

Worship with McClure United Church

~Revisiting Sunday School Summer Worship Series~

August 2, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning. Thank you for joining in for our virtual worship – where together, in our own individual homes and cottages, we are the church – a community of faithful followers, living God’s love. As a congregation we are committed to sharing God’s love in many ways and one of those ways is by seeking to be a safe and welcoming place for all folks, regardless of age, ability, race, economic status, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

This is my last Sunday with you until September... tomorrow I begin my vacation and Debra returns from hers. I have really enjoyed sharing worship with you this way and, although I miss seeing everyone in the flesh, it is so good to be able to use the technology we have to share together in worship. I’ve also enjoyed the opportunity to see some of you on Friday mornings for our coffee time. I am not sure if Debra is planning to continue with coffee time in August so please watch the Facebook page for more information about that. If, however, you would like a chat please don’t hesitate to contact Debra – her contact info is on the church website and also available on the Facebook page and by calling the church office.

And as we prepare our hearts and minds to enter into worship, let’s pause for a moment to acknowledge the land on which we worship today. Here in Saskatoon we are on Treaty 6 territory, homeland of the Metis people and we pay our respect to the First Nations and Metis ancestors and keepers of this land... with gratitude.

Opening Prayer

And so, now as we prepare our hearts for worship I invite you to take a moment now to open yourselves to the light and love of Jesus. I light this candle as a reminder of Christ’s light and I pray you will feel the hope of that light move through you and settle on your heart. *(light candle)*

We gather now God in your loving presence and in community with all those near and far who are watching this now. Forgive us, God, for all the times we forget or ignore or even deny your presence... forgive us for the times we lose our way – lose sight of your desire for us. Thank you for your grace.. and for the hope you hold for us... for shining your light on us and into our darkest places. And now open us to your healing love – inspire us with your wisdom – and challenge us live in your way... as your beloved disciples. Amen.

Scripture *Bartimaeus Sees, taken from the Spark Story Bible for Children*

Jesus did something amazing one day near the town of Jericho! He and his disciples were leaving for Jerusalem with a large group of people. Sitting all alone by the side of the road was a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He heard the people walking by and talking about Jesus. When Bartimaeus figured out that Jesus was with the crowd, he knew just what to do. He was hoping Jesus could heal his eyes so he could see again. In a very loud voice that everyone could hear, Bartimaeus shouted, "Jesus, please help me!"

Many of the people with Jesus were upset that Bartimaeus was interrupting them and yelled back, "Be quiet!" "Stop bothering Jesus!"

But Bartimaeus knew Jesus could help him so he shouted even louder, "Jesus, I need you to help me!"

Suddenly, Jesus stopped. The people around Jesus grew so quiet that one little bird could be heard singing in a nearby tree. Jesus said gently, "Tell the blind man to come to me!"

The crowd called Bartimaeus, "Get up! Jesus wants to talk to you." Bartimaeus was so excited he threw off his dusty coat, jumped to his feet, and made his way to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked kindly. Bartimaeus, whose faith in Jesus was very strong, said, "Please help me to see again."

Jesus didn't even need to touch Bartimaeus. In a firm voice Jesus said, "Go, Bartimaeus! Because you believed in me your eyes are healed."

And right then Bartimaeus could see! He saw Jesus, the crowd of people, even the little bird singing in the tree. Bartimaeus was so happy that he joined the crowd and followed Jesus.

Reflection

Jordan

This is the last Sunday in our series about the Bible stories from our childhood.

We've also got a new image in the background here (*it's a poster commemorating the Abolition of Slavery in Canada on August 1, 1834*).

Yesterday was August 1st... the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Canada.

I only learned this year that there had been slavery in Canada for over 200 years!

That's an important piece of our history I didn't know.

If, like me, you are just learning about the history of slavery in Canada and its abolition nearly 200 years ago, then we encourage you to go to the website: www.unitedagainstracism.ca

There you will find lots of great information about this history and why it is important for us to remember and celebrate August 1st as we seek to build a future free of racism and all forms of oppression.

Laura

So this week we are diving deeper into one of the many healing stories in the Bible... the story of blind Bartimaeus.

For the last several months, I have been hosting a weekly young adult discussion group for United Church young adults right across Canada. We have amazing conversations... For the last two weeks Jordan has joined us, and we've engaged those gathered in conversation about the upcoming scripture passages that we have chosen for Sunday. So much of what you heard last Sunday and again for today comes out of those conversations.

After reading the scripture for this week, we asked everyone to share any insights or challenges this passage brought up for them.

One of the young adults, Ian from Ontario... who has given me permission to share this story... spoke about how the healing stories impacted him as a child.

Ian, too, prayed for healing, and when healing didn't happen in the way he had hoped, he questioned himself and God's love for him.

This is definitely one of the challenges that this passage brings up for me too... and I suspect others as well. If healing is up to God... or if healing comes from God... and I, or the people I care about, don't receive a specific type of healing – primarily healing from sickness and disease – what does that say about my place in God's love?

Well... I 100% believe that God does NOT pick favourites.

God's love is radical in such a way that I don't think we can even begin to comprehend... we can only try to understand God's love in our own limited human capacity, but the love of God is so much bigger than anything we can imagine.

So why then do some people get better... recover... receive healing and others do not?

Well that's a really good question, and one I don't have a clear or easy answer for.

It's possible there are times when the healing we hope for isn't actually the healing we need.

It's possible that when physical healing happens, rather than being grateful for God's love for a particular individual, we might be grateful for the medical mysteries and solutions that are also, I'd say, a type of miracle but don't have anything to do with anyone's place on God's priority list.

It's also possible that there is something deeper that we are just unable to understand.

While I hold to the belief that miracles are not about God's preference for anyone – I'm also prepared to believe that miracles are the work of God and that the reasons why or how are just beyond our ability to know.

Jordan

Another difficulty I find in the healing miracle stories of Jesus, is that Jesus frequently attributes a person's healing to their own faith... just as he does with Bartimaeus when he says, "Your faith has made you well."

While I find this beautiful, because it suggests that people play a significant part in their own healing, it also raises a problem.

If people are healed because they demonstrate faith in Jesus, does that suggest that those who do not receive healing are somehow deficient in faith?

This can lead to a 'blame the victim' attitude towards those who pray for healing but do not receive it.

I wonder if the miracle of healing that takes place for Bartimaeus, and many others in the Gospels, is really about restoration of dignity and relationship in community.

At the beginning of the story, Bartimaeus is an outsider, regarded as a nobody by the other townsfolk. At the same time, his life and well-being are in the hands of those very same people... he survives by begging, in other words, by relying on the goodwill of his neighbors.

When Jesus comes to town, Bartimaeus sees an opportunity for liberation from the precarious situation in which he finds himself.

So, he calls out as Jesus is approaching... asking for mercy.

When his neighbours, who are in the crowd following Jesus, hear him they tell him to shush... They don't want him interrupting their time with Jesus.

Now Bartimaeus has a difficult choice...

If he upsets his neighbours, he runs the risk of losing their support in the future.

This could spell death for him.

But to remain silent is to choose their version of who he is - just a blind beggar - over his own truth of who he knows himself to be - a beloved child of God.

Bartimaeus chooses the latter, claiming his identity and worth as a person... trusting Jesus to recognize this truth as well.... And of course, Jesus does.

In this sense, when Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has made you well,"

I think he is not referring to Bartimaeus having faith in Jesus' power to give him sight, but rather his faith in his own dignity and value as a child of God.

This is the ultimate healing which we all need.

Bartimaeus has claimed it for himself and has staked his life on it.

Jesus recognizes this and affirms his faith in this truth.

Whether or not Bartimaeus receives physical healing, he has already been made whole by his belief in his own value... and *wholeness* is the deeper meaning of healing.

I also imagine that the other townsfolk we're surprised, challenged, and perhaps had their eyes opened too, by this exchange between Bartimaeus and Jesus.

The man they thought of as a 'nobody' has claimed his human dignity and Jesus has affirmed it and praised him for his faith and insight.

Perhaps that was the beginning of healing and wholeness for the entire community.

Laura

Definitely. And you know, Ian spoke about how the things he'd prayed for healing from when he was younger are the very things he now believes to be some of his best gifts.

Ian is about to enter seminary and has a very different understanding of his place in God's love. I got the sense that Ian had moved to a place of gratitude for who he is – and the gifts that he brings to the world and to the church.

This really resonates with the story of Blind Bartimaeus for me.

Jordan

One of the other young adults we were talking to on Wednesday challenged us to consider what the healing miracles say about persons with disabilities.

Do these stories feed the notion that disabilities - for example, blindness or deafness - are problems to be solved... healed... rather than natural, even beautiful parts of God's great human diversity?

She spoke about her own disability as part of who she is... not something to be gotten rid of or cured, but part of her unique makeup, with its own particular gifts to offer.

We need to be careful when reading the scriptures that we don't do violence to persons through our interpretations of the text... particularly, in this case, persons with disabilities.

This young woman spoke of her wish that society would heal from its notion that a person's value is connected to their productivity and learn instead to value rest more.

Laura

That's right. She also talked about her own chronic pain and the suffering this causes.

What are we to do with a God who allows some people to suffer?

It seems to me these healing stories raise more questions than they answer!

I hope that they will inspire us to continue to wrestle with these questions and our theologies around suffering, disability, and healing.

Jordan

Well that brings us to the end of our series on Revisiting the Bible Stories from Our Childhood. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed putting it together. We sure appreciated all the ways you have engaged with our reflections and the stories themselves.

Laura

And we hope you will continue to have conversations about these stories and how they speak to you... but for the next little while you'll have to have those conversations among yourselves... Jordan and I are beginning our holidays on Monday and we will be away until the end of August.

Have a great summer everyone!

Prayers of the People

Today's prayer was a visual prayer comprised of images and music and these words:

Let us pray...

We offer our prayers to you, O God:

In gratitude:

for love of friends, of family, of faith community.

for fun, for rest, for learning, for creation, for health care and caregivers.

And we pray our concerns for those who: are sad, are hurt, are sick, are bored, are angry, are lost, are afraid, are lonely, are confused.

Thank you, God, for hearing our prayers and for sharing your love.

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus shared:

Our Father/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 may we go from this time of worship

May we go filled with confidence in God's presence within and all around us...

A presence that is love and compassion.

A presence that holds us... heals us.

We are surrounded by the love of God,

the strength of Christ

and the power of the Holy Spirit,

today and every day.

Amen.