

Drawn In: Living Out the Creative Life with God

RISK June 27, 2021

WELCOME and 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 and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church today.

Today we return to our worship series called "Drawn In: Living out the Creative Life with God"... a 6 week series in which we are reflecting on God's dream for our lives and discerning how we might use our passions to connect to that dream. The theme for week 1 was Dreaming... week 2 was Hovering and today we talk about Risking.

For those interested in digging a little more deeply into the weekly themes, you are invited to join a small group of us on Wednesday nights at 6:30 for about an hour. The Zoom link is in the weekly email, on our facebook page and our website. If you are thinking about check it out, feel free to contact me and I will send you out the list of questions that we will be chatting about. Everyone, of course, is welcome.

If Wednesday doesn't work for you but you'd love an opportunity to connect with others, we are moving our Friday morning check in coffee time to in person as of July 2nd. You are invited to bring a lawn chair... but if you don't have one easily available, I will also be providing a few chairs. As we are still not able to share food and drink you are also invited to bring your own beverage. If its rainy or too windy to meet outside, we have permission to move it into the multipurpose room.

So I have an idea I'd like to share with you... DEBRA... if you are watching this today, please fast forward about 30 seconds. (pause) Okay.. Debra will be returning to work on July 19th. Yay! I would love to give her the warm welcome back that she deserves. So I would like to invite those who are able to send her a card or note to the church, welcoming her back and letting her know how much she was missed. Just address it to Debra c/o McClure

Church and we will put it on her desk for her return. It would be so lovely to fill her desk with notes of love for her first day back.

And that's all we have for announcements today. Please be sure to check your email though in case there is anything I have missed.

And breathe deeply of God's love... grounding ourselves wherever we are... are preparing our hearts and minds for worship.

OPENING

Sung:

In the world of the driven
Let us be drawn in
Let your love be a given
Let us be drawn in
To imagine, to dream, to create, to redeem
For the sake of the livin'
Let us be drawn in

God's act of creating all that is, God's act of entering our lives in the person of Jesus, God's everyday act of creating new life—all these are acts of bringing that which is not into being—all acts of originality. To create is to assert yourself in a way that is risky, that invites stepping into the unknown. Jesus told a story about people who did different things with the "talents" given to them. The one who took a risk and utilized those talents multiplied his gift in the world. What can you do to risk what God has given you to expand love and grace in the world?

Sung:

In the world of the driven
Let us be drawn in
Let your love be a given
Let us be drawn in
To imagine, to dream, to create, to redeem
For the sake of the livin'
Let us be drawn in

Let us pray:

Risking God,

you created something from nothing.

Open us to move into the unknown future with confidence

so that we might live into your vision for this world you continue to create.

Draw us into your possibilities.

Give us the courage to act.Amen.

OPENING SONG: I Feel the Winds of God Today – Tamara Ferguson

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 25:14-30* – Matthew Drabble

“Again, it’s like a wealthy landowner who was going on a journey and called in three workers, entrusting some funds to them. The first was given five talents, the second two talents, and the third one talent, according to each one’s ability. Then the landowner went away.

Immediately the worker who received the five talents went and invested it and made another five. In the same way, the worker who received the two talents doubled that figure. But the worker who received the one talent instead went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried the money.

“After a long absence, the traveler returned home and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came forward bringing the additional five, saying, ‘You entrusted me with five talents; here are five talents more.’

“The landowner said, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful worker. Since you were dependable in a small matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!’

“The one who had received the two talents then stepped forward with the additional two, saying, ‘You entrusted me with two talents; here are two talents more.’ “The landowner said to this one, ‘Cleverly done! You too are a good and faithful worker. Since you were dependable in a small matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!’

“Finally the one who had received the one talent stepped forward and said to the landowner, ‘Knowing your ruthlessness—you who reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter—and fearing your wrath, I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here is your money back.’

“The landowner exclaimed, ‘You lazy lout! So you know that I reap where I don’t sow and gather where I don’t scatter, do you? All the more reason to deposit my money with the bankers, so that on my return I could have had it back with interest! You, there! Take the talent away from this man and give it to the one with the ten talents.’

“ ‘Those who have will get more until they grow rich, while those who have not will lose even the little they have. Throw this worthless one outside into the darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.’

REFLECTION

Today we're risking!

Once we dare to dream God's dream
and we've taken some time for hovering over that dream... creatively discerning
what we are being called to do... where we search for that place where our
deep passion might meet the world's deep need...
then we are called to take a risk....
a giant leap of faith...

There are times when baby steps are good... and important...
But then there's the times when we need to leap.

Today we're talking about leaping.

So there's this scripture passage where Jesus said to his followers "hey... I'll do
whatever you ask in my name... I'll do this so that God may be glorified"...

Now I think this passage can be a bit confusing....
and it likely causes some people to doubt in the power... or in the love... of
God.

I think people sometimes don't really believe Jesus' promise of help...
they don't believe it because they've tried asking for things in the past... and
have ended up feeling disappointed.
Maybe they've asked for a job promotion they really wanted or for the financing
they need for their dream home....or for God's help in saving a relationship that
is floundering.
They've begged for help... or for healing... or to be free from some kind of
suffering they are experiencing.

And what they prayed for just didn't seem to happen...
leaving them feeling disappointed in God or questioning their faith – or their
worthiness of God's love.

Now... if you happen to be one of those people, I'd like you consider something.
Consider that Jesus' promise was not to give us what we want... or what we
think we need... it was to give us what we asked for in his name.
And asking in Jesus' name means a lot more than just saying the word
"Jesus"... or "Christ" as we often do in our Sunday morning prayers...
"we pray in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen".

In Jesus' time, asking for something in the name of another meant asking for something that jived... something that was in line with the will – with the intention of that person.

Something that fit with who that person was... with what mattered to them.

So to ask for something in the name of Jesus the Christ means to ask for something that is in line with what Jesus might want for our lives... and, therefore, what God want for us.... and what God wants for the world.

And, since God respects our ability to make our own decisions... our own choices...

God respects our free will...

anything we ask of God that might interfere with the will of another person is a no... its just off the table.

I recently had a conversation with someone who wanted something sooooo bad. She told me she'd been praying for that thing for a very long time and was frustrated that her prayers weren't being answered.

Unfortunately... I know for certain that the thing she was praying for was the same thing that at least one other person was praying would not happen and if her prayers were answered, someone else would be very disappointed.

Praying for something is a risk.

But at some point we have to take that leap of faith... trusting that we've done what we can do... and believing that God truly desires what is best for us... and what is best for others – and what is best for all of creation too.

If we have held our dream for ourselves alongside of what we understand about God's dream for the world...

And if we've hovered – discerned – prayed – and done whatever we know to do to find that place where our deep passion meets the world's deep need... then it is time to risk.

And we risk sharing our dream with God and praying for what we need to bring it to reality – knowing that God's view of reality is much larger than our own... and that it may be that the answer to our prayers is that we need to continue to hover a little bit longer.

I think this is one of the amazing things about being a person of faith.

And it's not that God loves people of faith any more than those without... or that God is less willing to help someone who isn't intentionally following a spiritual path...

The amazing thing for someone who has faith is that we are going to be more willing to take risks to follow the deep intuitions that God sends.

We see our lives as connected to God... and connected to all of God's creation. We are not on a solo journey.

The relationship between faith and risk is one of the things I think Jesus is trying to teach us in the Parable of the Talents.

I used to really dislike this parable.. it made me so uncomfortable...

But I know now that it holds a much deeper meaning that how I originally understood it.

So first we need to know that a talent was a unit of money in Jesus' day. And I read that scholars believe that one talent was worth about 20 years of wages for the common worker.

Did you know that?

I don't know why but I just assumed it was a little bit of money – one talent equals one dollar....

but based on minimum wage today one talent would be almost 500,000.

This was not just a little bit of money for the land owner to be handing out to the workers who received between 1 and 5 talents.

So for a long time when I read this parable, I thought it made God look a lot like some kind of tyrant who wants us to take risks just to fulfill some greedy agenda lest we get tossed into the darkness with some gnashing teeth.

Isn't that what happened to the guy who decided to play it safe and bury the landowner's money in the ground?

It's not like he even squandered the money like the prodigal son...

he just held it so he could return all of it to the landowner when he returned.

Sure he didn't make money... but he didn't lose any either –

that hardly seems deserving of gnashing teeth.

As I read more about this parable... I understood that some of my confusion comes from the fact that this parable isn't actually about money...

it's about something much more valuable...

In his book "Drawn In"... the one that this worship series is based on, Troy Bronsink offers a helpful suggestion.

He recommends that when we try to discern the will and activity of God in our world we "put a halo on it."

So we try to look at the world through the eyes of God.

We look remembering that God is actively involved in bringing God's dream for the world to life.

Tony suggests envisioning a halo—

a sacred symbol of holiness—

floating over something we feel is important for the fulfillment of God's dream.

Seeing this halo might help us adjust... or focus... our prayer energy... our creative thoughts...

in a way that helps the dream become a reality.

Try this...

I've practicing it this week and it totally changes how I see things..

I find it to be a very grounding practice.

So in this parable... what if instead of the three workers being given a whole bunch of money... they were given a whole bunch of grace.

So the first two workers not only receive grace, but take risks with the grace they've received.

How do you take a risk with grace?

You share it!

You share grace by being generous with people.... And generous in a way that is much much greater than what you believe they have earned – or deserve.... Or by being generous with others that exceeds their own expectations of what they think they deserve.

The reason why generous grace can be risky is because the hope is that generosity will be transformative..

That someone will be so touched by the generosity they have received that they will feel inspired... called... to pass it on.

It is meant to turn people into gracious individuals who will give grace too... who will share grace generously – in the same way they have received it.

But.. it doesn't always work out that way.

Sometimes the people who you have received grace – who have been the recipients of your generosity, will simply take advantage of you.

So.. if you want to multiply the grace you have received... the talent that has been given to you... you have to be taking risks... constantly taking generosity risks to make up for the possibility that not all of your risks will be rewarded.

Now lets take a look at the third worker.

He received liberal amounts of God's grace but never risks using it. Instead, he buries God's grace in the ground – he is afraid.

He isn't looking for halos.
He isn't allowing himself to live within God's dream – instead he is limiting God by his own limited dream – his own limited understanding of how the world works.

Because this guy isn't generous himself... he has trouble accepting that God is generous.
He believes God to be a harsh judge and he responds with fear.

This man doesn't need to be thrown into the outer darkness and the gnashing teeth...
he is already there...
neither receiving – nor sharing grace.

The only way out of the darkness is to take a risk.
The talent in God's world is grace.
God's grace is abundant and God is fully, 100% committed to us...
each one of us...
committed to sharing that grace generously – way beyond what we think we deserve.
We just need to trust enough to risk reaching out.

To do this we might want to consider what holds us back from making a move.

Canadian author Robin Sharma writes
“What holds us back in life is the invisible architecture of fear. It keeps us in our comfort zones, which are, in truth, the least safe place in which to live. Indeed the greatest risk in life is taking no risk.
But every time we do that which we fear, we take back the power that fear has stolen from us - for on the other side of fear lives our strength.

Listen.... God has created this amazing world – full of halos -
and we are part of it.

What if we saw ourselves as God sees us?
able to do far more than we think we are capable of?
able to share more grace than we can even imagine?

What if we actively participated in God's dream for the world rather than holding God tightly in our limited dream for ourselves?

What if we dared to risk?

Not because we are no longer afraid... but because we've decided that fear is no match for the generosity of God's grace.

(discussion with Ernie Barber follows)

PASTORAL PRAYERS/LORD'S PRAYER

Holy One,

draw us now to be with you as you are always with us.

As we prepare our hearts for this sacred time of prayer, may we feel your love surround us, giving us what we need right now to be fully present to you... for the sake of our community, our world, and ourselves. In opening ourselves to your creative power, strength and wisdom – we open to live your dream... to be channels of your passion for the world.

And we hold your dream now as we take a moment in quiet to give thanks for all of the blessings you have shared with us... in gratitude we pray: *(silence)*

And now with hearts touching gratitude, we are ready to offer our prayers of care and concern for the world... for our friends, families and for ourselves.

We hold before you, O God, those who are in need of our love, our kindness, and our compassion... those in need of our prayers:
the ones who are struggling right now – with worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, anger
the ones who are living with health concerns...
the ones who are grieving...
the ones who are addicted...
the ones facing loss and change and uncertainty...
and we pray for the ones who care for them – for the support workers, family members and friends...

We pray for all the painful places of injustice in our world and in our communities...

For the ones who live with trauma... the trauma that comes from discrimination, rejection, violent words and actions...

We pray for the ones struggling to be good allies, friends and neighbours.

We pray God for all the places of brokenness in your world...

We pray for your healing love and light to reach into those places, offering even a moment. even a glimmer of hope to those who most need it.

And knowing that we all have our own places and people where brokenness exists, we take another moment now in quiet to hold our brokenness before God – opening even further to the love that is within and all around us.
(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 now, we share together the prayer that Jesus taught his friends and disciples:
Our Father/Mother/Creator...

HYMN: God, as We Rise to Leave – Tamara Ferguson

BLESSING

I invite you now to consider one thing you might do this week that will make your heart sing and your creativity soar.

May you see the unfolding of each day,
as an opportunity to be a Co-Creator with God.

As a Jesus-Follower, may you feel his company leading you
toward creating more kindness, justice and mercy.

May you know the nudge of the Creative Spirit within,
“making belief” in all you are and do.

SUNG BLESSING: Sent Out in Jesus’ Name – Elin Sletmoen