

Worship with McClure United Church

June 21, 2020

Opening

Today we acknowledge two important celebrations – Father’s Day and National Indigenous People’s Day.

So a big shout out and Happy Father’s Day to everyone who fills the role of dad... biological dads, adopted dads, foster dads, and dad-like dads. Thank you for being you and for offering the best part of yourselves to kids (young and older) in your life. It’s also important to acknowledge that today is not an easy day for many. There are those among us who are struggling today – and for whom today brings up grief, loss, anger and maybe even fear. I want understand that grief and am sending love and prayers your way.

Today is also National Indigenous People’s Day and I’ll be sharing more about that with you a little later in the service. It’s important to always remember and acknowledge the history, culture and gifts of the Indigenous people of Canada... but today is a day designated to publicly celebrate these contributions.

So with this in mind we take a moment now to acknowledge that many of us watching this morning are living on Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Metis. Here’s a Saskatchewan Treaty Map... take a second to find yourself on the map.... And acknowledge the land on which you live. May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with her people.

A couple of announcements this morning:

1. This coming Friday will be the last of our Virtual Coffee Time gatherings for the summer. WE are going to experiment with a face-to-face gathering beginning July 3rd. Here’s how that’s going to work in a way that will keep ourselves safe. The important details for you to know right now is that we will be gathering outside in the church parking lot. There will be a maximum of 20 people, which means you will need to let me know by end of day Thursday if you are planning on joining in. Everyone will need to bring their own chair and their own coffee. We are not allowed, at this point to serve common coffee or snacks. If you do not have a chair to bring, I will be sure to have a few plastic chairs (already sanitized) available for those who need. Chairs will be spaced out to respect appropriate physical distancing. Now friends, I know this isn’t ideal... we’d all love to be shaking hands, hugging and sharing a carrot cake together. But this is a step... and we are going to make the best of what we have and can do at the moment. So, if you are interested in gathering, please let me know so I can reserve a spot for you.
2. As previously mentioned a task group has been established and they are diligently exploring all of the possibilities for reopening. They do not have

an easy job as information changes daily. Our facility is a bit more complicated than some given our close proximity to so many who are in the “more at risk” category. We want to ensure, as much as possible, the safety of our community and those we love. So please have patience and we promise to share information with you as soon as it is available.

3. Next Sunday will be Brian’s last Sunday with us as his appointment comes to and end. A group of folks are working to put together a little virtual farewell for Brian to be shared during worship next Sunday. They need your help. You are invited to consider taking a short video of yourself and/or your family/household/ group completing this sentence: “I would like Brian to know that...” Email your clip to Andrew and his email address is: communications@mcclureunitedchurch.org by Thursday, June 25. If you are unable to share a video, you are invited to share your farewell comments in the comment section beneath next Sunday’s Video on Facebook or Youtube... or you can send messages of thanks in a note or card, which can be sent to the church address/or placed in the outdoor mailbox by the church office entrance doors.

And so now let’s ground ourselves in God’s love and open our hearts to the light of Christ, shining in and through us (light candle).

Prayer

Let us pray:

Loving and gracious God,

Thank you once again for gathering us together. Draw us near to you now. May we feel your presence surround us as your love fills our hearts and your peace fills our minds. Help us to remember and hold on to the truth that while we worship in separate spaces, we are still joined together as one community – worshipping together – united by our love and desire to follow Jesus. It is from this understanding that we offer ourselves to you now. Amen.

Theme Conversation

So as I mentioned earlier today is National Indigenous People’s Day. For the last several years some of us from McClure United have joined others (picture?) from across the city in the Walk for Reconciliation on June 21 of each year. It has been such a powerful experience to participate in this journey together and to then celebrate the diverse Indigenous culture through song, dance and storytelling. I want to now show you a little news clip from Global TV highlighting this year’s events honouring this important day. Featured in this video is Amy Seesequasis (see-see-quay-sis) from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. So I invite you to

watch it now. (show video). <https://globalnews.ca/video/7084548/national-indigenous-peoples-day-in-saskatoon#autoplay>

So I hope you will be able to join in today to the online Indigenous People's Day events. Here is the link to the event and you will also find more information about it on our Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/events/264976927929788/>

Scripture

Genesis 22:9-14

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill^[a] his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place "The LORD will provide";^[b] as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.

Luke 15:18 – 24

¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'^[a] ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Reflection

It is one of the more incredulous stories of the Hebrew Bible. Abraham is ninety-nine years old, his wife Sarah is ninety. Despite repeated attempts they have remained childless throughout their marriage. Sitting in front of their tent one day they observe two unknown travelers approaching them. Exercising the best of middle eastern hospitality, they provide for the travelers and invite them to stay the night. As the story unfolds, we discover that these are no ordinary travelers but are God's own representatives. The message they bear is that God has chosen to bless Abraham and Sarah with generations of offspring who will

come to be known as the nation of Israel. As a result, Sarah is to become pregnant and give birth to their first child, a son, Isaac.

This morning's lesson takes place when Isaac is about ten years old. Abraham and Sarah are surrounded by Canaanite neighbours whose ways and practices are different than their own. They have lived in relative harmony with these neighbours and have been influenced by their neighbour's culture - perhaps too influenced. In this morning's story Abraham has become convinced that he must sacrifice Isaac, his first and only child. Human sacrifice was practiced among the ancient Canaanite tribes as revealed in the book of Kings. Perhaps Abraham thought if his neighbours' gods demanded such extreme devotion he should do the same. And so, Abraham heads up a mountain with a bundle of wood upon his back, a knife in his belt, and Isaac at his side.

The modern mind reels before such a prospect. It seems nothing short of absurd that a father, any father - and least of all one who awaited a child for so many years - could purposely set out to sacrifice his own boy. As one Bible scholar observed, if any modern man thought of such a thing he would be committed to hospital, and if he carried it out, he would be sentenced to jail. Yet before we dismiss Abraham as deranged, let us think for a moment about the nature of human sacrifice in the last century. Do we not know of grandparents influenced by the circumstances of their culture who allowed and even encouraged their children to offer up their lives during the two great wars? Within my own life span I am aware of how our neighbours to the south committed their sons - through the draft - to the jungles of a distant land to fight a war which they could not win. Those who refused to commit their boys were thought of as traitors; and the boys who refused to go were branded as criminals. The prevailing ideology of one's neighbours has a tremendous influence on what we judge to be sane or insane behaviour.

This is Father's Day and as I approached this Sunday I felt compelled to hold up positive images of "father love" in the same way in which, on Mother's Day, we speak about "mother love". Yet, I was hesitant, restrained by the stories shared so often during counselling sessions about fathers who had been inadequate or even violent. This was not my experience of a father, but it was the experience of many parishioners, clients, and even friends. On the one hand I wanted to celebrate the blessings of "father love" yet I could not deny the reality that "father love" has too often been illusive or absent.

Why is it more common for "mother love" to be transparent while "father love" remains obscure? Why is it easier to have an unapologetic sermon about mothers than it is about fathers? I believe that a clue to this dilemma lies in the story of Abraham. Here is a man who desperately wanted a child, a son and, in a seemingly final attempt, they were successful. He loved Isaac and had placed in

Isaac all of his hopes and desires for the future. What was it that made him take all this love and hope and suppress it such that he was willing to sacrifice the one so dear to him? It would appear that community norms, societal attitudes, religious standards and peer pressure caused Abraham to ignore his own intuitive wisdom.

As we ponder the paradox of “father love” it is essential that we recognize the impact that generations of patriarchy have had on fathering. American psychologist Robert Pasick writing about his therapy with men concludes that many men often live within a “deep sleep”. “The deep sleep,” he writes, “is an emotional, cognitive and behavioral state that many men drift into as a consequence of growing male in Western society.” Simply stated, Pasick suggests that men are conditioned by society to make work, competition and success the goal of manhood. They are taught to ignore their feelings, their relationships with those they love, and their own intuition. Pasick writes about a forty-six year old male client who related during therapy that he had been bitten by a dog when he was eight years old. Coming home crying he remembered his father laughing at him over this incident. His father’s explanation was that the dog had bitten him because he showed fear. His father’s advice was to never let anyone ever know he was afraid.

I have sympathy for this father who was, in all likelihood, trying to instill the “masculine code” in order that his son might survive in the world. Yet Pasick concludes that it is this masculine code which places men in the “deep sleep”, which distances men from their emotions and encourages them to sacrifice their most important relationships in order to be validated by ‘the boys.’ According to Pasick the code is comprised of the belief that the workplace is more important than home; that true friendship is but a memory from adolescence; that one should never acknowledge pain or admit that they need the care of others.

Abraham was in the “deep sleep” conditioned by his society’s masculine code. He had prepared the fire. He had laid Isaac upon the altar. He had drawn his knife. Then he woke up. Thank God! Thank God that God intervened and woke Abraham up to the realization that he had a choice, that he did not need to sacrifice his child, his hope, his future. God woke him up to the reality that he could think and act differently and he did. Perhaps God is in the practice of waking men up, waking us from the deep sleep that causes us not to notice the violence perpetrated upon women, minorities and one another because of the masculine code. Perhaps the God-power is revealing itself in the “Me too movement;” in the protests of Black Lives matter; in men’s groups and men’s relationships upending the masculine code and helping us to look away from the sacrifice of our children to new possibilities.

Perhaps God is waking men up to the possibility of being new kinds of

fathers and grandfathers, of partners and of abiding friends. Challenged by protest movements, disturbed by their own pain, motivated by their own innate "father love", touched by the Holy Spirit men are coming to embrace themselves, to embrace one another and to embrace the people they love.

More and more men are claiming their place in the parenting of their children. More and more men are resisting the pressures of workaholic and unhealthy competition. One of the most transformative experiences I have had here at McClure has been the experience of the Saturday morning's men group. This is one of the places where I have seen men share their joys and pains with each other. Around that circle they share their distress and their worries about their kids; they listen carefully and speak thoughtfully in the face of raw grief. They celebrate one another's accomplishments and hold hands to pray before they part. They still share the kind of male camaraderie that wants to tease and laugh and slap one another on the back. For the most part, these are mature men who have been exposed to the good and bad of male culture and are consciously claiming the good.

Perhaps one of the models for this new manhood was revealed two thousand years ago. Jesus shared his culture's view that God was a man but unlike the generations before him he did not think of God as a judge or a warrior or someone to be feared. He taught his friends to call God, "our Father" and in his most needy moment he called out "Abba. Daddy." He even gave us a story with a new and transformative image of a father. He described a father who had been challenged by his son and even exploited. A son who had surely been talked about by the neighbours as a disappointment and a failure. A son who others told him to abandon, to forget. Yet this father, Jesus tells us, opens his arms to embrace his son, to assure him that he is always welcome at home. He recklessly throws away custom and security in order to throw a party for his child. This is the model of fatherhood that Jesus holds open to every father.

Such a love is reflected in a country western ballad by George Strait. Although I listen to CBC all week, on the weekends I secretly turn to the country channel. Admittedly this song is a little simplistic but I mused about how it rose up in the charts on a station that is most often listened to by farmers and farmhands, by ranchers and roughnecks, by truckers and even the occasional preacher. Such affirmation is a sign to me that the masculine code is losing its impact.

I got sent home from school one day with a shiner on my eye
Fighting was against the rules and it didn't matter why
When Dad got home I told that story just like I'd rehearsed
Then stood there on those trembling knees and waited for the worst.
And he said, "Let me tell you a secret, about a father's love

A secret that my daddy said was just between us
He said daddies don't just love their children
Every now and then It's a love without end, amen,
it's a love without end, amen."

When I became a father in the spring of '81

There was no doubt that stubborn boy

Was just like my father's son

And when I thought my patience had been tested to the end

I took my daddy's secret and I passed it on to him

... daddies don't just love their children every now and then

It's a love without end, amen.

Last night I dreamed I'd died and stood outside those pearly gates

When suddenly I realized there must be some mistake

If they knew half the stuff I done they'll never let me in

Then somewhere from the other side I heard those words again

... daddies don't just love their children every now and then

It's a love without end, amen, it's a love without end, amen"

Might all men, sons of the living God, come home to themselves and be blessed
by the loves of their life.

Prayers of the People

God, you teach us that for your kindom to come, for your dream for us to come
true, we must actively sow the seeds of love, however small and vulnerable.

And so God, this morning, hear our prayers of love for you, ourselves and for our
neighbours.

We pray with love, O God and give you thanks for creation. For the beauty of the
sky, the richness of the soil, the life-giving gift of rain and the warm sun that urges
growth and abundance.

When we forget the fragility, vulnerability and sanctity of this our garden home,
remind us, correct us and set us on the path of awareness and good stewardship
once again.

We pray, with love for all those of Treaty 6 and the Homeland of the Metis. For
the challenges of the truth and reconciliation work still to be done. For those who
are still sharing stories of their experience of residential schools in hope that in
sharing the pain - they will inspire healing and change. For those of the 60s scoop
still telling the stories of resilience and persistence in hope that in sharing - they
will inspire healing and change. And for those who are listening to these difficult
stories and who are charged with the work of making a difference we ask that
there might be courage, in partnership, to act now.

We pray, with love for all of us who live with the heavy burden of racism. For

those for whom the colour of their skin or their ethnicity is a barrier to resources. respect and fair treatment. And for those who are working hard to uncover deep seeded racist attitudes and who are seeking new ways of being in the world. May the holy anger found here in the struggle against racism bubble into true equality and justice.

We pray, with love, for all of the LGBT plus community. In this month of PRIDE we celebrate the great privilege and gift it is to love and be loved. We pray for gentleness and grace for those still exploring their sexual identity so that all might find beauty in who You - God has created them to be. And where injustice and homophobia still exist we pray for courage and strength to stand in solidarity with one another.

We pray, with love, for the men in our community and the world who are entrusted with the care and nurture of children and who take up that responsibility with a deep and a tender love. For father's and uncles, brothers and friends who teach the ways of grace, gentleness and integrity we give you thanks, ABBA God. For young men struggling with societies mixed messages about what it means to be a "real man" we ask for your guidance and wisdom. And for those who have been hurt by the men in their lives we ask that a path of healing might be found.

We pray, with love for all who are ill, for all who are struggling with medical treatments and the impact illness has upon family and friends. We pray for those who mourn the loss of a loved one and for those for whom the world is a lonely place. We ask that all might know healing and the assuring warmth of your love.

Hear, O God, these our prayers of love, how ever small, and help them grow into acts of reconciliation, kindness, and compassion. So that your kingdom might be known in this place and in the world.

We pray together now the prayer given to Jesus' disciples.

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

And now we go into the world of complexity and challenge with God's message of radical love on our hearts. We go trusting that the Grace of Jesus the Christ, the love of God and the Companionship of the Holy Spirit is with us this day and always. We are not alone. Amen.