

Worship with McClure United Church

~Revisiting Sunday School Summer Worship Series~

July 26, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome again to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning. We are so grateful that you have chosen to tune into this virtual time of worship. No matter where you are or what you are doing... you may be watching this from the comfort of your own bed, from your deck enjoying a cup of steaming coffee or as you go for your daily walk... you are welcome here. As an affirming ministry of the United Church of Canada, McClure United tries real hard to be public, intentional and explicit in our welcome of all people regardless of age, ability, race, economic status, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. All are truly welcome here.

We acknowledge that we are offering this time of worship from Treaty 6 territory, homeland of the metis people and invite you to take a moment to acknowledge the land where you are now...as together we pay our respect to the First Nations and Metis ancestors and keepers of this place.

Thank you so much for joining us for this virtual worship time.

Opening Prayer

And so, now as we prepare our hearts for worship, I light this candle and invite you to take a moment to open yourselves to the light and love of Jesus. A light that shines in and through you into the world... a light that shines even into the darkest of places (*light candle*)

And now, let us pray...

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks. Thanks for gathering us together in this way. We ask your help in opening our hearts and our minds to your love and your wisdom as it may be revealed to us during this time and throughout our lives. Help us to be present in this time of worship, to hear your word for us in whatever way it is spoken or sung or offered... maybe in the silence. So be with us now God and bless our time together so that we may be a blessing to your world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scripture

Our scripture story today is called "Peter Walks on Water". It comes from the Lectionary Story Bible by Ralph Milton.

Jesus was very tired. People came to Jesus the whole day. Some wanted to hear stories about God's shalom. Others were sick and hoped that Jesus would help them feel better.

At the end of the day, Jesus said to his friends, his disciples, "You take the boat and go to the other side of the lake. I want to go up into the hills for a little while. I need some time to rest. I need to talk with God."

So the disciples started to row across the lake. But a big storm began to blow. A strong wind blew the waves. The waves bounced the boat up and down, and splashed water into the boat.

"We're going to drown!" yelled Andrew. All night long, the storm kept blowing harder and harder. The waves got bigger and bigger. The disciples were shivering because they were so afraid.

And then, when it was almost morning, Andrew saw something that looked like a person walking on the water. "It's a ghost!" screamed Andrew. The other disciples made strange, fearful noises.

Slowly, the person came closer. And closer. Then they saw that it was a man. And as the man came even closer, Andrew knew who it was. "It's Jesus!" he yelled.

"It's alright!" called Jesus. It's me. Don't be afraid."

"But... but..." Peter could hardly talk. "Jesus, you're... you're... you're walking on the water." Jesus just nodded and smiled.

"Could I walk on the water, too?" asked Peter.

Jesus reached out his hand. "Come, Peter," he said.

So Peter stepped out of the boat. He was looking right at Jesus and that made him feel strong. And sure enough, he could walk on the water, just like Jesus.

Peter didn't look at the waves and he didn't worry about the wind. Peter kept his eyes on Jesus. Step-by-step. Peter was not afraid.

Then, suddenly, Peter noticed the big waves. Right away he felt afraid. He began to sink into the water. "Help me! Jesus!" he yelled.

Jesus reached out his hand to Peter. Peter grabbed Jesus' hand, and right away he felt strong again.

"Let's get into the boat," said Jesus. And as Peter climbed in, he noticed that the storm was over. The wind and the waves had stopped. The water was calm.

Jesus' friends just sat there in the boat. They didn't know what to say. Andrew wondered if maybe it had all been a dream.

Peter looked right at Jesus. "You really are God's chosen one, aren't you, Jesus?"

May God bless our understanding of this story from the Bible.

Reflection

Laura: Hey Jordan, do you believe in miracles?

Jordan

Absolutely I believe in miracles. When you think about the fact that you and I are sitting here right now... and what had to happen for the atoms that are out there in the universe to come together in the particular configuration that would make you and would make me and would make these bodies work and would make us able to think and talk... the odds against that are astronomical. And yet here we are having this conversation. To me, this is nothing short of miraculous.

Then I look out the window and I see the trees and the bushes... we are surrounded by miracles! There's no question in my mind that miracles are all around us.

Laura: Great! So then... did Jesus walk on water?

Jordan

That's a very good question. My rational mind says – No, probably not... the laws of physics don't allow that... we know that's not possible.

On the other hand, as I've just affirmed, all kinds of things that seem incredible and simply not possible are, in fact, true.

So I don't know... I don't know if Jesus walked on water or if we have a story about Jesus walking on water that's trying to tell us something else... I don't know....

What about you – what do you think?

Laura

It doesn't actually matter to me if the miracle stories are real... if they actually happened. It's the truth, the wisdom... the hope... they offer that is important.

Let me tell you a story...

When I was in my early 20s I was a bit of a mess... a pretty big mess actually...

and I was searching, desperately, for something to "save" me from the pain I was in.

As I mentioned in our discussion about the Creation story, I came into Christianity through a more fundamentalist denomination...

a denomination that really focused on personal salvation – which was exactly what I was searching for.

I encountered this story of Jesus walking on the water and I remember reacting quite emotionally to it at the time... and what I reacted to... what got me right here (heart) was not the part of Jesus walking on the water to his disciples...

what got me was the part when Peter stepped out of the boat and walked to Jesus...

and, as we heard.. after a few steps he looked away from Jesus and allowed himself to get caught up in his fears – which is totally fair as he was in the middle of a massive storm – but he became afraid and he started to sink.

Jesus then reached out and saved him.

I remember feeling such a deep sense of reassurance –
a confidence in Jesus' love for me – even when I doubt, even when I'm afraid...
maybe especially when I'm in some turmoil –
those are the times when I can feel God's love –
which I often visualize as the hand of Jesus – outstretched... sometimes reaching for me,
sometimes pushing me, sometimes just holding me tight.
Connecting with this story was an important step in my journey to wellness.
It felt like a very personal call to step out of the boat – to trust in the power, the strength,
the courage God is offering to me –
through these stories of Jesus I found faith to believe that no storm is greater than God's
love.

And there will most certainly be times... there have been many... when I get caught up in
panic and worry... in fear.. and yet God is there with me, reaching out... inviting me to
keep moving forward.

So the miracle for me is that in the midst of such inner turmoil, I was able to deeply feel
God's love for me in such a way that I was able to move forward with a little bit of hope.

Jordan:

Wow, thanks... that's really powerful.

When I was reading the story, what stood out for me in a new way is the moment when
the disciples recognize Jesus, and he says to them – “Don't worry, it's me... it's okay.” And
Peter says to Jesus – “If it really is you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

If I was in that boat in the middle of the storm, with the waves and the wind against me,
and the possibility of getting swamped in the middle of the lake and drowning... and I see
Jesus there and I want to know for sure it's Jesus... I would say – “Jesus, if that really is
you, could you make this go away, and could you please get into the boat with us so that
we know we're safe.”

I think that often my prayers and my relationship with God look a lot like that... “Things
are really out of control right now and I need help... and let me tell you what help looks
like... it looks like making this crisis go away.”

It's striking to me that Peter, who has spent so much time with Jesus and knows how
Jesus works, doesn't say to Jesus, “Could you make the storm go away.” He says – “I'll
know it's you if you invite me into the storm... and because you have invited me into the
storm, I will be equipped to move deeper into the crisis in a way that allows me to cope,
where I can't cope right now.”

That's Peter's understanding of Jesus... that Jesus isn't just somebody who can come in
and still the storm... but rather will call him into the storm and equip him to deal with it in
a new way.”

So when Jesus says – “Alright then, come on”... Peter gets out of the boat and walks on water... Peter walks on water. It’s amazing!

And then of course, when it all feels like too much and he feels overwhelmed and starts to go down... Jesus is still there for him.

It’s not either/or – either Jesus is going to fix the storm, *or* Jesus is going to fix us so that we can cope with the storm... it’s both/and... Jesus is right there in the storm with us, inviting us to go deeper in, *and* he has our back through it all.

This allows us to do things we never would have imagined ourselves able to do.

No matter what shape that takes, it is always miraculous when we discover we have strengths and abilities and wisdom in us we never knew was there... and when we fall, to know that we are not alone... God is there to catch us.

There are so many layers of meaning in this story... and so many layers of miracles!

Laura

For sure. If someone had told me 30 years ago that I would be where I am today and would have done the things I have done... I never would have believed it!

Jordan

I can say the same thing. And I suspect everyone listening could say that too.

So we want to hear from you... how does this story speak to you? What layers of meaning do you find there?

Laura

And not just this story... but any of the miracle stories. How do you understand the miracles reported in the Bible? Read them again... do you have a favourite one? What does it say to you? How does it help you make meaning in your own life and faith journey?

Prayers of the People

Holy One, draw us now to be with you as you are always with us.

As we prepare ourselves for this time of prayer, may we feel your love surround us, giving us what we need right now to be fully present to you... for the sake of our community, our world, and ourselves. In opening to you... to your power, strength and wisdom – we open ourselves to be your love in the world.

So we begin our prayer with a word of gratitude... there is so much to be grateful for, O God... and we take a moment in the quiet and beauty of this place... to offer our gratitude to you now. (*silence*)

And now filled with gratitude and grounded in your love, we offer prayers of care and concern for the world...

We hold before you, O God, those who are in need of our love, our kindness, and our compassion... those in need of our prayers:

We pray for all who are struggling.. those who feel full of worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, anger

We pray for those who are grieving loss...

those who are struggling with their mental health...

those who are addicted...

those who are unsettled by change and uncertainty...

and we pray for those who are caregivers, support workers, family members and friends and trying their best to find ways to bring relief from the suffering.

We pray all the painful places of injustice in our world and in our communities...

For those who live with trauma... the trauma that comes from discrimination, rejection, violent words and actions...

For those struggling with their commitment to be good allies, friends and neighbours...

We pray God for all the places of brokenness in your world...

We pray for all your people everywhere to feel your love surround them... to feel your peace fill their hearts... to feel your hope fill their minds.

And knowing that we all have our own places and people where brokenness exists, we take another moment now in quiet to hold our brokenness before God – opening even further to the love that is within and all around us. (*silence*)

O God, hear our prayers, receive our hearts and from your deep love may we find the healing and hope we need... today and every day.

And now, we share together the prayer that Jesus taught his friends and disciples:

Our Father...

Blessing

And now as we go from this time of worship,
may we allow the love of God to surround us,
the peace of Christ to ground us,
and the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to guide us... to move us...
to be who God has called us to be in this world.

Blessed be.

Have a great week.