

“Sure of Our Steps”

April 18 - Third Sunday of Easter

Welcome/Announcements

We welcome you to this time of worship and as we do so, we acknowledge that McClure United Church stands on treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Metis Nation. We pay our respect to elders both past and present, wherever we find ourselves today. We also acknowledge our commitment as an Affirming Ministry of the United Church of Canada as we strive to be an open-minded, inclusive and welcoming place of worship. It is our hope that no matter your age, race, class, ability, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, you will feel the warmth and blessing of God's love today. And we give thanks to God for this opportunity to gather together for worship, reflection, song and prayer. May you feel the God's blessing upon you today.

Good morning everyone.. so glad you have joined us for this time of worship.

Have you noticed that spring has sprung? This past week, despite the snow and cooler air, I have noticed so many signs of new life... buds on trees, the crocuses and the geese are returning – it won't be long before we'll be able to see them hanging out in the park with their babies.

No matter how much I try to be grumpy about this darn pandemic... I can't help but feel a little tug on my heart – reminding me of new life and the good news of Easter.

I have only a couple of announcements today...

First a reminder to mark the date of our Annual General Meeting on your calendar for May 16th at 1pm. This meeting will be by Zoom and Reports will be available for you to review once they are completed. Stay tuned for more information about Zoom and how you can connect.

I also want to let you know that our amazing outreach committee is busy again organizing a food bank drive in our parking lot of Friday, April 30th from 10-1pm. The need for Food Banks is even greater now during the pandemic as many are still not back to work. Trucks will be set up in the parking lot and you will enter from Heritage Drive and exit onto Taylor Street. In the interest of as little contact as possible, we are asking you to place your items in the truck provided. If you need assistance, there will be help available.

They are still looking for 2-3 trucks to help out with the project. If you have one that can be used, please contact the church office. Please contact Carol Claypool at (306) 664-2285 if you have one available.

If you wish to donate money in lieu of the drop-off, please make cheques payable to McClure United Church and be sure that you note that it is for the Saskatoon Food Bank. You may also make

donations through e-transfer to donations@mcclureunitedchurch.org and indicate that it is for the Food Bank Drive.

And as always you are invited to join us at anytime for our Wednesday bible study, Friday coffeetime and for our email book club... information about all of those can be found on our website, facebook page and in the weekly email. You are always welcome.

And that is it for announcements today...

Let us join our hearts together and open ourselves to God's love as we enter more deeply into this time of worship.

Call to Worship

(light candle)

Life can be hard. Goodness knows we've all learned that.

The road before us is winding and rocky.

Most days it feels like we're heading up hill, or worse, in circles.

When the doubts start to grow in our hearts and the anxieties overwhelm it is not surprising that we stumble.

But, *this* is Easter. And this time reminds us that we are called the children of God. We are called this because of the Love we have come to know through the Holy One. This love builds us up, it binds us to one other, it guides our steps on this journey no matter how winding and rocky.

So even though we are often unsure about our steps in the world the truth of who we are remains the same.

We are the ones who dare to find joy in empty an tomb,

we are the ones who dare to allow resurrection hope to fill our hearts and our minds,

we are the ones who dare to dance in the light of the Risen Christ!

Dare to dance with dreamers, sing their song,

Dare to dance their stories, sing out strong.

Dare to dance with freedom your whole life long,

Dare to dance again!

This is the call:

Face this new day, even when you aren't quite sure where you're going.

We lift up our heads to meet the day.

Open your eyes to see the beauty of life that is all around us.

We open our hearts to the life giving love of God.

And even if the rain lingers, open your umbrellas and set out anyway.

For we are Easter People!

Let us pray:

Holy One, Justice-Seeker, Lover of Creation –

You set this world in motion and gave it life.

Turn us to you when our steps are not sure.

Come and dance with us, engage with us, as we seek you –
so that we can be risen with Christ and in Christ.

Be with us now, we pray. Amen.

Song: The Spring Has Come (Tamara Ferguson and Celeste Delahey)

Scripture

First Reading: Luke 24:36b-48 (NRSV, adapted) Natasha Burlingette

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Second Reading: 1 John 3: 1-3 (NRSV, adapted) Zach Burlingette

See what love the Holy One has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Sermon: "Remember Who You Are" by Rev. Nora Vedress

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each and every heart be acceptable unto you o God our Creator and Redeemer. Amen

When I first moved to Saskatchewan I learned a few things right away. First... There's no point fighting the wind. You gotta just roll with it. Second...-48 degree weather for six weeks in a row somehow has the ability to pull a community together and makes people stronger. I don't

understand it, but it happens. Third...Don't ever plan anything at the church on Grey cup or Telemiracle weekends. Nobody will come. And Fourth... People get a bit twitchy if they don't know who your grandparents are.

Now it took me a little while to figure that last one out. But I came to understand that people around here like to know who your grandparents are not because they don't like strangers but because they like to know "who you belong to". It helps them to understand who you are. So think for a minute. Who do you belong to? Who raised you? Your parents? Your grandparents? Other people of influence in your life? What did they do for a living? What brought them joy? What pissed them off? What was important to them? What did they teach you?

Our family of Origin, those people with whom we grew up, have a major impact on how we view the world, interact with others, and see ourselves. The spectrum on this of course is vast not to mention complicated. What can I say, families can be, peculiar. We all know that mixed in with the most amazing people are the most challenging ones. Knowing where we came from however, makes it a bit easier to understand who we are now and embrace who we long to grow into. And knowing where others come from, well that helps us understand them a bit better too.

Which all makes perfect sense, except that sometimes...a lot of the time?...I think we forget who we are. We hear all sorts of messages from the world about who we *should* be...smart, thin, self-made, strong, rich, white, straight, independent, flawless...but when those messages conflict with what our reality is...well then problems move in, and we find ourselves in an identity crisis. Suddenly who we are doesn't fit with who we think we should be, or more to the point who we think the world wants, or expects, us to be. If you've ever felt like you were standing on the outside looking in through a window you'll know what I'm talking about. You'll know it's not a great feeling.

The people who originally received the First Letter of John, that was read for us today and written somewhere around 100 ACE, were having such a crisis. Their community had started to fall apart. Arguments around the incarnation had sprung up as well as how the community of faith was expected to act in the world. Leaders had shifted their focus away from sharing God's love with others towards a more self-serving, narcissistic way of living. Even those who attempted to remain faithful to the mission of Christ were struggling.

They had started to forget where they came from and needed to be reminded of who there were. And so John tells them "you are the Children of God". But he admitted that this could be hard because the world would not always recognize them. As children of God they were called to a new commandment, they were called to live in the world differently. To love others, to live in the light of God, to proclaim a resurrected Christ and to find strength through the word of God's love that abided within them.

And while that was all amazing and life giving, none of it was easy. Because it made them stand out, brought judgment, and in the end wasn't the message the world was used to hearing. It still isn't. Thousands of years later the world is still is not used to, has a hard time understanding, cannot recognize this message of abundant love that ultimately defines the followers of Christ. And since the world can be very loud and very distracting, and very convincing, it isn't surprising that we start to forget too.

That's when the problems start to rise. Problems that rear their ugly little heads when we forget where we came from, when we lose sight of who we are. They'll be different for all of us of course, but you'll know them when you see them. They come in those moments when we don't feel all that loveable, when the doubts, and shame, anxieties, and fears grow within us; when the world and its isolating messages get too loud and convincing. For me my default is an overall feeling of unworthiness that I am not and never will be good enough. Those voices can get pretty nasty at times. It breaks my heart to think that you have them too.

But then into that moment of uncertainty, when we start to forget who we belong to the word arrives: "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are" (1 John 3:1).

Richard Rhor wrote "Love is not really an action that you do. *Love is what and who you are, in your deepest essence.* Love is a place that already exists inside of you, but is also greater than you. That's the paradox. It's within you and yet beyond you. This creates a sense of abundance and more-than-enoughness, which is precisely the satisfaction and deep peace of the True Self. You know you've found a well that will never go dry, as Jesus says (see John 4:13-14). Your True Self, God's Love in you, cannot be exhausted" (Richard Rhor posted on Center for Action and Contemplation)

This love, it is who you are. It is what defines you. And even if the world finds it hard to recognize sometimes it does not make it any less true. Even if you're struggling, or broken, or judgmental, or grieving, or angry, or afraid, or have forgotten, or never really believed it in the first place, it doesn't change the truth about who you are. Nothing you do, nothing anyone else says, can change who you belong to.

When I first moved to Saskatchewan I learned about a lot of things. I learned about the wind, and the cold, and football. And I learned that around here folk like to know who your grandparents are, not because they don't like strangers but because they like to know who you belong to. It helps them understand who you are. And think maybe in a way it helps them understand who they are too.

One of the very first people I met in this province was a woman named Alma. She was kind and faithful and wickedly funny. One evening after I spent an annoyingly large amount of time lamenting to her that I didn't know what to preach about the upcoming Sunday she said. "Honestly it doesn't matter what you preach. A whole lot of us don't really listen anyway. But when in doubt tell us God loves us. We need to hear that over and over again because for some reason we just keep forgetting. So talk about God's love and you'll be good."

I have no idea why we do that, why we keep forgetting that God loves us, that God loves us in such a way that we are Called Children of God, in such a way that the love becomes a defining part of who we are. But I do think that being followers of Christ calls us to the wonderful, challenging, never ending job of reminding one another who we belong to. That we commit to reminding one another that we are children of light, we are children of God, called to live and move in love, in truth, in action.

Understanding where we come from, understanding that absolutely everybody else comes from the same divine place, it changes how we look at things. It helps us be a bit more gentle with ourselves, it helps us be a bit more compassionate towards others, and it will change the world if we let it. Amen.

Song: You Gotta Move When the Spirit Says Move (Tamara Ferguson and Celeste Delahey)

Prayers of the People

God of the Easter season,

We find ourselves at an in-between moment right now – the snow is mostly gone, but it's not yet warm, the vaccines are here but not yet available to all, we hope that soon we will be able to see more friends and family but it's not quite safe yet and Jesus lingers with his disciples but we know he's not there forever.

Be with us in our waiting. Give us patience and understanding with each other and our leaders. Help us to spot signs of new life as the earth prepares for the growing season, and bless our doubts and confusion as we, like the disciples, try to make sense of what resurrection really means in our lives.

We offer gratitude that we are your beloved Children, God, and for all the little ways we experience your love each day, for the ways that we feel connected to you and to each other.

We are grateful for the essential workers who continue to ensure that we have access to health care, food, shelter, and education, and for the teams of people who are running vaccine clinics all across our province. Give them rest when they need it and stamina for the long hours.

Thank you for those who are courageously speaking out against racism, homophobia, and transphobia. Give them the support they need to keep going even in the face of negative reactions and hateful comments.

Thank you for the diversity of ways that we all move and dance through this world, even when we are unsure of our steps, even when we make mistakes and have to start over.

We offer prayers of gratitude today for those who support our church community – through prayer, service, and financial gifts. We are grateful that these gifts allow us to continue our ministry during this challenging time, and we pray that you would guide our steps in how we carry it out.

We need your healing, O Holy One, for our troubled planet, for our nation, for all who are struggling in body, mind, relationships and spirit. We remember especially those who are grieving, those who are struggling right now with worry, fear, sadness and loneliness. We pray for those who live with health concerns and difficult diagnoses and addictions, and we pray for those who care for them – for family, friends, and health care teams.

We pray for all the painful places of injustice in our world and in our communities – for those who live with trauma and abuse, for those experiencing poverty and homelessness, and for those whose lives are troubled by conflict and violence.

Knowing that you hear the prayers that we carry silently on our hearts we offer them to you now – prayers of gratitude, of concern for others, of worry for ourselves..... (moment of silence).

O God, hear our prayers, receive our hearts and from your deep love may we find the healing and hope we need... today and every day.

And may the dance of your Spirit call us to be in partnership with you, moving together as we seek to dance your hope, justice and love in all that we do.

Sung Blessing: Dance with the Spirit

Benediction

We have heard the risen Jesus speak peace
and offer us hope through his very body.

We have danced with dreamers past and present.

Send us forth now, O God,

to live in the freedom of the peace that you still speak to us,
making our steps more sure each and every day.

And may the Loving God,

Risen Christ,

and Dancing Spirit

fill you with all you need

for the days ahead.