

# Worship with McClure United Church

~ Baptism of Jesus ~

January 10, 2021

## Welcome & Announcements

**Zoom Coffee Connections:** Friday mornings at 10AM., to share information, discuss issues and connect with each other via Zoom. For more information, please visit our website or contact Laura at (306) 291-5838 or by email at [laura@mclclureunitedchurch.org](mailto:laura@mclclureunitedchurch.org)

**Congregational Meeting** to discuss the proposed 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets, February 7th. This important meeting will take place via Zoom and we hope as many of you as are able will be a part of the discussion and decision making. More details to follow in the coming weeks!

**Email Book Club:** Join other reading enthusiasts for an email book club. Here's how it works:

- Once a group of names has been collected, an email will be sent out to all members requesting a book suggestion. The book can be fiction or nonfiction, faith-based or secular. The suggested books will each be assigned a month (hopefully we will have a chance to read and discuss everyone's book selection).
- On the designated start day (probably February 1), the person who selected the first book will begin the discussion by posting a little bit about why they chose that book and if they have already read it, what they liked about it.
- Over the next month everyone will have an opportunity to send emails to the group sharing their own observations, questions, comments and others are welcome to respond.
- You can share as often or as little as you are comfortable.
- People can join at any time.
- Everyone is welcome.

If you have any questions or would like to join the Book Club, please email me (Rev. Laura Fohse) at [laura@mclclureunitedchurch.org](mailto:laura@mclclureunitedchurch.org) or phone/text 306-291-5838.

**Zoom Bible Study:** An opportunity to read, learn and discuss the Bible with other UCCan folks. Each week we will engage with one lectionary passage for the upcoming Sunday. Beginning February 3 and happening every Wednesday at 1pm. To register, visit our website. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

**Broadview Magazine Subscriptions:** Formerly known as the Observer, Broadview is an independent Canadian magazine featuring award-winning coverage of spirituality, justice and ethical living. Through compelling stories and engaging images, Broadview challenges and inspires readers seeking to live a purpose-filled life. All renewals and new subscriptions must be received by the office by January 31st, 2021. Annual Group Subscription rate is \$25 each (taxes included). Please phone the McClure Church Office at (306) 373-1753 to place your magazine order.

**Women's Gathering:** This group of faith filled McClure women continues to meet once a month early on a Saturday morning for conversation and connection. You are welcome to join in via Zoom. Send a note to Debra indicating you would like to come along [debra.b@shaw.ca](mailto:debra.b@shaw.ca). Our next gathering is January 16th, 2021 at 8AM.

**Men's Gathering:** A Gathering of faith filled McClure men meets for conversation and connection January 24<sup>th</sup>. Contact Norm Biram if you would like to join with them: [biram@shaw.ca](mailto:biram@shaw.ca)

### **Opening Prayer/Call to Worship**

As we gather for worship, we light this candle – as a symbol of the light that Jesus brings and a reminder for us to let our light shine so that others may know his love,

(light candle) Jesus Christ – light of the world.

Let us take a moment without words, to listen to the sound of pouring water – water that symbolizes life... nourishment... renewal. AS we listen, we prepare our hearts and minds for worship... remembering the baptism of Jesus... let's hear God speak "you are my beloved – in you I am well pleased". Let us also remember that those words are for us as well. Feel God's love surround you... listen to the water and remember that you too

are God's beloved – you are loved.. God's heart belongs to you... your heart belongs to God.

Let us pray in quiet – listening for God in the sound of water. (pour water)  
Amen.

## **Scripture**

### **Mark 1:4-11**

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

## **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.

How lovely to be thinking about the baptism of Jesus this day, given the tumultuous week we have witnessed.

Baptism, for me, conjures up visions of cute little Buddha babies, in white silk gowns or extra special "going to church" onesies with proud parents and adoring grandparents, cameras focused - so as not to miss a single moment of this special time. Baptism conjures up smiling congregational members excited to be welcoming yet another little one, excited to see where this child will lead, excited to have the energy and

enthusiasm of simple yet profound questions amongst us. It's a sugar plum baptism - a picture of beauty and joy filled welcome that is so full of love you can touch it.

I must admit I transferred this pastoral, gentle, beautiful moment into the story of Jesus Baptism. I picture Jesus strolling along a well-worn path that leads to the edge of a clear, calm Lake. I picture Jesus tipping his hat to passers by asking if they have seen his cousin, a real down to earth kind of guy. I picture Jesus smiling as he finds John in a quiet corner of the beach. They talk a bit about who should be doing what to whom and then John, carefully covering the face of Jesus, gently dips him below the waters and Jesus emerges with the fresh waters of the Jordan falling from his long hair. Doves float above, the voice of God seems to sing in the air, good news and welcome and love are so close you can touch it.

Quite frankly I kind of need this gentle, pastoral scene these days because if you have been watching the news this past week gentle and pastoral has not crossed the lips or been seen on the screen behind reports for a very long time. I want my faith to sing a comforting song these days – to be comfortable and lovely and easy. I want my walk with Jesus to mirror the easy images in my mind. However in this reading I get so much more.

But comfort and joy is not what Mark the writer of our Gospel reading lays out for us in his story of Jesus baptism. When Mark wrote it was excruciatingly dangerous to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus was a rebel, he pushed the edges of the Law and made those in authority very uncomfortable. He sided with outcasts and challenged the powerful to care for the poor. He spoke of justice for all and of a God whose love could redeem the lost and heal beyond understanding.

Friends we often fail to remember that John was killed for his support of Jesus. We forget that when Jesus rose from the muddy waters of the Jordan the heavens did not gently open, rather the heavens were “torn apart”. Jesus' baptism was far from a sweet dip in the river with angels singing and doves floating in the sky.

The Heaven's tore open.

Think about it, Mark's Gospel describes the Baptism of Jesus, as a radical act. Mark writes that as Jesus "was coming out of the water, he saw the heavens **torn apart** and a dove descending."

His word for 'torn apart' is *schizo*, and it means "to cleave, to cleave asunder, to rend." It's a strangely violent word to describe such a holy occasion.

*Schizo, torn apart.* is the word Matthew, Mark and Luke all use to describe that moment on Good Friday when the curtain of the temple is torn in two. It's the word John uses when the Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross determine not to tear Jesus' garment and divide it between them, but to cast lots for it, instead. It's a word that echoes in the prophecies of Isaiah, particularly when Isaiah says to God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down," (Isaiah 63:19).

The Gospel writer, Mark wants the reader to understand that God has torn open the heavens in the life of this man Jesus. In the gospel of Mark, the baptism of Jesus is very clearly a radical act.

Friends, maybe we have neglected one of the key meanings of baptism, perhaps we might be inspired today to revisit the roots and the challenge of the baptism that Jesus experienced. Might we consider our own baptism a radical occasion.

What if instead of a gentle sprinkle of water on the forehead or immersion on the banks of a local River or something in between, what if instead of baptism as a way to name our selves as followers of Jesus, what if the only way was by skydiving.

The very idea makes my stomach do backflips but consider the enormity of getting into a plane, soaring miles above the earth, considering the consequences of stepping out into the vastness of creation with little more than a parachute and a promise.

Stay with me for a minute. Imagine what it would mean to go through that experience with its terrors, it's uncertainties and its ultimate conclusion: that the parachute and the promises have led you safely to solid ground. Imagine if you will; showing up for church on Sunday morning to be greeted by a room full of people who have put it all on the line, who have stepped out in faith to trust the promises and seek the solid ground.

Think how you would see them as you walked in and found your Pew or chair, how you would see the older couple that sits up front and always holds hands through the prayers, the super cheeky soprano and the youth who doesn't look up from their phone, the guy who circles typos in the bulletin every Sunday and submits it back to the church office; and the other guy who seems as if he comes because his deceased wife liked it, and he may or may not miss Jesus, but he knows he misses her.

Think how you would see them all, the heavy, the creaky, the busy, the young and the old, the happy and the sad--the people you will find in every church on any Sunday--think how you would see them all, if being

baptized meant that at some point, however many years before, they had each had **that day** --that day when they had somehow summoned enough courage to leap out into thin air and into the mystery of God....

Friends, Baptism means that God has broken through; in Jesus and in you and I. In turn, we are called to tear into the challenges and problems of the world with everything we've been given.

Baptism is a summons to be part of the remarkable, healing work of God. To give our lives to something more challenging than any other kind of work--and in the end, surely more beautiful, true, and enduring than any other kind of work. And God knows that work is hard and costly and terrifying but look at the world around us – we must do the work.

No matter where you are baptized...whether it's in front of the same font where your grandmother and mother were baptized or whether it's by the banks of a river, or whether it's standing in the sanctuary of a place where even you can hardly believe you've found a home...no matter where it is, the water and the promise and the prayer take just a few moments, it is rather simple and easy.

But truly saying yes to the ways of Jesus is the daily work of the rest of our lives. It is saying yes to the world and yes to a life “torn open” by the love of God. It is a yes to loving your neighbour and sharing your resources of time and talent. It means doing what you can when it is uncomfortable but necessary. It is speaking the truth when the air is filled with lies, and trusting your own belovedness.

So...I suppose it's unlikely that we'll decide anytime soon to replace baptism by water and the spirit, with baptism by gravity and parachute. But the next time you walk into a church and encounter God's people there in all our familiar shapes and sizes, remember that what unites us all is something God's Word tells us is even more electrifying than jumping out of a plane.

In baptism, the heavens themselves were torn apart. And when we experience that for ourselves, when we know that for ourselves, and feel it in our hearts at last, and live it's truth - it is the thrill of a lifetime.

It is when everything begins and the world changes.

Amen.

## **Prayers of the People/Lord's Prayer**

And now let us gather our hearts and minds and offer our prayers to the source of all love and all life

I invite you into a responsive prayer today. When you hear me say, God of Grace, I invite you to respond with these words: "Immerse us in your Spirit."

Holy One... through the baptism of Jesus, you have infused the world with your Holy Spirit – We pray for your love and mercy for this world; for all nations and peoples struggling in this pandemic, for government and community leaders, making difficult decisions in the midst of competing voices; for those responsible for the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines, and for the exhaustion and continuing burden carried by hospital and front line workers. Help us to remember and give thanks for all who work on our behalf. God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

For the people of the United States; for the outgoing and incoming government leaders; for those holding the responsibility to ensure peoples' safety and security; for open hearts and minds, and for wisdom, discernment and hope for the days ahead. God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

For the vulnerable in our midst- Indigenous communities, those in long-term care, in prison, and for the homeless, and all those whose ordinarily-difficult daily challenge of providing food and lodging for themselves and their families is made more desperate in this pandemic time. Help us to see and respond to the less-visible in our community.

God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

For all who are suffering in mind, body or spirit - ; for those working with strained or broken relationships, and those suffering with addictions, depression or despair; for those trying to offer primary care, pastoral care, and support in the midst of pandemic restrictions. Help us to embrace your world. God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

For those who are struggling with being separated from family, from friends, and from their faith communities, in this congregation and around the world – especially those who are isolated from their usual supportive relationships; for all who are part of the McClure community struggling to celebrate together the gift of the Christ, and to experience our unity in the Spirit. Help us to reach out to them. God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

For your Church around the world; for its leaders lay and clergy; for The United Church of Canada.... our Moderator, Richard Bott, for all the communities of faith who are committed to serving you. May we seek and embrace your will in all things, trusting that you will empower us to be a source of your love to everyone we encounter. God of grace:

**Immerse us in your Spirit.**

Living God, we thank you for revealing the depth of your love for us in person of Jesus Christ, the light of the world... your beloved son. Help us to respond to the gift of your Holy Spirit and thereby follow Christ in all that we think, say, and do. This we pray in his name.

And we continue to pray together the words that he taught us....

### **Blessing**

Let us go from here in the spirit of that moment when God called you by name and invited you to a journey of a lifetime

Take with you and share the excitement, challenge and the joy of being beloved by God

Take with you the mystery of the heavens being “torn open” and your invitation to be a part of the breaking in of God.

And May God

Father and Mother of us all

Jesus Christ, God son, our brother and

the Power of the Holy Spirit

be with us this day and everyday.

Amen.