

Worship with McClure United Church

November 22, 2020

Welcome

COVID Restrictions Update Effective immediately, due to the large number of COVID cases, we are increasing restrictions on use of McClure's building until further notice.

1. The capacity of each space is reduced by half from what is written in the guidelines and the on-line form.
2. Gatherings are limited to 1.5 hours or less.
3. Staff will be working from home as much as possible.

Hopefully these are short term measures and can be lifted in a few weeks. If the case load continues to increase, we may need to increase restrictions.

Advent Kits Advent Kits for all ages soon available. Please let us know if you would like any of the following resources for celebrating Advent at home: • Advent Candle Kit to follow along Sunday morning candle lighting litany • Family Faith at Home Kit - family devotions, Advent calendar and activities for children, youth and their families • Older Adult Kit - advent devotional and a special surprise All kits will be delivered prior to November 29th (the first Sunday in Advent). To request a kit, please call the church office at (306) 373-1753 or email mcclureunitedchurch@shaw.ca.

EGADZ Teen Help Collections Once again McClure is partnering with EGADZ to provide support to vulnerable teens and their families. This year we will be collecting specific items so there will be less sorting needed. EGADZ has identified these as priority items. Please add some to your shopping list. Health regulations require that items be unopened and/or in their original packaging. Requests: • Deodorant: male & female • Toothbrushes and toothpaste • Feminine hygiene items (tampons, pads) • Toques, headbands, gloves and scarves • Financial donations- make cheques to McClure mark EGADZ. Cash will be used to purchase a gift for each client. Drop off will be at the church during the first week of December: • Sunday Dec. 6, 11AM-Noon • Monday Dec 7, 6-7:30PM

“So That Our Joy May Be Complete”:An Advent Concert Celebration Living Skies Regional Council is excited to offer a wonder-filled virtual evening of

music & story for the entire UCC family! Tickets Now Available:

<https://form.jotform.com/Regions245/AdventConcertTickets>

Co-hosted by Lorne Calvert & Lindsay Mohn, the evening features music provided by Sacred Sounds Worship Band, a Christmas narrative from Jim Tenford, and production support from Cheri Uthe of Faith Productions.

Ticket proceeds go directly to UCC Communities of Faith (congregations) & other UCC Ministries throughout the Living Skies Region. When you buy your ticket, simply indicate the specific Community of Faith or Ministry that you would like to support. Questions: Please just contact Kent at livingskiesyaya@united-church.ca or 306-221-5529

Socks for the Homeless. Collection bins will be set up inside the McClure United Church East doors on: Sunday, November 22nd - 10AM to Noon. If you missed drop off give Carol Claypool a call.

Honey will be for sale at all the Socks for the Homeless drop-off today as well. It makes a great stocking stuffer for Christmas! Just \$5 a jar with proceeds going to Refugee projects.

Opening Prayer

And now I invite you to take a moment to breathe deeply of God's love – a love that is with us wherever we are... whatever we do. A love we know through the stories, the teachings and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

And I light this candle this morning... the Christ candle... on Reign of Christ Sunday as a reminder of the light of Christ shining in us, through us and all around us... lighting the way with his power... his strength... and his wisdom.

And we pray this morning O God that during this time of worship... and in our every day living... that our eyes will be open to see you... our ears will be open to hear you... and our hearts will be open to experiencing your love. Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered

before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Reflection

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, here we are, on the last Sunday of the year.

The last Sunday of the Christian Year, that is.

I love the Christian calendar. I love the way we anticipate the coming of Jesus in Advent and celebrate the birth for twelve full days during Christmas. I love the way Jesus' light shines into the world on Epiphany and gets brighter and brighter in the weeks that follow. //I can't say that I love walking beside Jesus on his journey to the cross during Lent, but I can see why I need to do it. It deepens my celebration of Easter and those fifty

days' worth of alleluias that follow. And then, of course, comes Pentecost, and all the Sundays after that, Sundays in which we get to be disciples, following Jesus, hearing him preach and teach, watching him help and heal, becoming more convinced that the way of love is more powerful than the ways of darkness. And then we come to this Sunday, a Sunday for affirming that Jesus' way, is the way for us Christians. Ancient words and imagery claim this day as Christ the King Sunday or Reign of Christ Sunday.

In Matthew's Gospel we are given an interesting vision of the importance or place of Jesus in God's world. Jesus has been fending off the scribes and Pharisees for several chapters: answering their questions, calling their bluff, and warning them and his disciples of the devastation that is about to come on all the earth. In this passage Matthew shifts our gaze to the time just after the End, when the smoke has cleared, and all the nations of the world are standing there blinking in the bright sunshine of eternity. For Matthew this is when the Son of Man will come in all his glory and everybody will fall into the long line leading up to the throne and the judgment will begin. For one wonderful, or terrifying moment each person will look into the eyes of the King, and with a flick of his gaze, a nod of his head, he will direct them to one side of the throne or the other. And then, when the judgment is over, he will pronounce the verdict. You know how it goes: Sheila read about it for us - To those on his right—the sheep—he will say, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," but to those on his left—the goats—he will say, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire." Heavy stuff.///

The difference between the sheep and the goats, it seems to me is that the sheep looked on the suffering of the world and had compassion and the goats did not. It is interesting that in both cases the sheep and the goats are surprised by the verdict. "When did we see you in need and help you?" the sheep ask. "When did we see you and not help?" the goats ask. And in their question the importance of the word *seeing* begins to emerge.

"I was there," Jesus says. "I was in every hungry, thirsty, strange, naked, sick, and imprisoned person you ever encountered. You just didn't see me." You can almost hear their response. "But Lord, if we'd known it was you we would have acted differently. We would have thrown a party, **would have baked a cake**. We would have treated you like the king you are!" Which is

just what Jesus doesn't want. He doesn't want people to treat him differently than they treat everybody else. He wants them to treat everybody else as they would treat him. And so, the one we would follow the one at the centre of our living has come to us, disguised as those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, strange, sick, and imprisoned. He has identified with these ones so closely that the way we treat these is the way we treat him, and what he is watching for is whether or not, we will see the need before us and respond with compassion.

Let me take just a moment to say a word about that. The scribes and Pharisees, Jesus has been arguing with, lived by the words of Leviticus 19:2. It was practically their motto: "You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy." They believed that holiness was what it was all about and that when the Day of Judgment came people would be separated into two groups on the basis of how holy they had been. There are still people who approach religion in that way. But in the ministry of Jesus it is all about compassion—the ability to feel with other people, to know their misery, to share their suffering, and then to do something about it – It is this that is of far greater value than holiness.

Friends compassion doesn't often happen without seeing. I think those of us who serve meals on wheel, help with supper service at the Lighthouse, who prepare meals with the folks of the Integrated Community Ministries, who take our refugee family to appointments and have them over for supper – see things. Those of us who watch the news and read of nations and peoples on the edge, those of us who have traveled to places of extremes Like those in our community who traveled to Nicaragua and Mexico have seen things.

Seeing is believing. It changes things. It moves it from our head to our heart. Do you remember what God said to Moses from the burning bush? "I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians." God sees, God hears, God knows, and then God does. But it begins with seeing. It always seems to begin with seeing. "When did we see you and do something for you?" the sheep ask. They ask three times, and in each case Jesus responds by saying, "Whenever you saw the suffering of the least of these my brothers and sisters and did something about it, you did it to me." "When did we see

you and not do anything for you?” the goats ask. “Whenever you failed to see their suffering and do something about it,” he answers, “you failed to do it to me.”

Rev. Jim Somerville writes about a class experience he had while at seminary. While I was there, I participated in a class exercise called “The Plunge.” As a way to experience the plight of the poor firsthand my professor challenged us to spend 24 hours on the streets of the city. We were each assigned a partner—I got Roger—and told that we could bring 65 cents apiece: just enough for bus fare to get us downtown. Before we went on the Plunge, Roger and I spent four or five days getting ready, which meant that we didn’t shower or shave or change clothes in all that time. By Friday afternoon we looked the part. We saved 65 cents apiece by catching a ride downtown with a guy in a blue van who laughed when he heard what we were up to. So, there we were, on the streets, ragged, unshaven, and smelly. That’s how the adventure began. For the first few hours it felt like an adventure. I put a bottle cap in one shoe, forcing me to walk with a limp, thinking that would make me look more authentic. We panhandled outside the fancy theater downtown and one of my seminary professors walked right by me, without so much as a glance. We ended up in the Salvation Army shelter just before midnight with twenty other men who lay there stinking and belching and snoring. It was a long night. The next morning, we got up and out of that place as quickly as we could and spent the rest of the day wandering the streets.

It was sometime that morning that I noticed people weren’t looking at me. I was sitting on a bench outside a big department store, enjoying the sunshine, when a mother and her daughter came walking toward me. I smiled and said hello but the mother looked right through me as if I had become invisible. And once I noticed it in her, I noticed that everyone was doing it. They were looking around me, or past me, or through me, but they weren’t looking at me. If they had looked at me, they might have seen me, and if they had seen me, they might have had to acknowledge my presence, and if they acknowledged my presence then they might have had to do something for me. It was so much easier just to pretend they didn’t see, just to look around, or past, or through. Just to walk briskly by with their heads held high while I disappeared a little piece at a time.

At noon that day Roger and I went to the Cathedral of the Assumption on Fifth Street because we heard they gave out sandwiches after mass. I sat on a back pew, listening to the young priest deliver a very earnest sermon from Luke 15. There were the scribes and Pharisees, complaining about Jesus because he welcomed sinners and 6 tax collectors and ate with them. "Jesus kept bad company," the priest said. "He welcomed sinners and tax collectors. He rendered himself guilty by association. Here at the Cathedral of the Assumption we're trying to do what Jesus would do. We're trying to welcome those he would welcome. Some of our parishioners don't like it very much. They wish we would turn the homeless away. But if Jesus wouldn't turn them away then neither can we." When the mass was over he walked back to where I was sitting. "What's your name?" he asked. "Jim," I said. He said, "Good to meet you, Jim," and stuck out his hand to shake mine. It was the first time in 24 hours that anyone had offered to touch me and I felt a lump rise in my throat, making it hard to ask the question that had been on my mind since I walked in the place. "Do you give away any food?" This priest looked, he saw, he felt compassion.

I believe God wants us to see the other, to truly see and in love, respond, just as Jesus would.

According to the gospel writer Matthew to see with such compassion is the difference between heaven and hell.

Most of us probably do good things because we are genuinely good people. Some people probably do good things to relieve their guilt. But this is why I try so hard to do them: I do them because I am haunted by this parable, and I will always be haunted by it. I'm not haunted so much by the idea of the "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" as I am by the idea that the homeless beggar I just walked by on the street outside, the poorly dressed woman with bruises on her face and tangled hair, the young man talking to himself in the doorway, was Christ himself. And I didn't even look.

God have mercy. Amen

Prayers of the People

O God, through Jesus the Christ,
you proclaimed your kingdom among us and within us.
In the power of the Spirit, your love is always at work,
bringing good out of evil and life out of death.
We thank you that your love never lets us go,
for you have known the good times and the hard times of this life before us.

You came as one who was hungry and thirsty.
Where people live on the streets today, suffer from hunger, or beg for a meal:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as a stranger in need of welcome.
Where people live lonely lives or feel like strangers in a strange land; where love is lacking and people face rejection because of who they are, where they're from, what they look like or what they are able or not able to do:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as one who was naked.
Where people lack enough clothing, shelter or life's basic resources; where people live without dignity, exposed to every kind of pain and hardship:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as one who was broken.
Where people feel pain in body, mind or spirit; where someone grieves the loss of a beloved or the future they planned; in places where the pandemic has done its worst and desperation has moved in:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as a Shepherd.
Where people are led astray or nations are ruled by corrupt or greedy leaders and there is no peace in the land:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as one who was in prison.
Where people are treated unfairly, targeted or tortured; where justice has failed and people are punished with cruelty:
May your kingdom come. May your will be done.

You came as one, called Jesus, proclaiming your kingdom.
And so we lift up these prayers his name, knowing that your kingdom is drawing near and that we meet you in the face of those who cry out to us.
And we cry out to you now... holding all your people in our hearts as we say together the words that Jesus taught his friends and his followers...

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing

Let us go into the world with our eyes wide open.
So that we might see each other and see our neighbour and respond with compassion and love.
Let us care for each other and 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 Grace of Jesus the Christ,
The love God and The Energy of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and every day.