

# **Worship with McClure United Church**

September 20, 2020

## **Opening**

Welcome to worship with the McClure United Church.

Thank you for spending this time with us.

It is my prayer that what is offered here today will be a blessing to you as you live out your call as a disciple of Jesus.

McClure is a church of welcome and mission. It is our privilege to offer this ministry on Treaty 6 land and the traditional homeland of the metis.

To say we are living in unusual times is an understatement and I wondered what the Fall would be like. Traditionally it is a very exciting and busy time and I am so very glad to say this Fall has not disappointed.

We are busy as ever being church. The Outreach committee met the other night and planning innovative ways we can help out our neighbours in these challenging times. The Stewardship committee is eager to inspire folks to contribute time, talent and money to the many ministries we are living. The Board is setting the direction for our future and the ministry team is doing its best to nurture our spirits.

Laura is particularly busy these days pulling together all the wonderful pieces of our ministry with youth, young adults and children. In fact, today is the return of children and youth to Rainbow Village. We are continuing in an online format for now. Children will gather at 10am via Zoom and youth at 11. If you have not received the Zoom link, please let Laura know or join the Rainbow Village Facebook Group for more information. Also, Laura has prepared Faith at Home kits for families with children and will be delivering those in the next couple of weeks. These kits include stories, games, craft ideas and discussion starters for the whole family. If you would like one or know someone who may, please let Laura know and she will happily delivery one to you.

Laura and I are also going to host a coffee time after church on zoom at noon on Sundays for those who are missing those post worship debriefs. Check out our Facebook page for information as to how to join in.

We have some fabulous group of folks who are hosting a McClure United Church pie sale fundraiser on September 30th. Whether you are an experienced pie-baker or pie-eater - we would love for you to take part!

If you would like to make a pie DONATION, please contact Ebba Eggleston at (306) 373-0525. Again, the number to call to DONATE a pie is (306) 373-0525.

To ORDER your pie you make a donation of \$10 or more, and you contact Marlene Kells at (306) 374-0238.

A selection of apple pies, pumpkin pies and other fruit pies will be available. For complete details, please visit our pie sale page on our website at [www.mcclureunitedchurch.org/pie-sale](http://www.mcclureunitedchurch.org/pie-sale).

Keep connected to the website for information.

We are working on providing more print material for those who do not have tech access but in the mean time if you have a neighbour who would appreciate church news please give them a call and help keep us all connected.

Once again, I want to thank all those who are part of keeping this worship connection alive and well. I want to thank Andrew for his many skills, Terry Clark for reading scripture and Tamara Ferguson for offering a ministry of music.

### **Opening Prayer**

And now as we move more fully into this time of worship, I invite you to take a moment to breathe deeply of God's love... of God's energy and life... that is in us and all around us. Ground yourself in that truth. And I light this candle as a reminder to us all that the warmth of God's love continues to surround us. May we experience that warmth... even as the days begin to cool ... may we experience God's warmth and the inspiration that warmth offers now as we worship God together.

Please join me in prayer...

Here we are God... again gathered to worship you in our prayers, our song... in scripture and in our reflections. Ground us in you... open our hearts and minds to hear your word for each of us today. Help us to let go... even just for this time... of all that holds us back from truly living in your love. May we breathe more deeply – trusting that in each breath we are taking in your spirit. In Jesus name, we pray... Amen.

## **Scripture**

### **Exodus 16:2-15**

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?” And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but” against the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’” And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine

as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

*May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of scripture. Amen.*

### **Reflection**

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

“The whole congregation of Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness”.

I have heard my fair share of complaining recently. Perhaps you have too. And in our time we have so many new avenues to complain - we have emails, cell phones, Twitter, Facebook, ever expanding venues for complaining.

The complaint that currently grates on my last nerve is when I hear folks refusing to wear a face mask because they are hot and uncomfortable. I must admit I have not been thinking happy thoughts when I see my fellow wilderness wanderers not wearing a mask. Yes, I know some people can't wear a mask but it is such a very small percentage of the population - I'm sure not all of them showed up at Home Depot on Saturday all at the same time. I mean really.

“The whole congregation of Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness”.

It is funny how these wilderness stories seem to have taken on a whole new depth of meaning when read in context of our current wilderness time. In these days of COVID and in these uncomfortable days of peeling back the layers of our countries systematic racism and as we exposing humanities exploitation of the planet for profit - I find these ancient stories of wilderness so important to hear.

What was the wilderness like for our wilderness dwelling ancestors in our story from Exodus? It was a difficult place. Their bodies were pushed to the edge of hunger and fatigue and this ache caused them to long for the “good old days’ even though those days were imperfect days – days of slavery and hardship. At least in those good old days their stomachs were full and they knew what the day would bring. They knew the bed would be hard but it was familiar.

This part of the story comes as the people of Israel have been liberated. Moses has lead them out of slavery, they had rejoiced to know that God had freed them, that God had gathered them together and pulled them out of their oppression, guided them through crushing waters, saved them from a frightful army and brought them through to an in between place, into the wilderness - with the promise of new land and new life ahead. But the problem was they had not yet arrived - they were not their yet and their memory of being brought out of slavery by their God was beginning to fade. // They do not remember what God has done for them. All they feel is the emptiness in their stomachs and the soreness of their feet and they start to complain.

What annoys me about this story is God’s response to all the complaining. The people complained

*It would have been better for us to died in Egypt then endure this time*

*At least back then we had plenty to eat – just slave rations but okay.*

*Moses, you brought us out here to kill us! Well Moses sure did go to a lot of trouble just to kill you--really?*

What annoys me is found in in verse 4—Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain.....And I find myself hoping the next word will be "fire" or "big boulders, "something to quiet these complainers. But no, oh no. The Lord said, "I am going to rain **bread** from heaven for you." Really - Bread?!? Complainers should get discipline, and only those who boldly kept their chin up should get the bread. Don’t you think?

Friend this is just another one of those relentless stories of God’s grace, like Jesus’ story of the workers in the vineyard who came late in the day and got paid like everybody else or the young son who squandered everything who then has a party thrown in his honor. //Bread for miserable complainers. I guess as one who complains about the complainers, I should be glad to hear about God sending bread for them and for me, too.

God simply understood their misery, their sorrow over a lost way life, no matter how brutal it had been, and that the desert really is a hard, sad place, especially when there's no bread or water. God seems not to shy away from difficult places but rather seems to be found in the midst of such places.

Nobel prize winner, Isaac Bashevis Singer once said, "I only pray when I'm in trouble; the problem is, I'm in trouble all the time." Miraculously God sees us in our trouble and rains...bread on us. Rather extraordinary this God of ours.

But here is my problem. If the God power is going to get involved, then I want God to be bigger. I want this bread from heaven not to be dewy, flaky little bits but rather I want God to send big honking focaccia with garlic and sea salt. I want God to skip the bread and just scoop the people up and drop them in the promised land already. Let's get going on the promised land, milk and honey stuff. // What do they say, "go big or go home". But our God doesn't seem to work like this at least not in this story.

I used to be in charge of the Holy Hardware department of Western Book and Stationary which was a Christian book store located across from the Bay on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. You know what I mean by Holy Hardware? The religious stuff section – the section where the big pink eraser that has a stamp on it that reads "Jesus erases sin" section. Or the paddle with the elastic ball game – on the paddle is a target and the words "Jesus is the Goal" or the bracelets with WWJD in bold letters – what would Jesus do. The religious stuff.

There was one little item that we could not seem to keep in stock, I think it was called "Daily Bread" it was a little plastic loaf of bread with a slit in the top that held a little stack of rainbow coloured papers with a bible verse on each of them. It was a daily devotional thing where you take a bible verse from one end of the stack, read it and return to the back end. I never understood why that little loaf was so popular. I had no clue how this little scriptural tidbit could contribute to an enduring faith. But I get it now because for me, in these wilderness days, it is those little tidbits that are feeding me and helping me be present in a wilderness not of my choosing.

It is those barely noticeable acts of kindness, a brief moment of prayer, a treasured saying shared on Facebook, a door held open, a cheerful hello

muffled behind a mask. It is a sunbeam, a cup of tea, and a little nap. It is people doing their imperfect best and wanting to be better. It is an infant in Mary's arms, the hem of Jesus' garment, the bread broken and wine poured, the breathless news that He is risen. It is the assurance that every complaint whispered or yelled is gathered tenderly into the God powers strong embrace, heard and held - that is getting me through.

When Captain von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* (one of my favorite movies by the way) fears for the future of his beloved Austria, he doesn't sing about Austrian might or intellectual genius or artistic accomplishments, although he could. Instead, he sings about a little flower, Eidelweiss, *small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to meet me... may you bloom and grow forever.*

God seems to love what is small.

Perhaps God became small for us in the babe of Bethlehem because God knew it is in the small things that our hearts are cracked open and made new.

Friends I know times are tough, I feel it too. And I want God to swoop in and fix it all and land us on the other side but God seems to operate differently. Our God is a God in the midst of the mess with pieces of bread and birds and just enough for the day.

Keep watch for God's sustenance in the morning and in the evening and if you have enough of what you need for the day and you find yourself with a little extra - share that little bit with your neighbour.

Sustained by the God power and together, perhaps complaining all the way, we will get to where we are going.

Amen.

### **Prayers of the People/Lord's Prayer**

And now we gather our hearts together in prayer...

Opening ourselves to God's abundant love and grace – allowing it to fill our hearts... to fill our whole being.

We begin our prayers with gratitude...

Thank you God for your love and for all the ways your love guides us, strengthens us and grounds us.

Thank you for the many blessings in our lives – for the obvious blessings – like family, friends, and all of the things that bring us comfort and joy...

And we also thank you for the less obvious blessings – the ones we may not notice – and the ones we may not even recognize as blessings in this moment.

Let's take a moment now in quiet to give thanks for those gratitudes that we are holding in our hearts...

And we turn our attention now to prayers of care and concern... for the world, for our church and for ourselves.

As we edge closer 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.

And we continue to pray for all your people... for those who are sick... those struggling with mental health challenges or addictions ... those who are grieving, lonely, worried and afraid... for those fearful of their future – of the unknown. God, we hold all your people and offer them to you, trusting in your presence and in the hope you offer...

And we continue to pray for everyone impacted by this pandemic... especially those who are sick or supporting loved ones who are – and now as children, youth, teachers and all the many support workers have returned to school, we pray for their safety. We pray that they will feel strengthened by your presence and held strong in your love. May they find the patience, resilience and courage they need to adjust to the changes



that covid has brought and any anxiety and suffering it has created. 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 we take another moment now in quiet to offer our own prayers of care and concern to you now.

All of these prayers we offer to you now in the name of Jesus the Christ... who taught us to pray this way:

Our Father/Mother, who aren't 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.

### **Blessing**

Let us go from this time as Moses, Aaron and Miriam not knowing for sure where they were going , but knowing that God was leading the way.

Let us go from this time as Jesus went, with faith in the God power to heal the wounds of the earth and its people.

Let us go from this time as the people of God, with faith and hope in God's promise of life for all.

We go in the light of our Parent God,  
The rebel son and  
the relentless spirit.

Amen.