

## Season of Creation Week 3 September 26, 2021

### Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship with McClure United Church. As was described in the introduction we are a faith community that does its best to be a church of welcome and of service to others.

I'm glad you have chosen to worship with us today.

Last week I mentioned how much I love this time of year and all the wonderful colours that come with the Fall - well I am excited to share with you our new Season of Creation banner which is full of beautiful colour. Thank you so much to the sewing group who have been working on this beautiful piece of art. Watch the November newsletter for more details about this gorgeous banner.

As we move through the season of creation, Laura and I have chosen a resource entitled "Sacred Earth: Sacred Worth." As we experience the beauty of this time of year let us give thanks for the precious weaving of all life.

Many of us, including Laura and I hoped that this week, we would all be back in the McClure church building enjoying the gifts of worshipping together and getting reacquainted however we need to be patient just a bit longer.

We are livestreaming this week and each Sunday from here on in but not the live streaming we originally planned. This means you will be able to watch the recorded worship together with other folks and chat with one another before, during and after. You will receive a link for this experience. After 9:30 and before 10:00 you can start the live stream experience and chat with friends. The recorded worship will start at 10am and -like I said you will be able to watch together and chat with one another as the recording plays. We hope this will provide folks with another opportunity to connect.

This week our Senior and Junior youth are connecting. The Senior **Youth group** will meet Sunday morning at 11a with Laura and the **Junior Youth** - grades 6-8 will meet at 11am Sunday with Mark Anderson.

**Children** (3 years to grade 5 or 6) we are waiting to see you in person when the whole congregation gathers in person. We are working on some fun thing to do with you on line and Eden will once again be providing leadership. We will keep in touch.

**October 3 at 7pm** Laura and I invite you to join us for an on- line zoom communion service. Please bring some bread and some juice and an item from

faraway. Perhaps you have a souvenir from a vacation, or a little something you purchased at Ten Thousand Villages, maybe you have a travel book from another part of the world, or a postcard from a friend please bring that item with you to the service.

Thursday September 30 a day to mark our intentional work of living **Truth and Reconciliation**. We encourage folks to wear an orange shirts to mark your commitment to the journey of Truth and reconciliation and we encourage you to take some time to reflect and pray about the Truth and Reconciliation journey we are all on and we also encourage you to do some learning. Wanuskewin has several learning opportunities for us to take in.

**Women's and Men's Saturday Morning 8am gatherings** the first Men's gathering was Saturday and the women's gathering is coming up October 2 via zoom. Send me an email if you would like to get the link information or call the office.

A new group is beginning soon "**Devotions and Discussion**". This will be a time for folks to check in, hear scripture, discuss and pray together. Everyone is welcome – the link to this online experience will be emailed to you as well as be available through Facebook and our website. You can also call the office for more information. We begin Wednesday October 6<sup>th</sup> at 7pm.

Speaking of our **office** – Avyn has left us to work for Knox United Church so we are currently in the process of pulling together a search committee to find a new Office administrator. Irene our current part time office/finance person will be covering many office tasks while we search. So thanks Irene for being willing to help out and thank you also to some very special volunteers. Because all these wonderful folks are working together we are able to keep the office open Tuesday – Thursday 9:00 till 3:30. If you happen to call and know one is able to answer the phone please leave a message and know that someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

And

Thank you,

Thank you to everyone who brought their recyclables to the church parking lot Friday proceeds go to Cosmo industries. Thanks to the **Outreach committee** for organizing this for us.

Laura is now going to help us centre our hearts as we worship.

**Intro to Theme**

Our theme for this week in the season of creation is The Paths of Life. The spiritual journey can be understood as a dance moving in and out of four mystical paths, each with their own gifts: awe and wonder; letting go; creativity; compassion and justice. These "cycles of life" are born out of the seasons of the planet and remind us that there is a time for everything and that fluctuations of the spirit are part of being human. Can we accept the Holy invitation to move fully into *all* the rhythms of life? I invite you to consider this now as I light the Christ candle... a reminder that the light and love of Christ guides on our spiritual journey.

## **Candle Lighting**

**Call to Worship:** "Come all You People" MV 2

## **Opening Prayer**

Guiding God, You who never leave our side in all the paths of life, be with us as we traverse the pain and delight of loving and living so that we might be with others in the seasons of their lives.

We praise you for setting in motion the cycles of creation and setting us among it. And all God's people say, **Amen.**

**Hymn:** Come Let Us Sing – Kristie Elliott

**Scripture:** Psalm 30 from The Message – Diane Hogg

I give you all the credit, GOD—  
you got me out of that mess,  
you didn't let my foes gloat.

GOD, my God, I yelled for help  
and you put me together.  
GOD, you pulled me out of the grave,  
gave me another chance at life  
when I was down-and-out.

All you saints! Sing your hearts out to GOD!  
Thank him to his face!  
He gets angry once in a while, but across  
a lifetime there is only love.  
The nights of crying your eyes out  
give way to days of laughter.

When things were going great  
I crowed, "I've got it made.

I'm GOD's favorite.

He made me king of the mountain."

Then you looked the other way  
and I fell to pieces.

I called out to you, GOD;

I laid my case before you:

"Can you sell me for a profit when I'm dead?  
auction me off at a cemetery yard sale?

When I'm 'dust to dust' my songs  
and stories of you won't sell.

So listen! and be kind!

Help me out of this!"

You did it: you changed wild lament  
into whirling dance;

You ripped off my black mourning band  
and decked me with wildflowers.

I'm about to burst with song;

I can't keep quiet about you.

GOD, my God,

I can't thank you enough.

**Sermon:** Rev. Debra Berg

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

I have been wondering a lot about church attendance these days. I was so excited to think that we might be able to have part of our community gathered for "in building" worship starting this week. We had planned to invite folks from McClure place and Amy's house to join Laura and I and a music person in the sanctuary - at which time we would worship together and live stream the service for the rest of the community. But, of course, plans changed and I am mightily disappointed. It is just not safe to bring people together - it was safe and then it wasn't looking good and then Holy Moley our Covid numbers went through the

roof. We just need to wait – I don't think there are many of us who are good at waiting.

I was looking forward to seeing you but then again I have been wondering if I will see you. When we are finally able to have “in building” worship. Will you come back? /// Now I understand that some might be slow to come back because of wanting to be extra careful and I totally support that. Some are liking the convenience of worshipping outside of Sunday morning: Some are worshipping Sunday night when the kids are in beds and some retired folks are worshipping on a weekday morning while still in their PJ's and with a strong coffee in hand. Some are worshipping from the lake, the deck and even from the other side of the country and in a whole different time zone. I wonder what we will look like when we are able to once again be together in our building?

I wonder too how it will feel to notice empty chairs not because of choice, but because in our time away from each other, some of our family has passed away and some of our family have experienced life altering diagnosis. We have all aged and for some of us that means we are not quite as mobile, and our voices not so strong, for some of our younger men their voices have landed in a deeper place and are less likely to crack. So many changes in our lives. We might also need some more chairs, as we have had some new family members to welcome, several babies have been born which we celebrate, and some have married and some who have been away for awhile are feeling a renewed connection because of the phoning tree and they are looking forward to seeing their church friends again.

For many of us we will need to explore again why we go to church in order for us to throw back the covers, put on pants and get ourselves out the door on a Sunday morning.

Why do people go to church?

One of the common answers to this questions goes like this: "People are looking for something uplifting--something that will help them make it through another week." An older man put it this way, "The work week beats you down, so Sunday should lift you up. Life is hard. Faith is like a shot of adrenaline. It gets you through!"

The Calvinists did not think that the purpose of attending church was to get a boost to our wellbeing. Instead, they spoke of moral obligation, the ordering of society, and fulfilling the commandment to keep the Sabbath.

Down through the centuries, Christians have articulated all sorts of different reasons for belonging to a faith community. In some settings, people have spoken, first and foremost, about church being a place where you can search for God, or at least, learn the content of the Christian faith. Others emphasize their connection to a community of love and support. Still others point to a liturgy: to their thirst for the sacraments, the music, and the prayers. ///// In every age, there have been those who have expected church to provide a moral compass for themselves or their children. Yet, others indicate that they have sought out church because they long to be part of a *prophetic* community--a group dedicated to meeting human need: feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, reaching out to a broken world.///

In recent years, though, a large number of Christians, give a different reason for associating with church--for having faith. Simply put, an increasing number of people hope that faith will make them happy. This motive for tossing back the covers on Sunday morning has uniquely North American roots.

Christianity, so suggests some evangelical leaning folk, can help solve your problems--your marital problems, your work problems, your financial problems. Christianity for some is a call to be optimistic about your life, a summons to cast aside negative thoughts, and an invitation to see yourself as a success. What could be wrong with that?

But what do you do when things go terribly wrong, how do you stay happy. I recall a story of a woman name Beatrice who was a lovely woman who leaned toward this idea that Christianity was about staying happy and solving all your problems. But that changed. In fact, she eventually turned away from all religion. She did this after learning that her son Bobby, eleven years old, her first born, had been killed when he fell onto the subway tracks and touched the electrified third rail. After that, Beatrice stopped attending church. In fact, she never raised the subject of God in a conversation again. When asked why she never went to worship with the rest of the family, she replied "No amount of positive thinking, no amount of prayer for my children's safety, changed Bobby's fate, or could bring him back." She was not happy and Christianity ceased to have any meaning.

As people of faith, we need to ask : Is happiness really a Christian virtue? Is our God only the God of happy times? Can church--can faith--make you a happier person?

Jonathan Haidt, professor of psychology at UVA, in his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, asks people to think of the best thing that could ever happen to them as individuals and the worst thing that could happen them as individuals. The most common responses Haidt got was this: what is the event that would increase happiness the most - winning the lottery; the thing that would reduce overall happiness the most is becoming a quadriplegic. That's what people think, says Haidt, but they are wrong. While the initial rush of winning the lottery is indeed great and the psychological pain associated with losing control of one's body is enormous, studies have shown that within a year paraplegics and lottery winners return to "their baseline levels of happiness." We adapt. We recalibrate.

If we are so adaptable, if we return so quickly to a baseline of happiness, can we really assume that church will produce anything other than a momentary

blip of cheer for our hearts and our minds? And maybe that is ok. But the fact that happiness comes and goes so quickly should send us in pursuit of deeper things, big blue whales of things, things that swim beneath the surface storms. The world is convinced that happiness is humanity's chief goal, but I think God would have us go deeper. God prepares us for *joy*.

In today's psalm, psalm 30, the writer says to God, "Hey, when I was prosperous, making the big bucks, I thought myself a self-made man, a happy camper, a hot ticket. I said out loud, *I shall never be moved*. Then everything fell to pieces. It literally went to Sheol--to Hell. I was miserable. I was aching, God, mostly because I could not find your face."

Why are texts like this in the Bible? This passage is not unusual--not at all. If you were to toss out all the stuff that doesn't sound like positive thinking, you would have to do away with at least 75% of scripture. The Bible is crammed full of people speaking negative thoughts. Even Jesus says hard stuff. It is kind of hard to put a positive spin on Jesus saying, "Take up your cross and follow me."

When we try to erase these negative things from our faith, we lose something important. When we cover up the hard stuff in our faith, to proclaim a gospel centered in happiness and nothing else, we cheat ourselves. We miss the central message that the Bible goes to great lengths to convey: Our God is not just the God of the happy, but the God of the suffering, the sad, the lost, the sick, the confused and the downright angry.///

While I was on Sabbatical I took in two conferences - virtually. One entitled Evolving Faith and the other the Festival of Homiletics – both conferences had religious leaders, activists, artists and preachers wrestling with the question “where are we as church”, where are we as people going from here. From this place of too much, of a planet in crisis, of increased violence and significant mental health decline. Of division and alienation.



There was no definitive answer but there was a vision of the way through. The vision was that of a people who learn from their ancestors and who lean on each other. Of a people who learn the stories of faith; the stories of loss and Holy connection and new life and how the people of God found their way through. // The way through is to tell our own stories of faith; stories of loss and holy connection and new life, to tell the stories of those who we leaned on to get through our every day lives and those who leaned on us.

To do this we need to be together. We need to be together to hear, to encounter the holy and to wrestle with the truth and then we need to live the new life – the joy of our God.

Church is not the place we find happiness – it is the place we find our way through – it is the place we tell **the** story and **our** story, the place we wrestle with the truth and it is the place we find those who we need to lean on – it is the place we offer our very selves to others for leaning - it is a place of hope – a place of joy.////

God did not abandon me, says the psalmist. God heard me, and after the crying, the mourning, the sackcloth, the ashes, there was joy.

God, help us not to create an idol out of happiness. Help us to seek out the deep waters of faith and in those waves wash up in joy. Amen.

**Hymn:** We Are Pilgrims – Kristie Elliott

### **Offering**

Traditionally, this has been the time in our worship service when we pass the offering plates. This ritual is not just about the collection of money. It is also an opportunity to reflect on our role in the ministry of McClure United Church and on how we live our lives as followers of Christ. So I'd like to invite us all to just pause now as we see some images move across our screens. These are a visual sign of our ongoing ministry. As you are watching, perhaps you'd like to reflect on where God is calling you to share your gifts at this time in your life. Of course financial gifts continue to be necessary in order to do the ministry we are called to do... the gift of you – your passions, your talents, your time, however, are also necessary. What desire might God be stirring up in you? What might

God be calling you... or nudging you... to do that will feed your soul and serve the ministry that we have been called to share?

At the end of the service will be information about how to make a financial contribution... if you are able, please consider sharing in this way.

And, if you are feeling a pull to share your love in another way... please be in touch with Debra or myself and we can help you discern what that might be.

For months now you have continued your stewardship of this faith community as we found our way online. Covid may have kept us from being in the church building, but it has not kept us from being the church. So many of you have donated your time, helping us to discern and make decisions about keeping one another safe... the church board and many of the committees have continued to meet on Zoom... you've shown up for discussion groups and Bible studies... we've continued and you've continued to be a church that cares about and connects with the wider community through various outreach projects. You have also continued to support the ministries of this church financially. Thank you! Your gifts, whatever they may be, are a blessing!

And so we begin our time of prayer now with a dedication of all the offerings that have been freely given and gratefully received.

Generous God,

It is such a blessing to give and to receive, to share and support the ministries of this church as we do our best to live out our mission... our mission to worship, to study and to serve so that we might reflect your love in the world. May all of the offerings we have received be a source of hope and love in this faith community and in the communities around us. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

And now once again I invite you to make a fist with your hands and imagine in those clenched fists are all the things that you are holding tightly: maybe its fear, anxiety, worry, grief, loneliness, helplessness.

Or you might be thinking of a specific circumstance that is weighing heavy on you right now.

Now I invite you to slowly open your fists and imagine letting go... letting go into the loving embrace of the Spirit... the Spirit who receives and transforms all things.

As we let go and open up, may our hands and our hearts be ready to hold, with love, the concerns of others and the pain of the world.

And so we pray now for the world...

We pray for all your people God who are struggling right now.. for those who are sick... those struggling with their mental health... those who are grieving, lonely, worried and afraid... for those fearful of their future – of the unknown.. those struggling with addictions... we hold all your people God in love, trusting in your presence and in the hope you offer.

And we continue to pray for in the midst of this pandemic. We pray for everyone who is sick or supporting loved ones who are... may they find comfort in your healing love. We pray for the medical personnel... especially those working in hospitals – may they feel strengthened and sustained by your presence and by the love and support of all of us who are so grateful for their care. We pray too for all of those who have not been directly affected by the covid virus but are feeling the emotional and spiritual heaviness of living in this time of uncertainty and fear... of disappointment and heartache. May we all be filled with your spirit of patience... courage... and hope. May we all continue to challenge ourselves to look enthusiastically for the joy, the love and the life that is in us and all around us.

And as we edge now into fall... into a time of transition and change – a time when light dims earlier and creation begins to prepare for the coming cold, help us to remember your loving presence as it surrounds us, guides us and helps us prepare for what's to come. Some of us are excited by this change and some of us are challenged by it – some of us may be feeling a little of both. As we enter into this autumn time may the earlier setting of the sun remind us to take time to rest. May the brilliant colors of the leaves remind us of the wonder of your creation. May the steam of our breath in the cool morning air remind us that it is you gives us the breath of life. May the harvest from the fields remind us of the abundance we have been given and the bounty we are to share with others.

I invite you to place your hands now on your heart and sit with God in just a moment of quiet... a time for us to lift up all those things difficult to put into words, but felt in the depths of our hearts...

Thank you God for receiving our prayers, for opening our hands and hearts... and for your love and compassion – holding us close, even while we are apart.

And we pray together now the prayer that Jesus taught as we sing together the Lord's Prayer.

**Benediction:**

Let us go as listening, pausing, responding people, called to live the gospel's love.

And as we go

we know we are comforted by a God of many stories;

we know that Jesus is moving alongside us as teacher and friend on the journey,

And

we know that the Spirit draws us always forward toward, refreshment and deep faith.

Thanks be

Amen