

Worship with McClure United Church

~Revisiting Sunday School Summer Worship Series~

July 12, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning. As an affirming ministry of the United Church of Canada, McClure United publicly affirms and welcomes all people regardless of age, ability, race, economic status, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

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. While it really has been so hard to be away from everyone during this pandemic time.. isn't it great that you can watch worship this morning, sitting on your patio with a nice cup of coffee... or in bed.. or maybe even between swings on the golf course? Wherever you are right now, I hope that you will feel God's love move through the airwaves and right into your heart.

I'd just like to highlight for you again our Friday morning parking lot coffee time at 10am. We've gathered twice now and it has been so amazing to see friends gathered together for a little time to chat. So if you'd like to join us, bring a chair and a cup of coffee or tea and meet us at 10am in the shady part of the parking lot. Don't forget to let me know in advance that you are coming. If you don't have a chair some plastic chairs will be available for you.

And please remember to give me a call if you would like a chat. I'm happy to make some calls to connect with folks but I need to know who might appreciate that. So let me know if you or someone you know of may benefit from a call and a 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)*

Opening Prayer

We gather now God in your loving presence and in community with all those near and far who are watching this now. Open us to your love – inspire us with your wisdom – and challenge live in your way... as your beloved disciples. Amen.

Scripture The Story of Noah and the Ark from The Spark Story Bible

A long time passed since God created the world. People forgot about God except for one man. His name was Noah. He loved and obeyed God.

“I am very sad that people have forgotten about me,” God said to Noah. “I am going to bring rain to flood the earth - lots and lots of rain. Build yourself a huge boat of cypress wood.” Noah did just what God said and made a big, big boat with lots of rooms.

Noah was 600 years old when he entered the boat with his wife, their sons, and their sons’ wives. God brought two of every kind of animal to the boat. Elephants and zebras, lions and tigers, pigs and giraffes, dogs and cats, deer and rhinos, bears and cows, horses and goats, lambs and monkeys all came to buy two. All different kinds of animals, birds, and creepy, crawly things came to the boat. Noah took all of them into the boat. Then the door shut behind them.

Inside the big boat the lions roared, the dogs barked, and the birds chirp. It was stuffy and stinky! It was muggy and hot! On the outside it rained and rained.

It rained big, giant drops and little, baby drops for 40 days and 40 nights. The rains came down and the floodwaters came up. The water splashed on the sides of the big boat and pushed it up and down for 150 days. Finally it dress rested on the top of the tall mountain.

Noah waited and waited until God said to him, “come out of your boat, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.” Noah’s family and all the animals came off the boat.

They put their feet on dry land. They ran, and skipped, and jumped. They twirled and danced in the sunlight. They thanked God for the land and God blessed them. Noah’s family grew and grew. The animals and the birds and the creepy crawly things filled the earth again.

God painted a rainbow of brilliant red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet across the sky and promised, “never again will water flood the earth. Whenever you see the rainbow in the clouds, I will see it too, and I will remember.”

Reflection

Laura:

One of the most well-known bible stories taught in Sunday school is the story of Noah’s Ark. You can find Noah games, felt boards and toys. I think in Sunday school the parts of this story that are often lifted up are (1) how Noah and his family worked together to build an ark – showing the importance of community and family coming together to follow God’s instructions and (2) that Noah and his family needed to have patience and to trust that God would take care of them and (3) celebrating God’s goodness in providing them eventually with dry land and an opportunity to grow and live together in God’s love and.. of course (4) the rainbow... a promise God placed in the sky to remind us of God’s

love. The part about God destroying the rest of creation... besides Noah's family and 2 of every animal... is read as part of the story – but that's not the part that is lifted out in ministry to children.

Last week I had a visit with one of our families and during that visit I asked the kids what they knew about the story of Noah's Ark. The boy... about 10 years old I think... said that he remember that people were doing really bad things and this was making God angry so God found a man who wasn't doing bad things and asked him and his family to build an ark for his family and 2 of every animal. Then God brought a flood that killed everything else and after a long time on the boat they found a piece of dry land. God put a rainbow in the sky as a promise to the people that he would never flood the earth again. I was impressed by his memory of the story and asked him what he thought the main message of the story is...

His response, "that if we do bad things God will kill us"?

So... it doesn't matter that in Sunday school we don't highlight that part of the story – that part of the story is still absorbed by the children who hear it and they are left to try to figure out for themselves... with their very literal minds... what that story is actually about.

My conversation with this family continued and all of the children were old enough that we were able to begin a deeper conversation about this story... about the context in which was written... and to consider what other meanings it might hold for us today. All right so Jordan how do you understand the story today?

Jordan:

It's a good question. This is actually a challenging story precisely for the reasons that you've named, and it brings me back to what we talked about last week about myths... the power of myth and the purpose of myth being to reveal some deep truths that help us to make meaning out of our lives and our experience. I read the Noah story as a myth written by ancient peoples who were trying to make sense of their lived experience. We know from the archaeological record, as well as from the stories of many ancient civilizations, that there was a great flood thousands of years ago that had a devastating impact on the whole known world at that time. We see it show up in the mythology and the folktales of all different cultures. This story is how it shows up in the culture out of which our tradition has grown.

It helps to understand something about people at that time... they understood that everything that happened in the natural world was attributable to God. If the crop was good this year, then that was a sign of God's blessing – God gave me that good crop. If there was a terrible flood – God sent that flood... and why would God do that? The stories help to make sense of what people experienced. So, if I become sick, then God is sending

that sickness to me either to punish me or to test me or to reveal something through me. And if I am healed, then it is God who has healed me.

We see that same thinking today in many different ways... sometimes it is overt... sometimes subtle. If we understand God as the author of all things that happen, then these stories help us make sense of why God does what God does, and what we can do to make sure that we stay on the right side of God.

Personally, I don't (consciously) subscribe to the belief that God is the author of all things that happen. One of the most interesting things that I see in the Noah story is the evolution of thought about God from the beginning of the story to the end. This evolution of human thought and how it makes meaning and answers the question "where is God in the midst of suffering?" is very powerful.

The story begins with a notion of a God who is jealous, vengeful and resentful... who, if people aren't behaving the way God wants, will just say "enough of this – I wash my hands of you all!"... but if there is even one person who makes God happy, that person and his family are going to be rewarded. (There's no mention in the story of why all the rest of Creation gets wiped out as well... that's very problematic!)

By the end of the story, we see a God who moves from vengeance to accompaniment and, really, to resurrection. By the end, God is making a covenant with all of Creation... not just with Noah's family but also with the Earth itself and with every living thing on the earth. God says, "I am not going to do that again." That represents an evolution in human thought about God.

I don't believe God changed... but the human thinking about God changed. The story reveals this evolution of human thinking about God. The scriptures tell us that one or two generations after Noah and his family come off the ark, humanity is up to the same shenanigans again; but never again does God respond with all-consuming wrath that wipes out Creation. There was an evolution in human thinking about God and God's relationship with Creation, which changes our relationship with God and our ability to trust God. That's how I understand the myth of the Noah story.

This story challenges me to continually look again at my understandings of God – what is my notion of God? Do I believe in a God of reward and punishment, who saves only those who please God and is prepared to punish those who upset God; or do I believe in a God of Covenant, whose love isn't dependant on human fidelity? I wrestle with that all the time when hard things are happening in my life, particularly when I'm suffering. This story invites me to re-examine my notion of God – is God the author of my suffering, or is God the one holding me in my suffering, accompanying me, and ultimately helping me to find my footing again?

I think we all wrestle with this. I know that over the course of my life, my thinking about God has followed a similar evolutionary trajectory as the story of Noah. I think our

church's understanding of God has gone through the same evolution as well, and will continue to do so.

That's one meaning that I draw from this story; and maybe that's enough for today.

Laura:

Once again, we are inviting your reflections and comments about this story, or any story from the Bible that you are interested in delving a little deeper into. We are excited to hear from you – your challenges... the meaning that this story might have for you and how that may have changed... the meaning of God in your life... your understanding of God and how that has changed or stayed the same. Feel free to phone or email us, send a text or drop a comment in the comments section underneath this video, so that we can engage together more deeply in these conversations about these important stories from the Bible. Thank you for listening. Have a great week!

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 quiet 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 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 tight and never lets us go.

You are surrounded by the love of God,

The strength of Christ

And the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Today and every day.

Amen.