

# **Worship with McClure United Church**

## **August 30, 2020**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Welcome to worship with the McClure United Church.

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.

For those I haven't met my name is Debra Berg and I am one of the ministers at McClure United Church.

We continue to worship in this virtual way and will need to continue to do so for September and October. We are looking at a modified "in building" worship in November but of course a possible building worship is dependent on Covid and if we are able to ensure that we can keep everyone safe. We have a task group in place – sorting through all the regulations and coming up with a plan. Someone at the Board meeting the other night said we closed like we were a light switch but we will open like a dimmer switch. So true.

We have been busy being the church in August and I want to thank everyone who was able to participate in our various mission projects. Food Bank drive, garden share and last Thursday our new underwear collection for the Lighthouse. We have also been taking cash donations for the Crisis Nursery.

The church office remains closed due to Covid however there are folks checking phones and emails and taking care of donations. The mail is being brought in daily and of course if you would like to speak to me please don't hesitate but to call. I am still working from my home office and can be reached there. You will find my number in a variety of places like the website or through the message on the church's phone. And Laura is returning from holidays this week and we welcome her back to what promises to be a busy Fall.

## **Opening Prayer**

As we move into a time of worship, I invite you imagine a holy place. Perhaps this place is exactly where you are in this moment. Perhaps it is far away. Perhaps it is noisy and filled with activity or quiet and calm. Perhaps it is filled with chairs or pews or shady trees or rustling grasses.

We light this candle acknowledging the gift of holy places and the joy that wherever we are God's love is present to nurture and to make us strong.  
(light candle)

Prayer: (Dianne Young, Gathering 2020)

Patient God,

Too often we treat our lives like an Ikea bookcase. We think we can put it together without your instructions, but we always seem to end up with pieces that don't fit. You even gave us an example to follow, in Jesus. But still we think we know best. Forgive us our arrogance and false independence. Thank you for being there no matter how many times we mess up. We pray for the strength and wisdom of humility, as we continue to try to live with love in a do-it-yourself world. Amen.

## **Scripture**

Exodus 3:1-15

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, (to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.) 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 God said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." 13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." God said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of 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.

Now this might not seem like a big deal to some of you but in a

household of two young men who absolutely love basketball this it is a big deal. It has proven to be a big deal elsewhere, as well. This week the Milwaukee Bucks refused to play game 5 of the NBA semi finals because they wanted to make a statement. They - in the face of another attack on a unarmed black man / wanted to make it clear that it is not possible for things to carry on as normal. Life cannot carry on as usual – in the face of systemic racism - something has to be done. Their action came two days after Fred VanVleet of the Toronto Raptors gave an interview suggested that just such an action might need to be taken to wake people up. Fred asked “Do we actually give a (expletive) about what ‘s going on? Is it just cool to wear Black Lives Matter on the backdrop or wear a t-shirt? What does that really mean”? Is it really doing anything? Van Vleet’s comments and the Bucks actions has sparked the postponement or cancellation of games in Major League Baseball, Soccer, the WNBA and even tennis. A group of young athletes suddenly using their voice and platform to speak truth to power.

Greta Thunberg age 15 started protesting in front of the Swedish parliament building, vowing to continue to protest until the Swedish government met the carbon emissions targets agreed to by world leaders in Paris, in 2015. She regularly missed school to go on strike on Fridays urging students around the world to join her. By December 2018 more than 20,000 students around the world had joined her. In September of 2019 she travelled to New York to address a UN climate conference -addressing the conference, she blasted politicians for relying on young people for answers to climate change. How dare you? I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you. She speaks truth to power. Tristen Durocher, 24 walked 635 km from northern Saskatchewan to Regina to call on the province to address the high suicide rates in the north. He was frustrated when the Sask party mps voted against a bill that would have declared suicide a public health crisis. A young man using his voice to speak truth to power.

Today we seek the truth that is revealed to us in today’s exodus story, about another young person, Moses who is called to speak truth to power.

This story is set in the wilderness, in fact this story begins beyond the

wilderness. The first listeners of this story, thousands of years ago, would have felt the hair on the back of their necks stand up when they heard that phrase, "beyond the wilderness." It is an ominous phrase that we mostly pass by as we read. But "wilderness" in the Old Testament – which is mentioned more than 300 times - wilderness indicates danger, foreboding, dread. In the wilderness - animals lurk and attack. Hunger and thirst are always a threat. These are unpopulated, untracked, unsafe areas. And Moses was not only in the wilderness, he was beyond the wilderness. The wild animals there might be even hungrier, even more ferocious. //Moses was keeping his father-in-law's sheep which sounds tame enough, but he was in very dangerous territory. He was beyond the wilderness.

Being in a very scary place is not at all hard for us to imagine in these days of pandemic and racial unrest. Like Moses, we are beyond the wilderness in this year of fear and uncertainty that has stretched for many months now. All of our lives have been disrupted and upended by restrictions and economic uncertainty. We are also beyond the wilderness in this year of encountering the insidious power and perversion of racism. We watch our neighbours to the south in horror of the systemic racism displayed for all to see and it make us here in the North more than a little uncomfortable as we recognize ourselves and the racism that we perpetuate toward aboriginal persons. We are also beyond the wilderness in terms of economic inequity in our communities that inevitably hits women and children and the poor harder and deeper. I think you would agree - We are beyond the wilderness.

And so, this story is for all of us, now. It reveals to us two things about God that we need to hear, now in our time and place.

First, there is no wilderness so wild that God cannot find us there. God is there. In fact, God is there waiting for Moses. God shows up first and puts flame to a scrubby bush. Moses shows up second. The bush is already on fire but does not burn down. It displays an inexhaustible divine energy. Perpetually aflame, is this bush. So, not only does God show up beyond the wilderness, God is there first and is busy revealing a divine presence in this most unlikely place.

This something we need to hear on this day, in this time of loss and grief and anger? God is already here. God is right now revealing holy divine

presence in the unlikely places of our lives. Our places of pain. Our places of loneliness and longing. Our places of intense anger. Our places of exhaustion. Our places of depression and hollow emptiness. Our lesson today assures us that yes, God is already here.

And when God shows up, our wilderness places become holy places. "Remove the sandals from your feet," said God, "for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." "Beyond the wilderness" turns out to be holy, not god-forsaken. The wilderness places in our lives are holy and wide open to God's presence and action and voice and call.

The second thing that this story reveals to us about God is that God is not deterred by our shortcomings and failures. Moses has an arm's length list of reasons and excuses and loopholes as to why he is not the one to do this hard thing - to follow this call of God. And he names them all. This is a case of mistaken identity, he says. God, I think you mean to call someone who is strong and brave and smart and connected to power brokers who can swing a deal for you, God. Not me - I'm a fugitive, an immigrant, a marked man. No, God, not me.

But God is not deterred by our shortcomings and failures. God calls Moses in spite of his checkered past. God calls David even though he was just a shepherd boy. God calls Esther even though she was just a harem girl. God calls Jonah even though he tried to run away. God calls Mary even though she was on the bottom rung of society. God calls you and me even though we don't feel wise enough or skilled enough or brave enough in this complicated and painful world. If God calls Moses in spite of everything, I suppose we shouldn't be too surprised if God calls us, because God is not deterred by our shortcomings and failures.

This story not only reveals these two things about God but it also reveals something about Moses - and about us too. And that is that the people God calls - flawed people like Moses and like me and like you - are burdened with doubts and indecision. We resist God's call; we come up with excuses. We procrastinate, deliberate, and frustrate the clear call of God. We drag our feet. It's true - we do.

But God persists and promises, "I will be with you." And a few verses later in this same chapter, God even identifies a new and mysterious divine

name. "I Am Who I Am" - or maybe the translation is, "I Will Be Who I Will Be" or even, in the suggestion of one biblical commentator, "Whenever God is being God, God will be the kind of God God is." No matter what the translation - it is a name that signals promise. God will be the kind of God that God is.

And Moses stops talking and starts moving. Finally, he pushes through the wall of his own self-doubt and sense of inadequacy. God knew Moses would be fine. The problem was Moses didn't know it. God intended to give Moses everything he would need to fulfill his mission. The challenge was in helping Moses get to the place where he could trust God to work in, through, and around his human limitations.

It's quite a story, isn't it? The commissioning of Moses reminds us that the God who calls also equips.

Was Moses' life a bed of roses after God got a hold of him? Actually, the day that happened was the day his real troubles began. Pharaoh's army tried to kill him. The people that he liberated complained and griped for 40 years; and when he and they finally arrived at the Promised Land, God decided that someone else, Joshua, should take them over to the other side. Moses died in the land of Moab without ever reaching the Promised Land. The people grieved for him for about a month and then went right on without him. But, oh, what a life Moses led, beginning with the day he left the house a shepherd and returned the deliverer of a nation.

Friends in Christ, the life you're living now-it is the only one you've got. Don't spend it being scared, not being ready, not being what you should be. The bush is burning.

As it burns for Fred Van Vleet, Greta Thornburg and Tristen Durocher and millions of others.

It burns for you too.

Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

God for this beautiful earth which dazzles and amazes us, we give you thanks and praise. So much of the earth's beauty speaks to us of your presence and creativity. The very trees burn with messages from you.

We give you thanks for places of silence, for morning sunrises and evening sun sets, for lakes so calm they appear glass covered, we give you thanks, for holiday time for times of reflection and renewal, of calm and rejuvenation.

We give you thanks for places of frenzied activity, for children playing. We pray for our children and their families this week as they prepare to return to school. Help families through the difficult decisions, strengthen teachers in their care and keep all safe. Especially God let us be gentle with one another and free of judgement – none of these decisions come easy, none of us know the whole story, none of us have done this before. For the wonder and joy of children we give thanks.

We give you thanks for times of service and vitality, We pray for the helping agencies we have been privileged to help in a small way this past month, The Saskatoon Food bank and learning center, the Lighthouse and the Crisis Nursery.

For this opportunity to share in ministry with one another we give you thanks.

God we are a prairie people, and we know that if we stand in a field long enough the warmth of the summer sun will turn to wind wiped rain.

There is much in this world that puzzles and confuses us God.

We ask for your strength in the storms of life and the gift of companions in the confusion. Create for us places of rest and healing and help each of us to be co-creators with you - that others might find an oasis of comfort in us.

We would pray particularly this morning for those of us who are ill, who are feeling alone or afraid, who have difficult decisions to make and who are



grieving. We offer prayers of concern for ourselves and others in a time of silence.....

We pray also this morning for our sisters and brothers who live in parts of your creation that we have only visited or seen on TV. We pray for those living in the midst of war, those screaming to be heard, those yearning for the truth understood by those in power, we pray for those who do not have enough to eat or clean water to drink. We pray for our global brothers and sisters. We pray for peace.

As beautiful as a butterfly and as strong as a mountain is your love for us, Creator God. Fill us with your Holy Spirit now as we leave this worship time - grant us holy wisdom and courage to be your people of love and hope in the world. May your call to radical love burn forever in our hearts.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray the words we now say together.

Our Father and Mother, 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, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

### **Blessing**

Friends let us go into this week  
Open to the liberating energy of our God.  
Let us see with new eyes and  
let us speak the truth to all we meet.

We go in the light of our Parent God,  
The rebel son and  
the relentless spirit.

Amen.