

# **Worship with McClure United Church**

## **August 16, 2020**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Welcome to worship with the McClure United Church community. 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.

For those I haven't met my name is Debra Berg and I am one of the ministers at McClure United Church.

McClure United church is a busy church and we want to focus the Thursday's in August on those who are in need.

This past Thursday we had a very successful Food Bank Drive – Thanks to Don Hanke for the use of his truck and for his time. And thanks to everyone who could donate.

This Thursday August 20 is our Garden Share. If you have extra garden produce we are hoping you will bring it to the church parking lot between 1-3pm and if you would like to have some fresh garden produce please stop by for pick-up 3-5pm. Extra produce will be taken to the Friendship Inn. Thursday the 27 we will be set up once again in the parking lot and we will be collecting “ new “ in package underwear for the Lighthouse. If you would like to make a cash donation - make the check out to McClure United Church and mark it “Being Church” and it will be forwarded to the Crisis Nursery. All this information is on our Facebook page as well as our website.

We are a busy church even though our building is mostly closed except for 12 step programs and the office is closed due to Covid there are folks checking phones and emails and taking care of donations. The mail is being brought in daily and of course if you would like to speak to me please don't hesitate but to call. I am still working from my home office and can be reached there. You will find my number in a variety of places like the website or through the message on the churches phone.

As we move into a time of prayer I invite you to close your eyes and imagine a holy place. Perhaps this place is exactly where you are in this moment. Perhaps it is far away. Perhaps it is noisy and filled with activity or quiet and calm. Perhaps it is filled with chairs or pews or shady trees or rustling grasses.

Thank to Bonnie Godrey for reading scripture this week and to Elin Sletmoen and Shirley and Lucie Blackburn for their musical offerings.

### **Opening Prayer**

As we move into a time of prayer I invite you to close your eyes and imagine a holy place. Perhaps this place is exactly where you are in this moment. Perhaps it is far away. Perhaps it is noisy and filled with activity or quiet and calm. Perhaps it is filled with chairs or pews or shady trees or rustling grasses.

We light this candle acknowledging the gift of holy places and the joy that wherever we are God's love is present to nurture and to make us strong.

(light candle)

Source of life,

Bring to us in this time of worship a renewed sense of your vision.

Bring to us your love that we might discover its fullness anew.

Lift from us worries about friends and family and strangers, worries that paralyze and defeat our ability to move in healthy ways. Remove the anxiety that we sometimes feel and replace it with determination to be about acts of love and care.

We come in worship offering all that we are and all that we seek to be.

Receive us, bless us, send us out again in newness of life.

In Jesus name, we pray.

## **Scripture**

Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10 You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11 I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' 12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

May God bless to our understanding and our living these words of Holy 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.

Last week we hummed the tunes of Andrew Lloyd Weber and Tim Rice's musical – Joseph and the technicolor dream coat as we read the beginning of the story of Joseph in scripture last week. And together we wondered where God was “in the midst” of the dysfunction and mess. We went away concluding that the story of Joseph was perhaps teaching us to understand that though God might seem absent in the mess and disfunction - God is there – our challenge is to trust and hope because our story has not yet come to an end. Our challenge is to trust and hope that restoration, reconciliation and renewal will come not only for Joseph and his brothers but also for us. Today we read the end of the story. A story dripping with tears.

“And he wept so loudly” (Genesis 45:2).

Joseph had done plenty of crying in preceding chapters (Genesis 42:24; 43:30), but here – this is not a normal cry. It is a weeping of epic proportions. Joseph had come a long way, risen from foreigner to a position of leadership over all of the Egyptian empire. And though he was a man of great strength and power - he could not control himself. He sent away everyone so nobody would see. And yet, the weeping was so loud that it could be heard by those he sent away. I wonder what the emotion was behind the weeping? Was it sadness? Was it joy? Was it a catharsis? Or was it just plain mysterious?

Perhaps our own last crying bout can help us think through Joseph's weeping. Now I'm not referring to a few tears sliding down the cheek, but rather our last ugly cry of biblical proportions.

Big time weeping or wailing is something we usually do not plan like a haircut or an oil change, but rather it is something that just comes. Like Joseph, we cannot control it. The loss of control for Joseph is a bit surprising in the context of how the book of Genesis has documented the life of Joseph. Joseph is Jacob's second youngest child, a bit naïve, perhaps a bit of a braggart who lacks a filter. We read that throughout his life he consistently displays immense control in times of enormous

pressure, whether it be when he is in prison, or whether in the presence of the Pharaoh. So today's reading provides a surprising shift, as "Joseph could no longer control himself." When Joseph finally loses control, when he weeps it immediately leads to a display of mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. God is known.

As I mentioned last week, for most of the Joseph story, God seems to be surprisingly absent. This is unique among the patriarchal accounts of Genesis. Abraham directly encounters God on multiple occasions, and God speaks promises to him. God also appears to Isaac and gives direct commands. God interacts with Jacob and even engages in a direct struggle with him that lasts throughout the night. But unlike the other patriarchs, Joseph seems to have no such direct experience with God. Throughout Joseph's improbable journey from his childhood in Canaan, to indentured servitude, to prison, then royal authority, God is seems silent. But here in this part of the story we see that Joseph experiences God clearly. It was an extremely difficult place to get to. Joseph struggles with seeing his brothers again. Joseph's tears and forgiveness is hard fought.

Earlier in the story we are told that Rather than reconciliation, Joseph meets his brothers with manipulation. He pretends not to know them, accuses them of spying, throws them all in jail for three days, and demands that after they take their grain home, they return to Egypt with Benjamin, their youngest brother. He even has Simeon bound and held in Egypt to guarantee their return (42:24). Joseph sneaks the money they paid for the grain back into their sacks, surely a gesture of generosity but understood by the brothers, terrified of the powerful governor and racked with guilt, as a sure indication that stealing will be added to their spying charges. Citing the loss of both Joseph and Simeon, Jacob refuses to allow Benjamin to return with the brothers to Egypt until the family is out of food again and left with no other choice. The emotional roller coaster continues for the brothers, when Joseph feasts with his family, including the newly favorite son Benjamin.

Rather than reveal his identity now, Joseph has his own silver cup slipped into Benjamin's sack, setting him up for a charge of stealing. Judah, who, in the first part of the story lobbied for selling Joseph rather than killing him, steps in to plead for Benjamin's release for the sake of their father

Jacob, whose “life is bound up in the boy’s life” (44:30). It is at this point, with Jacob’s life on the line, that Joseph makes himself known to his brothers.

It would be difficult to overstate Joseph’s position of imperial power in this story; anyone who wants to eat must come to Joseph. He hoards the grain, and he decides who may purchase it and at what price, at a time when all of the world is riddled with famine (41:57). Once powerless at the bottom of a pit, outnumbered by brothers who hated him, Joseph now gets to decide who will live and who will die. Having that power does not necessarily make Joseph a bad guy, but his use of that power to control those around him surely does, no matter how much he cries.

The power to forgive is always in the hands of the one who has been wronged; it is right for Joseph to be the one to forgive the wrongs done to him by his brothers. But before Joseph weeps on their necks (15:14-15), he plays on their fears and exploits his imperial power over them. His actions may not constitute intentional revenge, but they certainly are not worthy of a Hallmark card, either.

But this crying spell marks a transformation. Joseph moves from the position of authority into a conversation of generosity. The resentment in previous chapters has disappeared. Joseph is eager to forgive and restore the family, not just for his generation, but for a dysfunction that permeated the earlier generations of Jacob/Esau and Isaac/Ishmael. Joseph’s tears seem to shout out; “enough is enough – this hate and rivalry and deceit must end”.

And it is in this moment of release of tears that Joseph realizes that God was active and present in all the spaces of his life:

- down in the pit while awaiting sale
- in a foreign household as a servant
- in a foreign prison
- before the royal court of Pharaoh

Perhaps knowledge that God was with him in all those places and although those years - brought some of that weeping.

Was it sadness? Was it joy? Was it a catharsis? Was it just plain

mysterious?

The answer is yes.

Tears are precious. Brian has said Tears are a sign of something important. Other's say tears are love spilling out because it has no where to go. Maybe tears are one of the ways God pushes into our lives with rest, reconciliation, and new life.

If you are a crier, I invite you to pay attention to those tears – I believe they are holy. And if you are not a crier – my hunch is that you know the tears are there – I invite you to pay attention to them even if they do not reach your cheeks.

In these times of isolation, worry, and so many challenges I believe we are not alone. God with us always – pushing through.

God is with us, we are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

God, life is complicated.

Our world is complicated - political unrest is bubbling up in so many places. Today we think of Lebanon, Belarus, Hong Kong. Oil has spilled on the biologically sensitive waters and shores of Mauritius. The Covid virus is relentless, especially in places where poverty exists and people do not have adequate access to much needed supplies.  
God WE WEEP for the world...

Our communities are complicated. We wonder about how kids will go back to school and how teachers will cope with all the changes and challenges. Parents are struggling through big decisions and even bigger worries. Then there are all those small businesses who are treading water and hoping they can survive through this Covid time. Civic and Provincial elections will soon be upon us and we need to figure out who to vote for and how to vote.

Our Herderite brothers and sisters are experiencing an outbreak and we pray for their health.

God WE WEEP for our communities...

Our life as church is complicated, we do not know when we will be able to worship together and this more than sad us it is hard on our hearts. So many of us cherish our faith community - for some of us it is on Sunday morning that we find nurture and support for the coming week, Sunday morning worship is where we place our energy and find ways to serve our neighbour. Bless us as we are apart and keep us connected through your love.

God WE WEEP for the church...

Our family life is often complicated. Jealousy, resentments, hurtful patterns, things said in anger, selfish behavior – all leave us broken. Forgiveness is hard work and sometimes it is impossible. Where family life has left a mark on our living help us to heal. Where family life has been gift and the foundation for resilience and strength, we give thanks and promise to live this forward to the next generation.

God WE WEEP for our family...

We ourselves are complicated. One day we got this new Covid time and another day we wonder if we will make it. One day we are optimistic that everything will be okay and we will learn and be stronger and another day hope seems distant and we are bitter for having to deal with whatever the day has brought. Some of us struggle with mental health. Some of us struggle just to put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads. Some of us are so busy caring for others that there is little time to take care of ourselves. Some of us are lonely. Some of us are dealing with health issues: chronic illness, newly diagnosed illness, treatments and appointments.

God WE WEEP for ourselves...

Push through our tears with rest, reconciliation, and new life - We pray as followers of Jesus who is our teacher and guide and who taught us to pray saying.

Our Father and 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, and 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**

May the God who brings to birth and sustains all life, sustain you.  
May the Christ who fashions hope and strengthens faith, strengthen you  
May the Spirit who empowers and inspires action, inspire you.  
Go into the world blessing all you meet.  
Amen.