

Worship with McClure United Church

June 14, 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Good morning friends and welcome to a time for reflection on the love and wisdom of our Creator God. We know that some of you are joining us at the 'regular' time when we would have joined in person on Sunday morning and that others of you will be engaging this reflection in mid-day or mid-week as a pause amidst your other activities. Regardless when you "tune in" we hope that this time of reflection offers peace for your soul and encouragement for your spirit.

I would like to repeat a few announcements – first, related to church and Covid closure. Re-opening the church remains a challenge as we consider the possibilities and protocols. The Board has appointed a committee which is considering all aspects of reopening. Clearly there are concerns about hand washing and social distancing and about numbers of people who can gather. One consideration is whether it is reasonable for a few to gather while the majority can't be welcomed. These are difficult discussions for a church whose mission is to be open to all. As the Board continues to ponder all aspects of reopening we hope do so prayerfully and with the needs of the entire community in mind.

Another note relates to the weekly Facebook reflections which were occurring on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays each week since the closure. With summer approaching and the hope that you are able to be outside more, we have made the decision to reduce our Facebook conversations to Wednesdays only and the ministry team will share in providing these reflections.

As always, the ministry team seeks to be responsive to your needs. If you have particular request or concern please email us or leave your message on the church answering machine which is checked regularly and we will respond accordingly.

We acknowledge that all that we do occurs on lands known as treaty six and the traditional homeland of the Metis. We respect our shared responsibility for this land and for our relationships one with another.

I invite you to pause and inhale God's spirit. I invite you to light a candle as a reminder of the flame of the Holy Spirit. I invite you into a moment of prayer.

Opening Prayer

Creator of Life we greet you on this morning inhaling the breath of the approaching summer. We celebrate the life that you have given to us and the blessings of our entire

earth. Help us to recognize you in the song of the birds, the rising up of gardens and the voice of a friend. Cause us to pause before setting sun or open prairie and soak up this revelation of you. In those moments help us to unite our souls with you that we might know peace and embrace your call to live fully in the days that you have given us. Draw us ever deeper into relationship with you as we reflect on your wisdom in word and song today. Amen.

Theme Conversation

Laura read a children's story called "When God Made You" by Matthew Paul Turner.

Scripture: Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Reflection

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

Like me, my hunch is many of you have been watching the news with more intention these days. (I have so much to learn about the "Black Lives Matter" movement and about systematic racism both in the United States and in Canada.)

As I watch and learn;

What I hear over and over again, on the lips of Black people and other people of color.

What I hear on the lips of indigenous leaders is "we are tired."

We are tired of the needless brutality toward our children and we are tired of bearing the burdens of others greed.

I wonder if the woman, found in our text today, knows something of this tiredness. I wonder if she too is tired – bent over for 18 years. It has been a long time since she could even look up. Her days are confined to that which is beneath her. And although we know how long it's been that she's been bent over, the text does not mention how long it's been since somebody – anybody, bothered to look down and see her. And yet she is there in the temple.

And we don't know whether she is there in the temple out of hope or out of habit. But she is there. Exhausted to the bone but there - tired from walking through life bowed down, weighed down - but she is there.

Put yourself in her body for a moment – can you feel the weight of it all.

Being bent affects how she walks, and how she breathes, and how she cares for those she loves. But she there she is in the synagogue, I like to imagine that she shows up because she, though tired, 'knows what should be happening there.

Being bent over impacts every aspect of her life. And yet, despite the stares and the assumptions others may make she still shows up in the temple - the church. Despite those who would blame her condition on her, she still shows up. Despite those who have no empathy for what it must be like, she still shows up. I am profoundly moved by her strength to show up. Just as I have been profoundly moved by the strength and persistence of those who keep showing up over my news feeds, calling for justice, night after night.

I think it important to note that the woman doesn't seem to come to the temple to be healed – so many of the healing stories have the one who is sick asking to be healed but She asks nothing of Jesus. I believe Luke is trying to tell us something here - Luke suggests this woman has suffered through no fault of her own. The Bible says it's the spirits that wears her down. And some of us know something about spirits that weigh us down and compromise our well-being.

We are in the midst of a global pandemic, and not only has the pandemic exposed the power of a microscopic virus, it is also exposed the vulnerability of communities and neighborhoods that have been consistently and constantly weighed down. The murder of George Floyd has further exposed that which weighs peoples and communities down. Friends, Over 421 thousand people have died globally from Covid 19 and over 115 thousand of these deaths have occurred in the United States not because the number had to be, but because they were weighed down by spirits of apathy, and spirits of indifference.

560 thousand children in Canada go to sleep hungry every night. Not because of covid - they were hungry before covid - these children are in families that don't have enough food to live a healthy life. 3.2 million people live in poverty in Canada not because of covid but because of systematic racism and greed. The spirit of capitalism – of always

needing more - the spirit of individualism - These are the spirits that weigh the poor and our children down.

I think what, Luke the writer of the story was trying to teach then and is teaching us now is - what happens when some suffer because of other peoples' sins. Some are held down and others are propped up but both are limited in their ability to fully be free.

Luke invites us to understand that this woman's condition can be understood as a metaphor, as a reminder of the weight of oppression, a reminder of the manifestations of being born with a target on one's back, whatever that target may be, a reminder of the impact of human indifference *and* the power of communities to heal.

In this simple text, Jesus provides both a reminder and a remedy.

The story tells us the Jesus sees her. He sees HER.

Something happens in our midst when we take the time to see one another. Too often religiosity, or our holy comforts, block our view. The text says when Jesus sees her, he stops teaching. Jesus stops proclaiming. Jesus stops the religious practice of the day to fully tend to what he sees. Jesus prioritizes the needs of this woman over the routines of the people. Her needs are more important than the rituals. Her needs are more important than their customary way of being.

Friends, This moment in our history has slowed us down, has interrupted our ways of being in so many ways. We lament not being able to gather in our buildings, to gather in our sanctuaries, to return – as some would say to normal. But I wonder if this is the perfect moment for us stop “business as usual” and to use this opportunity to see with new eyes the needs of one another.

My prayer, friends, it that we never return to normal, but that we gain new energy and courage to clear what blinds us from seeing. I am so proud of what we as a church community have “seen” together thus far. But I think about just how far Jesus had to bend down, to make eye contact with this woman? In what ways might he have contorted himself, risked his comfort to make certain that she knew his invitation was for her? Seeing can be uncomfortable sometimes. And yet Jesus sees her - and this unnamed woman knows the invitation is for her.

Seeing one another is an act of belonging. And in the church, there should never be the question that we all belong.

Jesus sees her and seeing her causes Jesus to act. Notice in this text Jesus does not simply speak a word and declare that she's healed - He's capable of doing that, but in this instance no, that is not what he does. He sees her. He recognizes the condition she wears is not her own. There is no calling out of a demons. There is no word of repentance. He requires nothing of this woman. He simple sees her and calls her forth. Jesus stops business as usual, and he treats the peoples' needs. Jesus centers her needs in the midst of community - he treats her needs as holy.

As she moves from the margins to the center where she belongs, she is free. Before he touches her, before he reaches her, Jesus says, She is free. Jesus centers her and reclaims her. Luke gives her no name, but Jesus calls her “the daughter of Abraham” – In other words you are family and you are God’s.

And as her body straightens and she is able to look up, the community of faith is freed to look up as well.

The good news of this text is - not only that the weight has been lifted off of this woman - but through the act of seeing, through the act of belonging - a road map to freedom is presented to straighten out the body of believers who are bound by what they refused to see.

Luke reveals what happens to us when we teach more than we touch. When we sermonize more than we see. When we invite people to join more that we welcome people to belong.

Luke challenges us. There is healing in the temple but the execution of the healing is dependent on “all people being seen and treated as holy”.

The failure to see our inherent biases and our choices, messes up our ability to fully serve others. Because until we can see the other, we cannot fully see ourselves. Jesus is calling us to see the needs, calling us to center the needs, calling us to remember the needs - to understand the plight of those suffering - through “no sins of their own”. It is when we center the needs of the burdened then we will all be free.

For all who are tired, who are bent by systems, and circumstances come there is true welcome here in the temple – in the church. Come all who have the courage to see.

Together we are the holy people of God.

Jesus says: “I have come that you might have life and that you might have it – abundantly”

Amen

Prayers

God the scriptures tell us that you want us to be healed from the things that ‘bend us over’ in life. Indeed there are many things that cause us to bend – self-criticism, worries about health or family or money; a loss of vision; being over-responsible and over-helpful. We look about and see neighbours in our world community who are also ‘bent over’. In recent times we have seen again the terrible weight of racism that has disabled so many. We know that others are bent over by poverty and an inability to ‘get ahead’. We know of those who have been bent by illness, weighed down by the aches and pains and by not wanting to burden those they love. We know some have been bent by grief and find it hard to stand up again and see the road ahead.

Yet, in today's scripture we recognize that you want us to be healed, to be renewed, to find our physical and spiritual backbone and to rise up to all that life offers us. You have taught us that love is the great medicine that can nurture our self- image and right the injustices of life. We thank you for the gift of love and its many expressions in the world. We thank you for those near and dear to us who make love so tangible and for those who seek to free our psyche from all that would burden us. We thank you for the courage of so many to rise up in the face of racism with a vision of future justice knowing that you made us to love one another. We are grateful for those who have pursued the knowledge that science reveals and who work every day to bring healing and relief to those who struggle with physical illness. We bless you for the love you have revealed in those who phone, or bake a pie, or make time to truly listen when we are burdened with grief. Such tangible expressions of your love are forever a sign that you are active in the world.

For your presence in our lives – comforting our souls, nurturing our wisdom, empowering our courage and calling us into action – we thank you. Jesus is a powerful witness in our life of faith and we remember with fondness the words he taught. ...Amen

Blessing

Let's go out in the world today with open eyes and hearts..

Ready to see God's beauty... and love... and compassion

God is everyone... in all beings and in all creation

Sometimes its hard to look...

Sometimes its hard to see...

But we must never give up trying...

Its what we are called to do.

And know always that we are not alone in that call...

Thanks be to God.