

Worship with McClure United Church

November 15, 2020

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to this time of worship with McClure United Church. It is our hope that wherever you are and whenever you are watching this worship, that you will experience the abundant love of God and feel connected to this community as we join our hearts and spirits together in prayer, song and reflection.

And may we also feel connected to this land on which we worship and the people who have been keepers of the land for many generations... here in Saskatoon we gather on Treaty 6, traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Stoney, Nakota and Dakota nations and homeland of the Metis people.

Our hope always that everyone will feel welcome here and that you will find something within this time that speaks to your heart and spirit – a word, a prayer, a song – something that will help you be more aware of and open to God's presence within and all around you.

God is with you... no matter who you are or what you've done, or not done... God's loving presence is without limits. May you experience that love here now.

I do have a couple of announcements this morning...

Debra and I are excited to have begun planning for Advent.

One of the things we'd like to let you know about right away is our Advent at Home kits.

You have a few options...

for families with kids and teens, there is an at home kit with an Advent Calendar, family devotions and other activity ideas.

for older adults, there is also an at home kit with a gorgeous Advent devotional and a few other little goodies

and for anyone who wishes, we have an Advent Candle Kit for you to have so that you can follow along with the Advent Candle Lighting ritual on our online Advent worship services.

To request a kit, please call or email the church office. You will also have received information along with the Sunday weekly email that had the link to this video. There will also be more information available on the website and Facebook pages.

We are again this year partnering with EGADZ to provide support to vulnerable teens and their families. This year we will be collecting specific items so there will be less sorting needed. Egadz has provided us with a list of priority items and those items will also be posted, along with drop off times, in all the places I just mentioned.

Covid is not going to stop the Advent celebrations and you are all invited to join An Advent Concert Celebration called "So that our joy may be complete"... a wonder-filled evening of music and story for the entire united church family. The link for where you can get your tickets is also found in a variety of places and if you have trouble locating that link please contact the church office and someone will get back to you. This concert is co-hosted by Lorne Calvert and Lindsay Mohn. Ticket proceeds go directly to United Church communities of faith and other united church ministries.

A reminder too of the 10 x 10 Art Show and Socks for the Homeless... both were announced last week and information about those is available on the website and Facebook page.

10x10 online bidding is on now... so make sure you get your bid in and socks for the homeless are being collected today from 10 til noon, next Sunday from 10 til noon and this coming Wednesday from 6-8pm. We are so grateful for your help in supporting this very important project. And a special note that honey will be for sale at all the socks for the homeless drop-offs... so bring \$5 to grab yourself a jar and support our refugee projects.

Opening Prayer

It is good to take this time to worship for once again the ground on which we stand seems to be shifting.

Some of us are still digging out from a record snowstorm.

Some of us are watching the news and we are still shaking our heads at what is going on to the south of us.

We hear how Covid numbers are rising again in our own community. New regulations require new adjustments.

And now with Christmas on the horizon we wonder what that celebration will look like.

We come to this time of worship unsure of many things.

But of this we are sure:

There is nothing in all creation, that will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We light this candle in celebration that God will not let us go on difficult days or on good days.

Light Candle

Prayer:

God we come today to this time of worship with our hearts open and our nerves frayed..

We come to be healed and to be inspired.

We come to be moved by song and held by prayer.

We come to acknowledge that we are part of a wider faith community that provides nurture and support in an uncertain world.

We come to hear ancient wisdom and be fed for the living of our day.

We come trusting you are with us now and always.

Amen.

Scripture

Psalm 90:1-12

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals."

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed.

You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh.

The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Reflection

The Psalm that Annalise read for us...Psalm 90.... is one of the lectionary readings for today. The lectionary suggestions only the first few verses... and the last few verses... but leaves out the whole chunk in the middle. I asked Annalise to read the whole thing.

If we had read only what we were supposed to read, you wouldn't have heard all that stuff about God's wrath... or the stuff and how short our lives are ... or about how our whole lives are spent in turmoil and trouble.

Now I do think that we would have still gotten the gist of the psalm if we'd read only what the lectionary suggested... but it seems to me that that middle chunk is actually really quite important.

Sure those verses in the middle are uncomfortable... and who wants to feel uncomfortable in church? That's probably why they are left out.

They are comfortable... at least in part... because they reflect a world view... theological understanding that is different from our own...

(we'll come back to this in a bit).

But they're also uncomfortable because they aren't very hopeful... they're all about God's anger towards us.... and how terrifying and troublesome our lives are because of it...

Those verses talk about how short our lives are and how the whole span of them... our entire lives... are spent in turmoil.

Not exactly inspiring...

Not exactly the sort of passage I generally like to reflect on – or even think about.

And that's probably why the lectionary leaves them out...

Now most of the time, these sentiments don't really resonate with most of us... at least not when things are generally going pretty well... like when we aren't in the middle of a pandemic full snowpocalypse.

But.... we need these verses – especially right now.

I suspect that they sound different to many of us today than they normally would... than they would in February or before...

Now we can relate a little bit more – maybe not to the idea of God's wrath... but probably to the feelings of trouble and turmoil.

When I was looking at the passages for today, and read this Psalm... instead of feeling uncomfortable, I found myself a little comforted – I needed to hear that our ancestors in faith got angry with God... that they felt abandoned by God... that they fell into despair at times.... And that they demanded that God pay attention to them... pay attention to the trouble they were experiencing.

I can relate to this right now.

Can you?

Obviously this psalm was written at a time when the people of Israel were experiencing an extended time of trouble.

And that makes it even more interesting that the psalm begins and ends with an affirmation by the psalmist of God's faithfulness!

It begins with the statement that God has been faithful to the people... and present with the people throughout all generations....

and it ends with an appeal for God's presence to be made known... the assumption there being that God is still present....

And it ends also with an appeal for God's people to be restored to prosperity.

The psalmist trusts that God is still listening and that God cares about the people.... despite all the apparent evidence that God is absent.

That is profound faith!

It's easy to believe in a faithful God when things are good.... but to trust in this truth even when things are not good... when we feel pressed on every side ...

that is a sign of true faith and trust in God.

Now the particular way that the psalmist interprets the trouble the people are experiencing may seem a bit strange to us.

Ancient people believed that everything that happened was caused by God... so if the people were experiencing trouble... hardship... it must mean that God was angry with them....

Why else would God do these things?

Our world view... our theology.... do not interpret everything that happens as the direct result of God's actions.... God doesn't make bad things (or good things) happen to us...

life is full of trouble... its full of joys – that's simply the nature of life.

But still... there is an important wisdom in the understandings of our faith ancestors that we shouldn't lose.

By believing that God was the author of everything that happened, they were able to recognize that in every situation... no matter how good or how bad... God was present.

This belief is affirmed throughout the scriptures.

Our understanding of God's nature... a nature revealed to us in in Jesus Christ... tells us that God is present in every circumstance.

Not present as the author of our troubles... but as the one who strengthens us...

Strengthens us to withstand trouble.

God is with us.... even when it seems like God is far away...

God is the courage that helps us face hardships...

God is the assurance that this will not last forever...

God is the reminder that we are not alone...

And God is the strength we need in order to put one foot in front of the other.

God *is* present in all circumstances of our lives...

Working... with an abundance of love and compassion... to turn our suffering into new life.

The wisdom of our faith ancestors really can help us through the troubled times we are in.

Their assurance that God is present and listening and can be called upon and relied on in the midst of the seemingly endless challenges and turmoil that life brings is important for us to remember – especially now.

So what does it mean for you to trust fully that your days... that you... are held always in the love and grace of God?

Where do you see the Spirit erupting in blessing and hope in the midst of this pandemic?

Where do you see the Spirit erupting in blessing and hope in all situations of your life... and of our lives together as a community of faith?

How are you experiencing God's presence with you... with us... as we face the challenges that are all around us?

Psalm 90 reminds us that God is here with us...

That God is faithful...

That God is caring...

Can you see the signs of God's presence even in the midst of uncertainty?
Of fear?

And will you allow yourself to cry out to God...

sharing your concerns...

sharing your hurts...

trusting that God is listening... that God really really cares?

May God grant us the courage of the psalmist to trust in God's faithfulness.
Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of love we enter into this time of prayer with many concerns in our hearts and many worries on our minds. We share these things with you now, God not because you will do exactly what we think you should with these things but because you love us, and we trust that in that love you will listen.

God of peace and justice we pray for the people of this world. We pray for the people of Ethiopia, as thousands flee to the Sudan as government forces and rebellious northern leads enter into a bloody offensive. We can only imagine what the people there are going through, for the families and friends of those who have died we pray for comfort, for those wounded we ask for your healing, and for those who are afraid we pray for courage.

God of wisdom, as COVID-19 cases surge around the world and here at home we pray for wisdom from leaders, we pray for the strength and skill of our health care providers and we pray that we might each take responsibility for the safety of the other. We pray for all of our older adults, our wise ones, who live with the knowledge that they are more vulnerable to COVID than others and reassure these that they are part of a caring and loving community that stands with them and for them and who value their lives.

God of healing we offer prayers for those of our own church community who are in hospital at this time, we pray for those who are waiting for, or are in the midst of treatment and for those who are recovering from illness. We pray also this morning for all those who grieve we ask that all who feel pain may know your healing and where possible God help us to creatively reach out with support and care.

Searching God be with those who are looking for something more in their lives be with those who are looking for renewed meaning or right paths to travel - then teach us to be beacons of your love and hope so that none might be lost and all might find peace.

Holy God there is so much in our hearts - we trust that in your mercy and grace you will hear all of the prayers that we offer - spoken and silent –and that in your hearing and in your love our need will be transformed into peace.

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus who called us friend and who taught us to pray...

– Shirley Blackburn sings the Lord's Prayer

Blessing

May we all go now from this time of worship

Filled with faith...

Faith in God's unwavering presence...

Faith in the strengthening love of Christ...

And Faith that the Spirit's eruption of blessing and hope.

Let's go from here confident in our capacity to and serve in faith.
Amen.