

McClure United Church

Worship Service

Sunday March 29, 2020

Welcome and Announcements (Debra)

Hi everyone – I'm so glad you are able to join Laura, Brian and I (Debra) as we offer you some thoughts and prayers that we hope will be a gift of worship for you.

The ministry staff and office staff are all working from home but keeping in touch with each other and with you through a variety of technological means. I think it was only a few months ago I was complaining about how technology seemed to be keeping us from connecting with each other because so many folks seemed solely focused on screens. What a difference a couple of weeks makes – I am no longer complaining as now that tech is one of the gifts that is keeping many of us from feeling alone and disconnected.

Speaking of connection I want to take a moment to thank a special group of people who have taken up a ministry of connecting through phone calls. We have about 30 people with lists of approximately 25 people each - who are calling to check in with McClure Church family. They are checking to see if anyone needs help with groceries or other things. They are also letting our office administrator know of contact information changes and when asked they are connecting folks to the Ministry team. Thanks to these faithful folks who stepped up and volunteered so quickly and who are all doing important ministry.

As I mentioned the technology is amazing and Laura and Andrew (our new communications person) are our gurus and patient teachers on this. Laura has several Zoom gatherings planned. Please go to the website to get a list of groups that are connecting through this platform. I will just run through them for you:

- Youth Group [Wed](#) at 1pm and [Sun](#) at 11,
- Young Adult Group [Sun](#) at 12:30,
- Family Gathering Fridays at 1pm for
- General coffee time is Friday at 10 am

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11:00 the ministry staff will take turns to live stream on Facebook a thought for the day type thing. Pray for me.

So my faithful friends- like us on Facebook, Instagram and check out our website for ongoing updates and information.

Here ends the announcements for today.

Opening Prayer (Debra)

I hope you who are watching in a comfortable space in your home and you too are comfortable. I am going to light a candle and just take a moment to take a deep breath. I invite you to do the same. (*light candle*)

Let us pray together.

God who knows me through and through and loves me no matter what.
This is a heavy time in our world and in our own lives.

Part of me is scared as I consider what it might be like to be sick.

I am scared I won't be able to fight the virus or I will need medical assistance and it won't be available to me. I am scared for myself.

Part of me is worried about my family – family that is close by and family that is far away. I am worried they might become sick. I am worried about those I love.

Part of me is anxious about finances – for myself and for others. I am anxious about paying the bills, about jobs, about investments, about making ends meet. I am anxious about getting buy.

Part of me is lonely. Missing physical touch – a hand to hold or a body to embrace. I am lonely.

Part of me is angry because I am missing events and trips that were planned for months ago. Graduation, recitals, sporting events, family trips, birthdays and anniversary gatherings. I am angry for what is lost.

Part of me is relieved and glad for a break from the demands and pressures of the world I have created for myself. I am relieved to have time to breath and rest and recalibrate. I feel a bit guilty for this Part of me but it is honest.

Take these parts of me o God and hold them in your love now as I step away from all of them to open my heart to hear your wisdom.

Calm my soul and teach me your ways. Help me to worship you. Amen.

Theme Conversation (Laura)

Hey everyone.

I hope you are all doing okay... that you are finding lots of things to do to keep yourselves entertained. I am seeing so many cool and creative online things for people, especially kids and families, to do during this time of self-isolation.

I really enjoyed my Zoom time with some of you on Friday. Friday morning I had virtual coffee time with a bunch of grown ups and in the afternoon I got to visit with some parents and have a story time with the amazing kids of McClure. If any of you would like to join in on either of these gatherings next week, please go to our Facebook page or website for more information. I would love to see you.

So technology is something that has been bringing a lot of joy to my life, but it's also important for me to get away from the screen and to find joy in other ways. Looking for joyful things is super important right now. It would be easy for us to focus on all of the not-so-joyful things happening like having to stay inside, not being able to see friends and do all of our favourite activities, but we can't let those things be the focus of our thoughts. It's not good for us.

The scripture reading you will hear in a moment is about joy... the bible says a lot about joy... one of my favourites is from the book of Romans and it says "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace".

The thing is that God has filled our lives with joy... just look around.

What do you see that brings you joy? I'm going to show you some of my own joy... (pets, Jordan, meditation chair, prayer shawl)

These are just a few of the many things I am surrounded by that bring me so much joy. It's hard to stay grumpy when I spend time with them.

So take a look around your own home. What are the things that bring you joy? Do an inventory.

And I would love it if you would take a photo of one thing in your home that brings you joy and share it with me. I think you all have my email address and cell #... or you can go ahead and post your photos in the comments section under this video link.

Find your joy... and share it so others can enjoy it as well.

Have a joy-filled week and remember that you are loved by God... and also by me.

Scripture (Matthew Drabble)

John 16:21-22

When a woman is in labour, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

Reflection (Brian)

The process to become a certified Spiritual Care Practitioner involves about two years of study followed by the presentation of a series of papers and an oral exam. One of those papers is to be a case study of an experience of Spiritual Caregiving. Many years ago, I was asked to be the reader for an applicant from Alberta. In her case study this Spiritual Care Practitioner described being called to the ICU unit where she found a man anticipating the death of his husband. They had been a couple long before the law allowed them to marry and they had endured the ups and downs of living a relationship that was not always affirmed by the society. The Spiritual Caregiver sat with this man as he held his partner's hand and said his goodbyes. Her presence offered companionship to this grieving spouse and was, simultaneously, a visible sign to staff and others that such a love was worthy of spiritual affirmation.

One of the tasks in the case study was for the student to identify a theological concept or spiritual idea for understanding this caregiving moment. The student named the theological concept of "joy." I was momentarily halted in my reading by this idea. I set down the paper and asked myself how joy was present at this time of death, how joy was present in a critical care room, how joy was known in a relationship that had often been misunderstood and even rejected by the wider society. The student went on to teach me, through her case study, that joy and hardship can co-exist. She explained that the tender words uttered from spouse to spouse about a lifetime of love, courage and companionship rose above the struggles they had faced. Love transformed the hospital room into a sanctuary where Joy coexisted with the reality of life's end. The student contended that her task was to be a witness to this joy.

There are countless occasions in scripture in which the word "joy" is found. Many passages suggest that there is great joy to be found in one's relationship with God. One scripture reference stood out for me above the others. It reminded me of the lesson I received from the student about joy and struggle co-existing. There is a long passage in the gospel of John known as the 'farewell discourse'. Imbedded in this larger discussion are the two small verses we read this morning. "When a woman is in

labour she has pain because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the pain because of the **joy** having brought a human being into the world.”

Obviously, I have no personal experience of giving birth. I have, however, twice had the privilege to witness this event. It is true that the pain and the struggle, the groans and the blood almost instantaneously gave way to joy when a wrinkled new life was placed upon Victoria’s chest. I have also witnessed how my daughter’s experience of a life-threatening delivery, requiring weeks of recovery, has been accompanied by a tenacious and self-sacrificing love for the boy she birthed. Even when her patience is severely tested in these days of covid-quarantine there is little doubt that this boy is the one of the deepest joys of her life.

I’ve been thinking about how one cultivates joy and it inclined me toward a book that had been sitting on my shelf unread. It was recommended to me by a young man who had experienced testicular cancer. It is entitled *The Book of Joy* and is a collection of the combined wisdom of the Dalai Lama and the anti-apartheid crusader Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I know some of you have read this book. It offers an interesting mixture of Christian and Buddhist teaching which insist on a distinction between joy and happiness.

These spiritual gurus observe that in Western society, happiness is often linked to material goods where a new purchase creates happiness until the novelty subsides. Happiness comes and goes, influenced by the events of the moment. Joy, they suggest, endures even through struggle. Two ways that Tutu and the Dalai Lama suggest for cultivating joy include taking a broad view and exercising compassion.

Noticing our blessings requires taking a broad view of our lives. The temptation is to look only through the window of each moment. The more we look through the window of our entire life, the more we notice our blessings. When we back up from the final moments in an Intensive Care Room or when we back up from the groans of a birthing room we can see life in its entirety complete with blessings, opportunities and relationships.

The other recommendation they offer for discovering Joy is to exercise compassion. The Dalai Lama explains that the human mind is programmed to self-reference, to think first about one’s own needs and desire but he concludes this is very limiting. He quotes a study that found a correlation between people who frequently use the terms

“I” and “Me” and how this group tends to have greater experiences of depression and even heart disease.

To illustrate they tell the story of Anthony Ray Hinton, an African-American who was wrongly convicted of a crime and held on death row for 28 years. His sentence was finally overturned in 2015. Hinton told them: “When no one believes a word you say, eventually you stop saying anything. If the guards needed information from me I wrote it down on a piece of paper. I was angry and refused to speak. Going into my fourth year of not speaking I heard the man in the cell next to mine crying. The love and compassion I had received from my mother spoke through and I asked him what was wrong. He said he had just found out that his own mother had passed away. I told him, ‘Look at it this way. Now you have someone in heaven who’s going to argue your case before God.’ And then I told him a joke and he laughed. Suddenly my voice was back. For all the years after that night, I tried to focus on other people’s problems.” Even when confined to a jail cell, it became possible to extend compassion to others.

In this time of Covid-quarantine perhaps we should not be looking for happiness but rather be opening up to joy. It appears that joy and struggle can co-exist. Offering prayers of thanksgiving for our lives and loves; and praying for the well-being of others is not a new activity for those who chose to follow in the way of Jesus.

In these last couple of weeks I have been practicing more gratefulness for my home, for the food on hand, for the country I live in and for the companionship of Victoria and our many friends. We have also – in small ways – also tried to turn our view outwards. Most nights around happy hour (sometimes with a glass of wine; sometimes with a cup of tea) we have chosen to FaceTime friends. Reaching out in this way has blessed us significantly. We also explored websites for supporting the homeless in our community. I checked with the folks who rent our little apartment to see how they were managing as the end of the month approached. Turns out they are organizing food deliveries for needy kids along 33rd Street. Joy abounds!

My student was right – when I take the broad view of life; when I turn my prayers and efforts towards others - joy does arise even in the midst of worry and quarantine. May God who is the source of love continue to inspire you to love yourself and equally, your neighbour, so that your joy and theirs might be complete.

Prayers of the People (Laura)

As we move this time of prayer, I invite you to take a deep breath as we ground ourselves together in God’s love.

God of life, you have promised to be with us every day.. especially in difficult days like we are facing right now. We give thanks for your loving presence.. a presence that offers hope as we journey this path together.

We pray for clarity in our minds, strength in our work , rest as we sleep and peace in our souls.

We seek your unending grace, as we live with the reality of COVID-19, in our communities, our province, our nation and around the world. May everyone who needs reassurance and support feel your loving presence surround them. May we open our hearts to your love and find ways to reach out to those who are more vulnerable and in greater need of connection and support.

Loving God, we pray for all those in need of healing. We pray especially for those infected with the virus... and for their families as they wait anxiously for improvement and return to health. May they feel strengthened and sustained by your presence.

We pray too that your peace surrounds everyone who is feeling anxious or grieving... maybe grieving the losses this pandemic has brought...loss of work, loss of community, the cancellation or postponement of important events - graduation, weddings and other special gatherings. May your peace offer them the comfort they need.

We pray that all those front line workers who continue serving.. all those who continue to provide essential services to our communities... hospital and long term care workers, shelter workers, grocery store employees, pharmacists, first responders and many many others. We pray they will continue to be strengthened and sustained to do this work.

We pray too for your Holy Spirit's discernment amidst the many choices and decisions facing our medical leaders, national, and world leaders. May they find the wisdom to make choices that are living giving for all affected by this pandemic.

God we offer this prayer knowing that even in the hardest moments of life, you offer us so many opportunities for gratitude... opportunities to experience joy. Help us to seek out... to acknowledge and to ground ourselves in all that is good - within us and around us.

And we offer all of these prayers, knowing that you listen.. help us also to listen for you.

And now I invite everyone wherever you are to join with me in saying the prayer that Jesus taught... and as we say this familiar prayer, remember that you are not alone - we are in this together.

Our Father who art in Heaven...

Blessing (Debra)

So together let us continue the journey.

Let us care for each other and care for the earth.

Let us seek justice and peace.

Let us live our lives filled with the wisdom of our God.

And may the

Grace of Jesus mold us

The Love of God hold us

And the Spirit bless us on our way. Amen.