

# **Worship with McClure United Church**

## **August 9, 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.

I have been away on holidays and am glad to be back. Like most folk I didn't go very far during my holiday time. Mostly to the back yard to read and into my basement to clean. Laura is now taking a break and she will return from her holidays in September.

The church office is still closed due to Covid but 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 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 church's phone.

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

So next Thursday 6-8 we are having a Food Bank Drive in the parking lot. Bring items for donation – drop them in the truck and we will take them to the Food Bank.

(urgent items are baby formula, whole grain pasta and cereal, canned fruit -stews and meats as well as 100% fruit juices)

Thursday August 20 is a Garden Veggie Share. If you have extra garden produce we are hoping you will bring it to 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 contribution to McClure caring ministry in August – mark your Cheque – Being Church and we will forward the donation to the Crisis Nursery that is in need of funding for cleaning and other supplies.

All this information is on our Facebook page as well as our website.

Laura was hosting a Parking lot coffee time Friday mornings but these have been set aside until she returns.

I want to thank Mona Eremondi for reading scriptures this week and the Powell family 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 noise with activity or quiet and calm. Perhaps it is filled with chairs or pews or shading bows 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)

Dear God, hear us as we pray.

In the midst of confusion and loss, we pray.

In need of your help and guidance, we pray.

For your nurture and your love, we pray.

Not only for our own need, but for the needs of others, we pray.

To be messengers of love, to be a light in the shadows, to bring hope and to carry joy every step of our way, we pray.

To seed and nurture love with the love we receive from you and through the life and witness of Jesus, we pray.

Be with us now as we worship, we pray.

Amen.

## **Scripture**

Genesis 37:1-4,12-28

Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. //

12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "Here I am." 14 So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, 15 and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" 16 "I am seeking my brothers," he said; "tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock." 17 The man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. 18 They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him" —that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; 24 and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from

Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. 28 When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

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 Oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

If you grew up in the 80s, there's a decent chance that your earliest knowledge of Joseph's story came through a local high school or community theater production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. That musical (by Broadway legends Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice) playfully tells the story of a young boy, the favorite son of the patriarch Jacob, who sets in motion both a family and a geo-political drama - by flaunting his fashionable coat. I'm not sure how I managed to get this far in life without seeing this production, but I have. So when I hear or read this story it comes sadly without the snazzy soundtrack.

I am however, as an only child and quite clearly my parent's favorite child - been fascinated by stories of sibling rivalries. And so this story always grabs my attention. I must admit I haven't heard many sermons about this story and most often I have heard the story as it is found in a Children's Bible. I have been content with the lessons found in such creative readings - that it is wrong to envy others, wrong to boast, and wrong to treat family badly.

I was glad that the lectionary invited us today to hear this ancient story once again and to seek God's wisdom within. Today Mona has read the story as it is found in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible - a scholarly version of the bible. And it is here that I see new layers to the story that I have not seen before.

I wonder if this is true for you as well?

This time as I hear the story, I don't so much see the vanity of Joseph but rather the failure I see the failures of his parent Jacob - often referred to as Israel in the passage. Maybe it is because I am now a parent of grown children and I often wonder how well I have done in raising them.

As I read the Joseph story through the eyes of a parent I connect with Jacob Joseph's father, I see in him my own inner turmoil as a parent: worried and anxious about the well-being of my children and my role in their lives. In many ways every parent is Jacob, imperfectly apportioning love and discipline, wondering (if not praying): "God, did I give my children my best... or heaven forbid my worst? Have I set them on the road to success or disaster. Have I been too hard on them or too soft. Did I teach them compassion and resilience or greed and resentment? // I have often joked that I am not so much saving for my children's education but rather for their therapy.

This is a story about a family conflict of legendary proportions. Joseph, second youngest son of Jacob, was born to his beloved wife, Rachel. But Joseph has no mother-she has died in deep sorrow. Jacob, perhaps compensating for Rachel's absence, lavishes Joseph with love and invests in him his deepest desires. Jacob's overt favoritism is embodied by the extravagant coat he has given young Joseph to wear, a coat with "sleeves that touch the ground," a coat that evokes royalty. //It is no wonder that Joseph's brothers didn't like him.

And poor Joseph, according to the story, his brothers hated him because their father favored him not because of anything Joseph does; we don't know if Joseph flaunted the coat in their faces, we don't know if Joseph was self righteous about the whole favored child thing. We do know he shares with his brothers the content of some dreams he was having - where the brothers end up bowing down to him - which I'm pretty sure did not help them like him more. But they hated him long before he starts talking to them of dreams and visions.

And then there is something here I hadn't noticed before.

Sure, Joseph's brother didn't like him because of their father's favoritism and Joseph's perceived arrogance but I think their hatred deepened because Joseph had caught them doing something they should not have been doing. They were in the wrong field.

You see they were supposed to be in the fields at Shechem, the field that belonged to their father, but Joseph couldn't find them there -// they had left the land of their family and deliberately wandered into foreign territory. Their being found in Dothan, the wrong field - would not have

played well at home. They were in trouble. They had been caught and instead of taking responsibility for their disobedience they decide to destroy the one who could expose them. They were using Jacob's failure as a parent and Joseph's supposed arrogance as justification for what was to come next. A plot to get rid of the potential snitch.

This got me thinking about how many times I have acted in a similar way – blamed others for my own mess thus avoiding taking responsibility for it, avoiding my own imperfections and justifying my deceptions and failures. I wonder if you as well have blamed others to avoid the truth.

As the story continues to unfold I was hopeful for a moment when the story tells us that Reuben seems to find an ounce of compassion and convinces the other brothers not to kill Joseph – “Shed no blood he says throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him - but it wasn't compassion rather Reuben hoped to come back later and rescue Joseph from the pit and bring him back to Jacob – if Reuben couldn't be number one son maybe rescuing number one son from the pit might make him at least number two son – one notch above the others. He would be a hero.

But then all that goes by the wayside when Judah another brother decides to profit from the sale of Joseph. There goes Reuben's secret plan. And we see that the brothers were not all in like with one another or on the same page. And so Joseph is sold and taken to Egypt.

Who says stories in the Bible are boring. You can't write soap operas this good.

The truth is that no one I know comes from a perfect family. And while no family I know is like Joseph's, every family is weakened by the things that weakened Joseph's: generational dysfunction, parents working out their unresolved issues in the lives of their children, and by love unevenly-even unfairly-apportioned. Weakened by people unwilling to own up to their own mistakes and who insist on twisting the truth in order to blame others. And yes, it is true, some of the mess we are in and create comes from our dysfunctional families but thankfully this is not the end of the story.

What I find fascinating is that in the Joseph story God is confoundingly hidden. The Joseph story is longer and more complete than that of any other patriarch or matriarch. Less a collage of fragments, it is a whole work of art. Yet it is almost completely without God, who was the driving force in the story and lives of the men and women before and after

Joseph. Abraham, Moses-even Jacob-would do nothing without God. The story of Joseph hardly mentions God. Is God hiding amidst the chaos?

Whatever the situation with your family-whether you are Joseph in the pit, a brother standing on the edge looking down, or Jacob, receiving back the bloody coat that you never should have given - this story asks... no, it pleads with us to hope and trust. Because when we get to the end of this story we find that these people are God's people, they are the ones entrusted to bring about God's commonwealth, they are the ones who live into existence God's justice, redemption, transformation and radical love. I think the good news of this story is that God is in the midst of the mess, is present despite the chaos, God is breaking through in those moments of truth telling, honest listening, and compassion. If God chose this family to be the bearers of God's liberation in the world - then one must ask what more can God do with us.

So my friends if you are feeling your life is a bit of a mess, and your family is not all that you would like it to be. If you are tired and wounded and not at all perfect. Well the God power has a little surprise just for you – all is not lost – rather the God power loves people just like you. And your story is not ended.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

As we pray in this time together, I will pause at the end of each petition, and I hope you will take those spaces to offer the prayers pressing on your own heart.

Let us pray

God of Strength and Weakness, there are so many places in our world where life is broken by pain and suffering. Strengthen the resolve of leaders and the will of the people to pursue peace with justice. Make people wise and compassionate as the whole world lives with the realities and devastating impact of Covid. May your Spirit move throughout our world to bring hope and healing. We pray especially for the people of Lebanon – for families grieving there and for all the challenges that are now

deepened in the aftermath of the explosion. We pray for the world; God hear our prayer.....

God of Strength and Weakness, quiet our hearts. Still our minds that we may hear your voice. We thank you for this time of worship and for our communities of faith, especially we give thanks for our spiritual home McClure. We give thanks for the refuge we find there, for the inspiration we receive to carry your message of hope to others in the places we live and work and play. For the community that stands with us when we are strong and holds us when we are weak; we pray for our church and the church worldwide and for all communities of faith. God hear our prayer.....

God of Strength and Weakness, we thank you for the people in our lives who make our journey richer by walking with us. Whether near or far, we remember friends and family. Watch over them and bless them. For those in our community who are hurting, grieving, hungry, lonely, or sick we ask that you hold them in your arms of compassion. We pray for those who are in special need. God hear our prayer.....

God of Strength and Weakness, we pray for ourselves. You see our deepest needs; you know the desires of our heart. We commit all that we are to you, knowing you are a God of compassion. Hold us in faith and guide us. We pray to know you better to love you more and to walk in your way always. God hear our prayer.....

We pray all these things in the name of Jesus our teacher and friend who taught us to pray together saying..

Our Father and Mother

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**

Friends – imperfect beautiful friends.



Let us continue our journey walking in love  
Let us care for each other  
Let us care for the earth.  
Let us seek justice and make peace  
God Goes before us so let us live our lives boldly.  
And may the  
The grace of Jesus the Christ  
The love of God and the  
Strength of the Holy Spirit go with us this day and every day.  
Amen.