

Worship with McClure United Church

Pride Sunday

June 7, 2020

Welcome and Announcements *(Debra)*

Good morning and welcome. It is exciting to continue to be the McClure United Church in these interesting times - even though we cannot be together in our building we are still church. And we welcome everyone who is joining us this morning. Brian, Laura and I hope that what is offered here will be a gift of worship for you.

No doubt you have heard that the Government of Saskatchewan has announced that places of worship may resume services as of June 8. As much as we all miss each other, and miss having worship services at the church, we will not be meeting at the church yet. To protect people's health, we would only be able to have a small number of people in the church at a time, and we would not be able to sing, speak chorally, shake hands, or have coffee.

In March we stepped away from the building so abruptly and it would be great to just flip the lights back on and start up again but our return to "In the building worship" and other activities needs to be done slowly and thoughtfully. A small team is working on a reopening plan for our church building and will keep you posted.

I also wanted to mention that the ministry staff have made a little change. We have been offering a little reflection each Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning at 11 on Facebook and we want to continue to offer a little something during the week and have decided to continue but just on Wednesday mornings.

And as always if you are in need to speak with one of the ministry staff you are welcome to contact us. Please just call the church office and one of us will get back to you as soon as possible.

Today this worship is being shared from land that is Treaty 6 land and the traditional homeland of the Metis

Our worship today celebrates Pride.

On June 10, 1925, almost 95 years ago, The United Church of Canada was born after much consultation, compromise, and listening for the Spirit. In 1988, The United Church of Canada decided that sexual orientation would no longer be a barrier to membership in the United Church and hence to candidacy for ministry. In 2009, gender identity was added to that decision. Today churches across Canada celebrate Pride on the first Sunday in June.

Some of us come today celebrating and knowing lots about Pride. Some come today celebrating and knowing a little about Pride. And some of us come today not

sure what to expect but here to learn what we can. So, let's begin with a bit of background.

Pride is a positive stance against discrimination and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and gender-fluid people. Pride is also a chance to promote self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and fundamental human rights, and to celebrate in a safe environment.

The Pride Parade has its roots in a 1970 march in New York City, which marked this LGBTQ community's first resistance to police brutality, oppression, and human rights violations that had resulted in the Stonewall riots a year earlier, in 1969. Since the 1980s, this liberation movement has morphed into the Pride movement. Parades, festivities, and celebrations are held to mark improved rights for this marginalized community, supported by allies of all walks of life, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

And so on this important Pride Sunday – I invite you to light a candle.

Prayer

I would like to share with you the opening prayer that we shared together in Feb 2016 at the celebration of our becoming an Affirming ministry of the United Church.

God of blessing, you created us in your likeness and in your image and then you pronounced us as good. We give you thanks for the gift of life itself and for our uniqueness. God of transformations, you set us free to change and grow, you hold us close in love and grace. We give thanks for your call to our lives to change and be transformed. As we gather this day, may we feel your embrace and love. May we, in the same way, embrace others, whoever they are as your children – good and loved.
Amen

Song: Draw the Circle Wide

Prayer of Confession *(Laura)*

God, you call us to be the church:

To live with respect in creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil. Sometimes we get it right. Sometimes we miss the target by several miles.

We confess that we have failed to listen for your voice calling us to move out of our comfort zones. We know that sometimes we miss your wisdom because it comes from an unfamiliar source. We admit that loving others, seeking justice, and resisting evil are challenging, that sometimes they take more energy than we feel we can give and so we would rather share our prayers but not get too involved. We admit that sometimes we who have privilege because of our skin colour, or our sexual orientation, or our social

class, or our gender identity or some other criterion fail to, or choose not to, recognize the benefits of that privilege. Help us use our privilege in the work of seeking justice, resisting evil, loving and serving others.

God, you call us to be the church, a testing ground for the Kingdom, a place where different priorities and values are raised up.

For the times we fail to be the church, the times we miss the target, forgive us.

For the missed opportunities to change the world so it too lives by Kingdom values, forgive us. Help us repent, to change direction, so that we make different choices in the future. ...*time of silent prayer...*

Here is Good News!

God is at work in this broken, flawed, imperfect world. God is at work in us.

God offers us forgiveness, for our poor choices, our missed opportunities, our failures.

God calls us to lament and repent and to step back into the fray of living and loving as we have been loved. We are a forgiven and redeemed people! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Statement of Affirmation (*Community Members*)

We affirm our acceptance of all human beings as persons made in the image of God regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

We affirm salvation for all people is by grace through faith and that all believers in Christ are accepted as full members of the Christian church regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We affirm that the church is called to initiate and encourage communication and discussion with brothers and sisters in the LBGTQ2S community about sexuality in order that fellowship may be increased and misunderstanding, fears and hostilities lessened.

We affirm that members of the church, individually and corporately, are responsible for becoming more aware of discrimination against the LBGTQ2S community, taking action to ensure that they enjoy their full civil and human right in society, working to end all form of discrimination against them, and for personally supporting the victims of such discrimination.

We affirm the need, as the church engages members of the LBGTQ2S community in dialogue, to recognize the personal and professional risks to which people open themselves as they respond to this invitation.

We affirm the need for all church members, of all orientations and gender identities, to study and understand sexuality and lifestyles in the light of the gospel.

We affirm the call to be public, explicit and intentional in our commitment, through dialogue, story-telling, education, and reconciliation with people who identify as sexual or gender diverse, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transsexual, transgender, two-spirited, and queer persons.

(Adapted from Gift, Dilemma, and Promise: A Report and Affirmations on Human Sexuality, United Church of Canada, 1984. Adapted to include gender diversity and with addition of statement from the Living Apology GC42 2015.)

Scripture (Aurora Coulthard)

Today's reading is from First Corinthians 13. This reading is from The Message Version of the Bible:

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

² If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all God's mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

³⁻⁷ If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything, trusts God always,

Always looks for the best, never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies.

Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

¹¹ When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant.

When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

¹² We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

¹³ But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly.

And the best of the three is love.

May God bless to our understanding these words from scripture.

Reflection (Laura et al)

Hi everyone. So I must admit to you that I struggled a bit in trying to focus my thoughts for today's service and reflection. The first Sunday in June is designated as Pride Sunday for all Affirming Ministries and I was excited to show off our rainbows and share our joy in being an Affirming Ministry.

And then George Floyd was killed, protests began and I was drawn in to the pain, fear and outrage expressed by many of my black friends on social media.

It felt.. wrong.. to celebrate pride in the midst of such suffering – and injustice. The hashtag “silence is violence” kept appearing in front of me and it felt like a personal call in my own complacency... complacency in acknowledging my privilege as a white person... and my own sense of “what can I do?” as a person who has claimed to be an ally with pride.

I spent a fair bit of time this week reflecting on what it means to celebrate the expanding freedoms of the LGBTQ+ communities in light of the ongoing violence and oppression towards black folks, indigenous folks and people of colour.

And then... I read something sent to me by a friend which clarified some things for me with respect ongoing obligation as an Affirming Ministry and as members of the LGBTQ+ community... and that includes allies.

What I read was a message from Rainbow Railroad's Executive Director Kimahli Powell. Rainbow Railroad is a Canadian charitable organization that helps LGBTQ individuals escape violence and persecution in their home countries. The message offered some historical information on state violence against people of colour... not only in other countries... but here in our own beloved country as well... and the message also offered this important challenge:

Here's what he wrote: “This brings us to our obligation as members and allies of the LGBTQI community to fight for racial justice, regardless of the colour of our skin. Pride began as a protest against police brutality, led by black and latinx drag queens and trans folks. On June 28, 1969 the police raided the Stonewall Inn, in what was a routine occurrence of violence towards the LGTBQI community. But that night, the patrons of the Stonewall fought back, and for five more nights rioted against police brutality in the streets of Greenwich Village. In doing so, they helped birth the modern LGBTQI movement. So this Pride Month we must honour our LGBTQI history by demanding justice for George Floyd and the countless others that came before him. Rainbow Railroad exists because our founders understood that the epidemic of violence against LGBTQI people internationally needed a response. And until LGBTQI people everywhere could live in peace, there would be no meaningful equality here at home. Now, we need

to act on the principle that there cannot be peace for LGBTQI people of any background in a world where black life is not fully valued.”

So I hold that history and that challenge in front of us this morning... and I hold it along side of the scripture passage shared a moment ago.

A passage that is often read at wedding celebrations but holds a deep wisdom and truth about the nature of love – a passage that I listened to with more intensity this week – as I reflected on my own call to love... to be love in this world.

Love is so much more than well-intentioned thoughts, prayers and words.

Love... is nothing without action.

I invited several folks this week to share why being part of an Affirming Ministry matters to them. As I listened to their words... loving... welcoming... affirming words... I heard action flowing through every one. Whatever we can do to share God’s love... God’s extravagant love... is one step in the right direction.

So yes... let’s celebrate the decisions we have made... let’s celebrate who we are and our commitment to learn and grow in our understanding of what it means to be affirming. WE do indeed have so much to celebrate.

And let’s also remember always the people who continue to live in the reality of exclusion, discrimination and violence. We need to acknowledge that our work is not yet done... in fact, its only just beginning.

And I share with you now the wise words of our community members. Thanks to everyone who offered themselves in this way. (*video of individual reflections*)

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer (*Brian*)

God, we know you are you are the Source of Life and we are in awe at the wonder of your creation. The diversity of plants and bugs and sea creatures reveal a world that seems too vast to comprehend. We recognize you in stardust and pollen, in mountain granite and salty seas, in the synapses of the human brain and the migrating patterns of the birds. That you have granted us sufficient knowledge to explore the outer regions of space and the molecular structure of our own hearts is a gift beyond measure. We marvel that you are in all, that you are in us, that you are the source of all that is. Today we thank you for the magnificent diversity of the human community. For black hair and blond hair, for auburn hair and no hair at all; for loud voices and soft voices; for bodies with muscles and bodies with resilience, we thank you. We are grateful for the opportunity to discover you through love – love of our children; of our parents; of our friends, of our lovers and even of strangers. We are blessed by our differences which inspire us and cause us to appreciate the breadth of human experience - art and mathematics; sport and opera; ideas and feelings; alone time and time in community.

We thank you *Source of All That Is* that you have made us different and in doing so have created a rainbow of people, experiences and opportunities.

Today we pray for those who have felt undervalued because of their difference. We remember generations of people who have been excluded or persecuted because of who they have loved or how they experience their sexual identity. Remind us of the blessings of diversity and turn your world from exclusion to acceptance. Today we also pray for those who have been oppressed or exploited because of the colour of their skin and whose hearts ache in the face of prejudice. Remind us that Your Spirit beats in every human heart.

Especially today we pray ...

- For those who still feel the need to hide their true selves for fear of reprisal. Strengthen our commitment to **affirm** the worth and dignity of all people and especially those who turn to McClure for community
- For those who are still marginalized because of race or culture. Strengthen our efforts to welcome the stranger and enliven within us a commitment to stand in solidarity with our Indigenous relatives
- For those who have felt invisible in the face of the Covid pandemic – elders who have been isolated and cut off from community; service workers who have felt taken for granted; the grieving who have had to bear their pain alone – we pray your love on them all today.

You are the Life Force that calls us forward into a new world that is safer, more equitable and contains justice for all. Enliven our spirits to walk toward this vision, we pray. Amen.

Music My Love Colours Outside the Lines

In conclusion – some words from our Affirming Sunday celebration.

(based on 1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

What's the "good word" we have for the world? What do we say through the worship and witness of our church?

We say, "We believe in God, known in Jesus Christ."

We say, "Let there be justice and peace!"

We say, "Come, accept the cost and joy of discipleship."

Commissioning & Benediction

Go gladly into the world. Be filled with the love of God.

Go celebrating God and all God's people

Go in hope and joy trusting in God's presence.

Amen.