in October. This is another real opportunity to "Bee 🐝 the church"!

Hope to see you buzzing around soon! Please wear your masks!!"

I am also very excited to welcome Avyn Koyl to McClure. Avyn is our new office administrator. You are going to like her. She brings a wonderful energy to the office and a long list of skills. Unfortunately, you are not able to stop by the office to say hi but I do encourage you to send an email to the office with words of welcome and good wishes.

WE are going to be doing a Full congregation "check in" by phone over the next few weeks and if you would like to be a phoner we could use your help. Please contact Ruth if you can help out.

I am grateful to those helping with worship today – Our musicians Elin Sletmoen and Shirley Blackburn and our reader today is our McClure Church treasurer - who has done an incredible job for us Elaine Neibergall.

### **Opening Prayer**

And so, now as we prepare our hearts for worship I invite you to take a moment to open yourselves to the light and love of Jesus. I light this candle as a reminder of Christ's light and I pray you will feel the hope of that light move through you and settle on your heart. (light candle)

We gather now God in your loving presence and in community with all those near and far who are watching this now. Thank you for all the ways you continue to make yourself known in our lives – we know, God, that even a pandemic cannot keep you from us... your love is persistent and relentless – and for that we give you thanks. So may we now open our hearts to your love – allowing you to fill the spaces within and around us.. trusting in your goodness. We ask your forgiveness when we drift away from or even push away your presence. May we always find our way back to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **Scripture**

#### **Matthew 22:15-22**

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. <sup>16</sup>So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. <sup>17</sup>Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" <sup>18</sup>But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup>Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" <sup>21</sup>They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." <sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

*May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of Holy Scripture. Amen.*

### **Reflection**

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

It's that time of the year when we "human beings" are going to engage in what must be one of the most peculiar and uniquely human of all behaviors. Many of us are going to invest a good bit of time and energy and even some hard-earned money to locate and obtain a specific variety of squash. In fact, some of us may even go for a ride in a wagon or a tractor

out into a field, that we don't even own, with the sole purpose of choosing one of these perfect squashes. //We are going to buy a pumpkin, and we are not going to eat it. We are going to hollow that thing out and we're going to carve a face in it. And then we're going to put a candle in it so that the face lights up at night. // Regardless of what you believe about the origins of this Halloween practice, you have to admit it's a rather odd practice. Personally, I have no problem with making jack-o-lanterns. I think it's a lot of fun. However, as human practices go, from start to finish, it's pretty unusual! No other critter on the planet does such things.

We humans like to put our image on strange things and leave our mark. Like graffiti art on a railway car to the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or cave drawings thousands of years old to computer avatars today. We like to leave our mark on interesting things.

Caesar, in Jesus' time, had carved his face on the denarius coin. So, that every time, goods and services exchanged hands it was like Caesar was there, saying "This is mine." Every time one of the empire's taxes came up, Caesar was there, proclaiming, "This is mine, too." The people of religion didn't like it at all.

Currency, especially with a human face on it, was the stuff of idolatry. It was easy to see, given how we value money in our day, how people of Jesus time could start to worship it, to give it more value than anything else. In fact, in addition to Caesar's likeness, each coin also bore an inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus." It was no wonder that the Jewish authorities would have despised it so much. The use of the marked money was a constant reminder of the Roman occupation, and the yearly census tax made it even worse. Each time that tax was paid with one of those coins, it felt like worship to a false god. This is precisely why the Jewish religious leaders find this coin to be the perfect way to trap Jesus. If Jesus agrees to the payment of Caesar's yearly tax, then he will become immediately unpopular with the crowds of, ordinary folk who are following him. They, too, feel that Caesar's face is everywhere, oppressing their livelihood, and the yearly tax was deeply unpopular. It was another form of tribute; that is, a system whereby they handed over a portion of their livelihood in return for protection and the right to live. By consenting to that system Jesus will be seen as just another one of the spineless leaders in hock to the Roman army trying to maintain the status quo. However, if Jesus agrees it is unlawful to pay the tax then he becomes

a normal revolutionary, an upstart war-monger who wants to overthrow Rome. It will be much easier for the authorities to encircle him and label him as a trouble maker.

Jesus' response about paying the tax is remarkable. He manages to wiggle out of their trap by reminding them of something that everyone finds so easy to forget, or worse, easy to deny. What's more extraordinary and ingenious than the face of Caesar on a coin? Well, the fact that each one of us—each pumpkin-carver among us, bears the image of God. From Jesus' point of view, it is no big deal at all to pay Caesar's tribute with the money in our pockets once we remember that we pay tribute of thanksgiving and service to God each and every day with our lives. The currency of Caesar is copper, stone, and sword. And those are powerful, if you want to build a city or an army or pave a road. But the currency of the God Power are things like flesh and blood, intellect and language, creativity and compassion, kindness and passion for justice. Imagine what those things can build.

To be reminded that we are created in God's image is no small thing. I wonder if the Pharisees and Herodians had forgotten it, caught up, as they were, in fretting about how Caesar was laying claim to everything. Come to think of it, I'm not sure **we** really know what it means sometimes to be made in God's image. We hear so many competing definitions of what it means to be human nowadays that our divine qualities get glossed over or downplayed. The brain is just one giant computer, programmed from birth, some say. Others tell us all our features of human-ness can just be explained by cold-hard science, as long as we have the time to figure it out. So many of us get the impression that we are just cogs in a giant machine, working, day in and day out, to pay the bills and make ends meet, worrying if we'll have enough for retirement, focused on what to consume and purchase. Millions of others of us scrape by in the slums of the world's poorest communities, living on little more than a denarius a day. We see, we hear, we sense deep in our bones that we are just pawns of whichever cruel empire is in place, that we are mass - produced squishy computers that can be controlled and manipulated.

The reality, we must remember, is different. The reality is that the God power, in mystery and purpose has carefully chosen each person who has ever walked on this earth, male and female, and said, "This one. This one is mine."

The reality is that each victim of COVID who seems destined to become just another statistic, destined to become just another contagion for us to fear in the attention-hungry news cycle, bears the image of God. Bearing God's image does not just mean that we are precious or worthy. It means that as much as we participate in a world that will always try to convince us otherwise, we have been designed to reflect this God Power back to someone else in a way that contributes to the good.

We could keep all we have too ourselves and I have done this. But I want who I am and what I have to reflect the very face of the one who has claimed me, named me and who is reflected in my being – the God power. It is critical for my walk as God's beloved to contribute my time, my talent and my financial resources to reflect God's heart in the world. This is why I contribute to the life and work of the church. It is critical part of who I am because I believe the Church reflects what God has called me to do –to bear the very image and likeness of God into the world. Through me I want to reflect the God power not only in my daily encounters but also in places I cannot physically reach. Places the church reaches, places of deep need both economic and emotional, I want to be in places of loss and grief, of justice making and radical transformation – of renewal and healing.

It would seem that you want this too. I see how you live your lives and I see the God power reflected in you. I know you are generous toward your church so that the God power in you might be present in those places that you cannot reach personally.

By contributing to McClure United Church, you have sat at the bedside of a person who was dying, and helped a family, crushed by grief say good bye. You have listened to and stood with a person who is struggling with depression, you have prayed with a person wrestling with addiction, you helped hire a chaplain for the three Saskatoon hospitals, you have fed a hungry person and helped cloth someone. Did you know you have sat with an elder and made them smile, and encouraged a care provider to take a break. These are some of things I have been privileged to do on your behalf because you have faithfully supported the ministry of McClure.

This is what has happened because you have chosen to reflect the image of the one who carved you - who has claimed you – in whose image you are made.

If we are created in God's image then how we live must reflect that image in the world – Jesus was convinced that this is true.

Friends God has loved us into bearing God's image.

This is what, I believe, Jesus envisioned when I think of him flipping that coin back into the hands of the Pharisees. He isn't all that impressed with the power of cash or currency, but rather with the beauty of our very beings offered 100% in grateful devotion—each one of us, like a beautiful masterpiece

As we shine, as we reflect the one who has carved love and grace into our very being. As we live as a reflection of the one whose image we bear.

I imagine our creator gazing back at us saying: These ones, these ones are mine.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

And now we gather our hearts together in prayer... opening ourselves to God's abundant love and grace – filling our hearts and holding our minds.

We begin our prayers... with prayers of gratitude

For life...

For love...

For joy...

For the many sweet blessings that fill our days.

We pray gratitude especially for your presence within and around us.

Especially in our more challenging times...

Times of grief...

Of hurt...

Of anger...

Of frustration...

Thank you lifting us up... for holding us tight... for guiding us gently forward.

We turn our prayers to others now...

We pray for all your people,

Especially for those who are lonely...

Who are sad...

Who struggle with internal demons...

Those who feel caught in despair.

May they feel a crack of hope move through their hearts

May they feel the whisper, the gentle touch of your love.

WE offer all of these prayers to you, O God, knowing that you hear these prayers and all of the prayers held in our hearts. Thank you for hearing our call and for answering in love.

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught...

### **Blessing**

Go with grace into a broken and wounded world.

Reflect the one who sends you,

The one who has called you by name,

The one who has shown you the power of love.

We go in the light of our God, the rebel son and the restless Spirit.

Amen.