

Worship with McClure United Church

~ 2nd Sunday in Advent ~

December 6, 2020

Welcome

Welcome to worship with McClure United Church. This is the second Sunday in Advent - the Sunday where we focus on Peace.

Once again McClure is 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 identified these as priority items. Please add some to your shopping list. Health regulations require that items be unopened and/or in their original packaging.

Requests:

- Deodorant: male & female
- Toothbrushes and toothpaste
- Feminine hygiene items (tampons, pads)
- Toques, headbands, gloves and scarves
- Financial donations- make cheques to McClure mark EGADZ. Cash will be used to purchase a gift for each client.

Drop off will be in the church parking lot during the first week of December:

- Sunday Dec. 6, 11AM-Noon
- Monday Dec 7, 5-6:30PM

Blue Christmas - Wednesday, December 9th at 7PM.

It has been our tradition to share in a time of worship early in Advent where we acknowledge that Christmas is, for some of us, a time of profound grief and heartache. As we worship, we are reminded of God's companionship even in difficult times. This year a Blue Christmas service will be available just like Sunday morning worship - an email will be sent to you with a link to the service.

I'm sorry we cannot physically be together but please know you are not alone.

Women's Gathering - Saturday, December 12th at 8AM.

This group of faith filled McClure women continues to meet once a month early on a Saturday morning for conversation and connection. You are welcome to join in via Zoom. Send a note to Debra indicating you would like to come along debra.b@shaw.ca.

If you enjoy baking, please consider donating some of your Christmas creations to our bake sale. We are looking for Christmas cookies, tarts, candy (confections), squares, slices, and any single-size treats. No muffins, please.

To DONATE baking, please call:

Ebba Eggleston
(306) 373-0525, or
(306) 262-0525

If you are donating baked goods, please drop them off at the Church on Tuesday, December 15th, 9–10:30AM.

To place an ORDER, please contact:

Marlene Kells
marlenekells@sasktel.net
(306) 374-0238

For \$20, you will receive a tray of delicious Christmas treats (4 dozen). Each tray will have an assortment of baked goods.

Orders must be placed by Saturday, December 12th.

For those picking up their order, please do so at the Church on Tuesday, December 15th, 4–5:30PM.

Proceeds will go to general revenue for McClure United Church.

For both drop-off and pick-up, masks must be worn. Use the east entrance nearest to the Church office.

Living Skies Regional Council is excited to offer a wonder-filled virtual evening of music & story for the entire UCC family!

Tickets Now Available:

<https://form.jotform.com/Regions245/AdventConcertTickets>

Co-hosted by Lorne Calvert & Lindsay Mohn, the evening features music provided by Sacred Sounds Worship Band, a Christmas narrative from Jim Tenford, and production support from Cheri Uthe of Faith Productions.

Ticket proceeds go directly to UCC Communities of Faith (congregations) & other UCC Ministries throughout the Living Skies Region. When you buy your ticket, simply indicate the specific Community of Faith or Ministry that you would like to support.

Questions: Please contact Kent at livingskiesyaya@united-church.ca or 306-221-5529

We now have our very own Advent Prayer Tree (right in front of the main doors of the church building).

We are inviting everyone to write your prayer requests on fabric strips and tie them to the tree - or simply tie a piece of fabric as a symbolic gesture of offering your prayer.

When you stop by to tie your fabric, pause for a moment to share your prayer and offer a prayer for this community as we travel this Advent journey of hope, peace, joy and love.

Thanks to Doug Coley for making this tree for us!

Zoom Connection - Friday mornings at 10AM.

A place for the McClure Community to share information, discuss issues and connect with each other via Zoom. For more information on how to connect or contact Laura at (306) 291-5838 or email laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org.

We invite you to join us for our online Christmas Eve services on December 24th:

- 5PM - Virtual Pageant
- 7PM - Lessons & Carols
- 9PM - Communion Service

Opening Prayer

O God, John the Baptist said, "Prepare the way."

So may we now prepare our minds for worship.

Help us to silence our inner critic, to let go of busy thoughts so that we are able to make way to hear you speak.

May we now prepare our hearts for worship.

Help us to be open to all our emotions... to feel what we feel so that we may open ourselves up to be moved.

May we now prepare our bodies for worship.

Help us to take in the scent, sight, and feel of whatever space we are in so that we are able to breathe in your mercy and breathe out your love.

May we now prepare our souls for worship

Help us to bring our full selves into this space... to wear our hearts on our sleeves so that we are able to trust that even now, you are here.

May we prepare the way to worship you, O Holy God.

Scripture

Mark 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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.

Friends here we are, the second Sunday in Advent. It seems just the other day I was thinking Christmas was a long way off and we had loads of time to plan and get ready, but here we are, already marking the 2nd Sunday in advent, the Sunday of peace.

And I don't know about you, but I sure could use a good dose of peace right now. A dose of "Silent Night" – all is calm all is bright." I could use a good portion of the beauty that comes with Christmas, the light, the excitement, the energy, the joyful anticipation, the peace of candlelight and the extra good cheer. Let's face it, it has been hard to find those things in the past eight months.

As I anticipate goodies and surprises and sugar plums, I come to this Sunday's scripture passage, and I find it rather disappointing, though it is clearly a Christmas passage, there is no joyous anticipation or excitement in this gospel lesson.

Most scholars believe the gospel of Mark was the first gospel to be written. It is thought that somewhere around 70 CE the writer of Mark feared that those who were eyewitnesses to the life and works of Jesus would die before anyone prepared a written testimony about his life and the second coming didn't seem to be coming. So Mark wrote in a hurry, giving a bare bones account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In Mark's gospel there are no shepherds, no magi, no angels or stars - no birth story at all just a odd looking man, dressed in camel's hair and a leather belt with locust and honey on his breath - baptising people in a river. Mark's story of Jesus begins, not with his birth but with his baptism.

And Mark begins the story of Jesus baptism using words written by the Prophet Isaiah – ancient words "See, I will send my Messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way."

It helps to know that the custom of the day was that a King visited any part of his realm there was a Messenger that was sent out before him to prepare the way - to announce the King was coming and get everybody ready. According to the Gospel writer Mark and the people to whom he wrote John is therefore a very big deal. He was preparing the hearts of the

men and women of Israel for the new King one who would rule the kingdom and their hearts.

John the Baptist is a very important figure in biblical history. John is one of the very few persons mentioned in all of the gospels and in other historical writings of the period. We know that Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins and about the same age. John the Baptist was older by a few months but there are many parallels in their lives. Both experienced miraculous births; John, from a woman way past childbearing age and Jesus from a virgin. Their births were publicly announced affairs and there was rejoicing at their births. There were interesting and unique aspects to their naming and circumcision in the temple - there was a public presentation and prophecy of destiny for both of them. In their early years there was a description of their growth as young children into adulthood and there was a martyred death at the hands of worldly authorities for both of them.

Yet, in every case, Jesus is described as greater than John. However, John was an important person, integral to explaining the story of Jesus.

John announced to all that the King was coming. By the time he baptized Jesus hordes of people had come into the wilderness to listen to this bizarre and powerful preacher and most of them had been baptized by him as a sign of repentance

John the Baptist proclaimed that someone was coming someone so spectacular that it was not enough to simply wait for him to arrive. John called upon the people to be honest with themselves, to step back from their daily routines and prepare their hearts to receive the one whom God was sending - one who would redeem them and offer them new life. John challenged them to repent and embrace what God's gift would bring. Now some asked if John was indeed the Messiah and of course he replies; "one who is more powerful than I is coming after me, I'm not worthy to stoop down and untie the thought of his sandals." John the Baptist was the witness the one to tell everyone of the coming of the Messiah. John was critical to the story for he was the first to understand who Jesus was and what Jesus had come to do.

Clearly, I have been thinking a lot about John. And I have been

thinking aren't all births miraculous, you only have to see a newborn infant to know that. We were all born of very human mothers, just as Jesus and John were. It is likely that people rejoiced in our birth and many were told of our arrival. A goodly number of us were presented in our temples or public places for blessing and anointing and most of us like John and at times like Jesus, wander in the wilderness of this earthly life.

We have experienced our fair share of wilderness particularly these last eight months. /// Some of us have lost sight of what is right and good and what it means to care for our neighbors. We have witnessed the murder of unarmed black men and women in the United States, which has opened to those of us in Canada the unjust treatment perpetuated towards First Nations people. We have come to understand that pandemics unfairly affect those on the margins of society more profoundly than others. We have had to revisit the way we care for our older adults and our elders to ensure they are well cared for and not a means to a profit. We have been mired in the darkness of refusing to notice and care for the least, those that appear on the streets and those who live with issues of mental health. We have seen with new eyes the plight of our planet and its exploitation in the name of money and wealth. Indeed, we have experienced much wilderness these past few months. ///

What if we are to be like John the Baptist, crying in the wilderness against evil and injustice. We who like John, miraculous in our birth, born of very human women, celebrated upon our birthing, blessed and anointed, who have walked in the wilderness, what if we – knowing full well we are not the messiah and we cannot save the world, what if we are the ones to bear witness. Bear witness to the one whose Way can save the world, bear witness to the teachings and life lessons of Jesus of Nazareth, which if embraced will issue in people living lives of radical love, which will bring peace with justice and joy.

Perhaps this year amidst the gift wrapping and candy making, perhaps this year we shall - pass on the Christmas sweater and put on some metaphorical Camel hair with a nice leather belt and we shall bear witness to those who need to hear - the powerful and the helpless - the strong and the weak. Perhaps this Christmas we shall be the ones who must bear witness to the one - who calls us out of the wilderness - to a life of love, forgiveness, joy and grace.

Let us prepare the way.

Amen.

Prayers of the People

Dreaming God... in this time of prayer may we open our hearts and minds to your dreams for us.. for our communities... and for the world.

May we connect our own dreams with yours so that together we can live into being a better, more peace-filled world.

Now we pray our dreams for a world that is waiting... a world that has lived so long in darkness. We wait; we prepare; we anticipate your coming.... with hope-filled gratitude we prepare to celebrate once again your light coming to us to shine on us and through us. And as we prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus during this waiting time, may we begin to peak through the darkness making space for your dreams to enter in.

The world is waiting God.

We wait with dreams for a better world where everyone has a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and enough food to satisfy their hunger. We wait for a world where everyone is able to be safe and secure, where they can close their eyes and have a restful sleep, not worrying about what the morning will bring.

As we dream of these things, help us to do our best to bring them to life.

There is so much to do that has been left undone. Give us the courage to step out in faith to make your dreams and ours a reality.

We offer our prayers for all the elected officials who form our governments. May they witness your dreams too... dreams of a world of compassion where greed is set aside for the sake of those on the margins, those who are oppressed, those who are ignored, left out and abused. And help us to be bold in our faith as we stand up for what is right and just.

We hold in prayer now those who are sick, who are grieving, who are lonely, afraid, anxious. Touch them with your healing Spirit that they may

also be filled with the peace that comes with your dreams for them, for their loved ones and for your world.

Holy God, may we not hold onto our dreams as if they will be easily shattered but may we be given the courage, strength and wisdom to live our dreams faithfully, boldly and without apology... knowing that our dreams for a better world for ourselves and all your people come from you, connect us to you and help us prepare the way for greater peace.

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught... Our Father

Blessing

Friends go into this world that God loves
bless it with compassion
speak against injustice
act with integrity.

May the passion of God's prophets encourage you.

May the life of Jesus the Christ be your example.

May the Holy Spirit fill you with courage and love.

Let us prepare the way for the coming of our God.

Amen.