

Worship for February 13, 2022

Acknowledgment Video

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to the adventure that is the worship of God with McClure United Church. Today we are coming to you - via live stream using our new Rural Connect equipment. So I am excited to welcome those of you who are joining worship in real time - as we share it this morning. We had a little glitch last week with the live stream but I think we have that fixed this week. The recorded worship was more complete so for those of you who worshiped later in the day you were able to access the more complete worship. February is the month we are working with new equipment and new formats so please be part of the adventure and send us your feedback.

In the sanctuary today is a socially distant and fully vaccinated worship team. Laura and I, along with Elin Sletmoen and Shirley Blackburn our musicians - as well as several tech people are here - eager to share in worship with you.

For those watching the recorded worship I pray that what is offered here feeds your soul and strengthens you for the week ahead.

I am excited to announce that we welcomed Claudia Manning to our office team this week. You can get a sense of who Claudia is as she posted on facebook this week – she brings great energy and solid skills. I think in Claudia’s post she has invited everyone to stop by the office and say hello to her and she is encouraging folks to bring cookies - so there is lots to like about Claudia.

As part of our ongoing adventure as a Church we continue to be excited about the Rural Connect ministry. We will welcome Rural Church partners in March I am looking forward to the richness we will share in relationship as we work together. Our build a snow persons along Taylor project have not worked out as planned - given the weather. After our big rain and then melt we are running a bit low on snow, and I am not sure whether or not to be happy about that. On Wednesday morning last week the preschool was out trying to build a few snow kids but mostly they could only chip out a lump – inviting us to use our imaginations.

However our February plant a heart for refugees is going very well. Throughout the month of February, the Outreach Committee is inviting you to support refugees by making a donation and for every \$20.00 donated, a heart will be planted outside. The good word is that we will be welcoming a family from Eritrea very soon so refugee support is even more important.

As we journey closer to Lent which begins March 2 - Laura and I want to invite folks to consider joining us for some thoughtful time. Laura and I will be leading a Lenten Book study together beginning on Wednesday, March 9th. The book for this study is called Lesser Evils and is available both in paperback and in a digital format. You can

purchase a hard copy of the book or a digital copy through the United Church of Canada Book store. Laura has sent the link, to the digital book, in this worship email and she will also posted it on the Facebook page for you. We don't know at this point if that gathering will be online or in person... or a combination of the two... but we will let you know as soon as we have more information.

This week you would have received notice of a Congregational meeting coming up on Feb 27th at 1:00pm so that we might talk about our 2022 Operational and Capital budgets. However the notice was a bit confusing. There were two agendas and the link to the information was not working. So we will send the whole thing again early in the week. Hard copies of the materials are available at the church office if you what to try the old fashioned and turns out rather reliable way.

Some of you might be wondering when or if we will be back in the building worshipping together and I just want you to know that the church board will be considering this at our Feb 22 meeting. Your thoughts are always welcome so please send them via email to the office.

These are all the announcements.

So now our worship team invites you to:

Relax your shoulders, take a breath and open your heart as we worship together...

Gathering Song: Lord Listen to Your Children Praying *(1 verse)*

Call to Worship and Candle Lighting

God calls us together to discover what it means to be blessed.

May we enter this time of worship grounded in God's love.

and listening for God's blessings as they are revealed to us now... and always.

I light this Christ candle today as a reminder light of Christ shining in the world...

blessing us so that we can be a blessing to others.

(a candle is lit followed by a minute or so of silence with piano music, when piano music ends, opening prayer begins.)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, draw us near to you now as you are always with us.

May your Spirit of compassion, peace and justice move within us in this time of worship. Open our hearts to hear your Word, and our minds to be open to the transforming power of your love. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Hymn: How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds *(5 verses)*

Scripture: Luke 6:17-26

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

‘But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Reflection

The Rev Mark Larson a Lutheran pastor writes:

My father and I were standing in a parking lot on a Thursday afternoon, after a funeral. The previous Monday, I'd received a phone call from the pastor of the church where my father had served for over twenty years, the church where I grew up. She had thoughtfully called to let us know about the death of one the members of that congregation. Calling him a "member" was an understatement. "Pillar" would be a more appropriate description. You know, the kind of person you always think will be there, whose fingerprints are on every square inch of that building and that ministry. I thought to myself that this would be a perfect opportunity. Ever since we moved my mother into an Alzheimer's care unit, my dad had been going to visit her once, twice, even three times a day. He really hadn't "transitioned" yet. He had not taken a chance to get away, to break out of the daily routine of caring for my mom that had become the center of his life, to find a "new normal." I thought that this might be opportunity to help him make that transition.

I called him up and I said, "Dad, if you want to go to this funeral, I'll go with you." I told him that I thought it would be good for him. He agreed. And so, we met at church on Thursday morning, the day of the funeral.

The experience was everything that I hoped that it would be. The service was a wonderful, tender tribute to this faithful servant of the Gospel, this saint of the Church. There was sadness, of course, but also a beautiful celebration of his life. I lost count of the old friends who came up to my father, saying how good it was to see him and how much it meant that he had come back for this tribute. The highlight was the reception following the funeral when the current pastor came up and sat down for half an hour to talk to my dad and regale him with stories and memories that people had shared with her of his ministry. She told him how fondly he was still remembered. And, you know, if I'm going to be perfectly honest, a lot of people came up to me, too, to point out what a good son I was, bringing my father to this service. I felt I was trying to be attentive to his needs, but I may have overdone it. When we got back to the parking lot, preparing to go our separate ways, he turned to me and said, "You don't have to worry so much about me. I know that I'm going every day to the care center. I know this is becoming my routine, but it's okay. I've been married to your mother for sixty years. This terrible disease has taken her away from me. Of course, I'm sad. Give me time. I deserve to weep."

Luke the author of our scripture lesson writes: "Blessed are you who weep, for you will laugh."

My hunch is Rev Larson wanted to help his father move from the weeping part to the laughing part more quickly – that is what motivated him to take his father out to the funeral. He thought his dad would feel better, even be happy after connecting with old friends and a positive part of his life history. But his father knew he deserved to weep – it would be okay. Perhaps his father knew that even in his grief we was not alone, God was with him, he was blessed.

Luke's version of Jesus great sermon – the beatitudes - was not preached from the Mount, as it is in Matthew's gospel, but rather proclaimed on the plain, right in the midst of the people. Not from high above them but rather right where they stood. In fact, he might even have been below them. I noticed when I read this passage this week, something I had not noticed before. Jesus is busy healing the crowd's diseases and then Jesus literally had to "look up" to see his disciples before he could teach them. Where they somehow above him? Had they removed themselves from those who were suffering? Is this why Jesus has to look up – to help them take notice of the poor, sad, even discarded people that he was serving?

"Don't you realize these are the blessed of God," he seems to say, "This is where we should focus our attention because it is these people who have God's attention. God sees them even when no one else does."

To be blessed, is to know that you are God's. To know that where ever you go, you will not be alone. To be blessed is to know that you are valued and important, simply because God lives and breaths in and through you as God does in all of creation. Jesus seems to be witnessing to the truth that there is no separation between the disciple and the crowd. There is no up and down. Rather everyone is connected here on the plain of living and God's blessing belongs to everyone and particularly those who are wounded.

Maybe if we were honest about our own woundedness, we would know how close we are to one another and how much we need one another.

Some of us have lost health or lost relationships or lost jobs. Our wounds are personal, they are unique, they are truly ours, they are no one else's. And yet they connects us with one another because we are all wounded in some way. When Jesus says blessed are those who weep, he reminds us all that of us mourn. Instead of separating us into some kind of imaginary hierarchy of need, we are brought closer in our shared weeping.

We look around, we see injustice, we see exploitation, we see violence, and we grieve. No matter who we voted for, no matter our economic status, our sexual orientation, or our ethnic background, we are all weep. We hear of borders closed and walls being built and we know, we know this is not how God works. We see military build up, discrimination, racism and we mourn. We listen to hateful words coming to us from all sides, and it hurts.

The good news is this. Blessed are those who weep. God hears you. God knows you. God comes close to you. And God will not let you go. We all deserve to weep, and we are all blessed. Even while we are weeping and mourning, we are blessed.

In Luke, Jesus is clear that wealth and privilege are real dangers that have the power to separate us from each other and the whole of creation. Jesus spells out the "woes" of living separated - living as though some are better than others. Jesus challenges those, with societal privilege, to recognize and understand the responsibility of that privilege.

The "woe-itudes" helps us all take stalk and ask - am I like the disciples in the story - somehow removed from the people Jesus is caring for – are we looking down on others. These warnings challenge us to care more about the people God cares about. And to see ourselves in the midst of it all.

How differently we would look at our neighbors if we saw them as both wounded and blessed?

There's a wonderful little video that I came across years ago that I keep thinking about. It begins with a businessman going about his usual day, except the day isn't going very well. It seems as each minute passes, the day gets worse and his frustration level rises. He starts to pull out of the driveway, and almost runs over a child on a bike. He gets to his favorite coffee outlet, but a woman steals his parking place. The man in front of him in line places an order for his entire office building.

When he finally gets to the counter, he's told that it will be a few minutes because they have to brew a fresh batch.

Sitting in a corner, seething in frustration, a man walks up and hands him a pair of sunglasses and then disappears. Confused, he puts the glasses on and all of sudden little bubbles, like in the comics, appear above everyone's head. Instead of dialog however, he can read what is really going on in everyone's life.

The woman who cut him off is distracted because her child is sick. The man who placed the huge coffee order is worried about a medical diagnosis he just received. The barista is struggling with addiction. And finally, returning home a bit shaken, he sees the child again with a bubble above his head which says, "Just need someone who cares."

The man gets out of his car and walks over to help the boy fix his bike.

How would we treat each other if we could really see what was in everyone's bubble? I believe that all the walls and all the distance we place between ourselves and others would disappear.

After all, we worship a God who is not content to look down upon us from some safe haven, light years away. We follow a savior who gets down, right down on the same plain with those in deepest pain, with those who have nothing left. With you and me - with everyone. Blessed.

We are not so different. We are all wounded. And together we yearn for healing and a world turned upside down.

Amen.

Hymn: My Soul Cries Out (*9 slides of verses*)

Acknowledgment of Offering and Prayer of Dedication

This community of faith has continued to offer support in so many ways throughout this pandemic time. The offering plates are here as a symbol of the financial gifts that have been given... without these gifts we wouldn't be able to continue to be the church in the way we need to be. For all your financial gifts, we are grateful.

And we also must acknowledge that there are so many ways we are supported to live out our ministry beyond financial support.

So many people share of themselves... donating their time... to keep us going. Your commitment to this community and willingness to share your time and energy with us – is such an amazing. We literally could not exist without you.

So let's take a moment to pray, acknowledging these gifts and dedicating them God for the ministry of McClure United Church.

Life-giving God, out of the abundance of our lives we offer our gifts to you.

Through your blessing and our willingness to share, may these offerings become a source for hope and love in this faith community, and in the community beyond us, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Sung Offertory: All That I Have

Prayers of the People

Compassionate God, You blessed the poor and healed those left to beg for their livelihoods. And yet we are still surrounded by poverty and financial difficulties. Support those who face struggles at work, or for whom employment or income is uncertain. Help us in this time to provide for those who beg for their livelihoods that they may be cared for with compassionate love.

Abundant God, You blessed the hungry and fed thousands, but famine is still a problem for this world. Worse, starvation is used as a weapon of war, and claims the lives of many thousands of children in conflict zones. Be with those in this time who are seeking peace or delivering aid to the millions facing starvation.

Comforting God, You blessed those who wept and consoled those who grieved. Be with those in this time who have lost loved ones... or who are grieving any loss. May we feel your presence in the midst of loss and disappointment

All-embracing God, You blessed the broken and the lonely, and You brought them into Your circle of love. You welcomed the excluded and You made time for those whom others told You to ignore. Bless us in this time when we are broken and lonely. Bring us into Your family of love and prompt us to share Your love with those around us: welcoming; including; noticing others' needs.

And we take a moment now in quiet to offer our own prayers, seeking God's blessing on us, on those we love and on the world around us...

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught, saying:

Our Father/Mother, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: Bless Now O God the Journey *(3 verses)*

Benediction

May the companionship of God - shape us into community

May the peace of God fill us with hope and joy.

And may the love of God embrace us and strengthen us to serve each other this day and every day. Amen.

Sung Blessing: Take Up His Song *(1 verse)*