

## Worship for September 5, 2021

### Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church. It is great to be back with you today. I had a lovely vacation time followed by a week of continuing education that you'll be hearing more about a little later in the service. It was just wonderful to have some time with family and friends... I ate an adequate amount of ice cream and I took up paddleboarding. A number of hours were spent this summer floating and paddling and just enjoying the quiet... and now I'm grateful to be back and ready to start this new church year. I guess technically the church year begins the first Sunday in Advent but fall always feels like the beginning to me.

And it is hard to believe that we are soon moving into fall. I, like most of you I'm sure, was realllly hoping we'd be in a place this month to have our regular "back to church Sunday" in person. Unfortunately with numbers again on the rise... and the children still unable to be immunized... we aren't quite there yet. But I truly believe we are getting close. Disappointing for sure but... we have something new on the way and this is helping me at least to feel the fall excitement. Beginning hopefully on September 26<sup>th</sup> we will be shifting our online worship services to a livestreaming format. What does this mean? It means that every Sunday morning at a designated time – probably 9:15 but we haven't confirmed that yet – Debra and I, along with our musicians, will be sharing worship live in the sanctuary. Those of you at home will be able to watch the service live on YouTube and interact with each other through an online chat feature. The service will also be recorded and posted on YouTube and Facebook so those of you unable to participate live will still be able to share in worship later in the day or week. Livestreaming will continue even after we are able to all worship in person for those who are unable or not ready to be there.

Now with respect to livestreaming... to get us going we need an iPad. It needs to be 5<sup>th</sup> generation or newer and should have a larger size screen. If you happen to have an iPad laying around that you are no longer using.. please be in touch with me as soon as possible. My contact information is on the website and all over our Facebook page as well. My email address for those with a pen handy is [laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org](mailto:laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org). If there are no takers, we will go ahead and purchase one later this week.

I also want to say a quick word about programming for children and youth. This week I sent a survey to families seeking wisdom. We do not know yet when or how these programs will resume but I will be sharing more information soon. If you did not receive an email from me this week and you have children or youth, please give me a call or send me an email so we can connect and I can hear your wisdom as well.

And a couple more announcements...

The outreach committee would like you to save all your cans and bottles in support of Cosmo Industries and bring them on over to the church parking lot on Friday, September 24<sup>th</sup> between 10am and 2pm.

Our email book club is continuing this fall. Basically this group reads a book a month and discusses the book on an email thread. We have read a number of very interesting and quite diverse books. Folks can join in at any time... just let me know you're interested and I'll add you to the list. We are also now taking book suggestions for the upcoming year so send yours in now.

Our weekly online Bible Study will also be resuming on Wednesdays from 1-2pm. I believe these will begin in a couple of weeks so stay tuned for more information and the Zoom link to join. These discussions are open to everyone throughout Saskatchewan... and we even have a couple from outside the province... and are led by various church leaders from across the province. More information will be posted on our website and Facebook page in the next week or so.

and I believe that is all I have for today so let's move now into our time of worship.

### **Opening words/ candle lighting**

We come from places of rest,  
from summer cottages,  
summer holidays, and lazy days.  
We come to worship.

Just as God can be seen in the beauty of creation in the warm breeze,  
gentle rain and the starry night so too God can be found here before a  
computer screen as we worship.

We come to reconnect with the source of our being and to connect with our  
community of faith, as we gather virtually.

We come seeking to know better the God of our lives.

We light this candle to remind us of God's love for us and for the world.  
We light this candle and remember God's promise to be a light for us each  
and every day.

### **Opening prayer**

Creative God, we thank you that you desire to live in relationship with us.  
Bless us as we come to this time of worship, open our hearts and our

minds that we may hear again the story of your love for us and for all that you have made. Bless us, heal us, and transform us so that we might know that we are both loved and cherished and called to be vehicles of your grace in the world. Amen

**Hymn:** Praise to the Lord – Sacred Sounds

**Scripture:** Select verses from Ephesians

### **Reflection**

As I mentioned earlier, I ended my vacation time with a week of continuing education. One of the nice things about Covid... and there actually are a few... is all the access we have to online learning – so many webinars offered by wise and wonderful folks from right across the globe.

One of my favourite webinars was offered by Marcia McFee... a professor, author, preacher and creative worship designer from California. I was drawn to her webinar because it was offering insight and ideas for creating and sharing transformational worship during this pandemic time and in the post-pandemic time which I promise is on its way.

I was also drawn to this webinar because of its name... Metamorphosis Moment – provocative ideas for an uncertain world. Catchy, isn't it?

And along with the catchy title... was this this image. I love butterflies. And with this image I see the butterfly... fresh out of cocoon time... beautiful... free... and ready to fly. That's my hope... my desire... for the church. I want it... and I want it NOW.

Welllllll.... apparently what I missed in this image is that gooey bit just under the butterfly's little legs.

The metamorphosis moment referred to in the title is not the moment of flight... it's the ooey gooey "pupa" stage... the stage when everything in the cocoon goes to mush... the stage when the DNA itself is actually changing...

and this... she said... is the stage we, as a church... as a society... are currently in.

We are in the messy moment.

And we are in this moment together. We don't have to do it alone... in fact we shouldn't do it alone.

The trick to being in this moment, Marcia said, is to get comfortable enough with this gooey pupa dna changing moment to allow things to happen organically – not to manufacture

something so we can have an answer – and many of us are so wanting answers right now when everything is uncertain and changing.

And all of this uncertainty... and change... is the root cause of much of our anxiety... and I have heard so many people – even the ones I would say lean more to the stoic side of things – express concern. And concern is normal... it's a totally appropriate response to things like a pandemic and all of its various implications - but what I am hearing... and feeling... is beyond concern – its definitely treading into the realm of anxiety. In fact, there is even a medical term for what many are experiencing... “Covid-19 Anxiety Syndrome”.

Marcia believes that the antidote to our need for answers... and the anxiety this causes... is to “get curious.” Curiosity, she said, is the most important attribute we can cultivate right now... more important than intelligence, especially when we aren't sure what to do next. A spirit of experimentation is better than answers.

Marcia has been doing research as well on successful entrepreneurial churches – and by this she means churches that are thinking outside of the box. In her research she found that the churches share 3 attributes. (1) they have a learning mindset (2) they are *listening* for the reality of their context, and (3) they are *looking* for the abundance that is already present.

These attributes are all about being curious.  
And curiosity is the antidote to anxiety.

Wonder. Wondering about something feels far more grounded than worrying about something.

What if “I'm worried about what will happen” is replaced with “I wonder what will happen”?  
I wonder if this shift would help us to let go of expectations.

Marcia calls expectations premeditated resentments.

If we have an expectation that we are supposed to be doing something one way and we are somehow prevented from doing that... its easy to build resentment and then often, we look for someone to blame.

We can let go of resentment by letting go of expectation.

So remember that this webinar was intended to be a resource for church leaders as we move forward into and then from this pandemic time... and I found it really helpful for that purpose. But I also found it really helpful on a personal level.

Its not just the church that is in this ooey gooey metamorphosis moment... its not just the church that's in a messy place – many of us are.

We've all had expectations explode in the last 16 or so months... we've all experienced disappointments – grief – frustration – fear – resentment.

It has been a messy time.

Life is always a little messy... but the messiness we are living in right now is quite something else.

And, for me anyway, the messiness around me is definitely connected to my expectations – expectations that have regularly been squashed this year, leaving me feeling disappointed and anxious at times.

That is exhausting!

Everyone seems exhausted.

I know that when I'm exhausted I get cranky – my patience is thin, my temper is short and my ability to make wise choices is quite diminished.

Many right now are also suffering from decision fatigue.

“where should we go?” “what should we do?” “should we wear a mask?” “should I hug? shake a hand?” “should I visit my family?” “should I send my kids to school?” “should we have in person worship?” “should we wait until the numbers go down?”

First of all... we need to give ourselves a break. There's a reason we are feeling exhausted. Second of all... there is no shame in pausing.. regrouping.. saying “I can't do this right now”.

Take a breath and begin to let go of... or at least examine... the expectations that are creating anxiety and resentment. Expectations that are preventing you from being curious.

Marcia emphasized that this is a time for radical experimentation... as a church community and in our own individual lives.

Lets assume that what we know from the “before times”... may no longer apply – or at least not apply right now.

Lets also act as though we know nothing about how things are going to be...

lets question everything...

Lets put ourselves in a stance of curiosity.

Marcia suggested that every congregation should reflect on these three questions. I think these questions are also great points for personal reflection. Before we move forward let's ask ourselves:

what have I learned during this pandemic?

what of those learnings do I want to bring forward with me?  
what was cancelled that I secretly celebrated?

Curiosity is an antidote to anxiety.

As I mentioned, in a few weeks we are going to shift to livestreaming our worship services... this means learning new programs and equipment... it means something different from what we are doing and we have no idea how it will work or if it will work... and this would give me all kinds of anxiety if I was focused on the worry. "I'm so worried it won't work. I'm worried people will hate it". I'm not going there... instead I am allowing myself to just feel excited about what it might be like to have people worshipping together in real time. I wonder what it will be like for you. I wonder what it will be like for those of us leading worship. And if things go south I will wonder what went wrong and what we can do to make it better. Its an exciting puzzle to put together or a mystery to be solved. To worry is exhausting.. but to wonder... well now that feels alright.

Anxiety is exhausting.

I read somewhere recently that the antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest... its wholeheartedness. We are not only exhausted because we are anxious... full of worry... we are exhausted because our spirits are not being spiritually fed by much of what we do.

So this is an opportunity also to get curious about our passions.. our desires... the things that bring us joy. Be your own personal entrepreneur and adopt the attributes of a successful entrepreneurial church – (1) a mindset of learning... discover yourself (2) listen for your reality... why are you exhausted, are you feeling anxious and (3) look for the abundance in your life that is already present. God is good.

So as it turns out this gooey, dna changing pupa stage of metamorphosis is actually not so bad... kind of exciting really. Think about the excitement and joy that comes with the curiosity... with the wonder... of a child.

This is a time of discovery – of uncovering and discovering – of letting go.

And remember what I said at the very beginning here... we are in this moment together. We don't have to – in fact we shouldn't – do it alone.

We are not alone.  
God is with us.

Thanks be to God.

**Hymn:** Teach Me God to Wonder – Caroline May

**Prayers of the People:**

God of Grace, we give you thanks for your goodness, your blessings, and your patience with us. It is no secret that we often look for happiness and fulfilment in the wrong places, but we turn again to you, our God, in this time of prayer seeking your wisdom, guidance, and blessing. By your abundant grace - recreate us.

While we are aware of our own needs remind us that others, in our church, our community, and our world are experiencing great struggles. And so we pray for those in need around us, asking for your blessing, and asking for your help as we seek to do our part to bring comfort, healing, and hope.

We pray for those who are sick, that all may have the medical assistance they need and the gift of healing in body, mind, and spirit. We pray for health care workers who are being asked to do so much more in a climate of entitlement and disrespect. Give all, in health care a strong sense of the gift that they are and the importance of their skills and generous hearts.

We pray for those who are grieving, that all may experience the comforting peace of your presence and the assurance that they do not walk alone. We pray for those who are hungry, homeless, or experiencing the stress and uncertainty of poverty. Give all, with more resources the confidence to share generously.

We pray for those who always find themselves in “last place”, for those at the end of the line, for those who are left out or forgotten. Let all know the joy of being first in your eyes and give us the courage to show them that honour when we find ourselves in places of privilege.

We pray for all survivors of violence and for families left to grieve the loss of those whose lives have been taken. Teach us all to pay attention, to stop sexist behaviour in its tracks and to work for health in relationships.

We pray for our children and those who have care of them. For teachers and childcare workers, health care providers and councillors. For parents and grandparents, aunties and uncles and special friends of our children -

we pray for strength and grace.

We pray for our covenant partners of Holy Spirit Catholic Parish. Bless them with wisdom as they live out their ministry.

We open our hearts to you now, God, in a time of silent prayer offering our personal prayers of joy and concern....

We give you thanks that in the midst of our daily journey, to follow the way of Jesus, to love what is good and do what is right, you promise never to leave us or forsake us. Because you are our companion and guide, we will not be afraid. Thanks be to you, our loving and gracious God.

As followers of Jesus' Way we pray as he taught us: Shirley singing

Our Father and 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**

May we go from this time of worship filled with wonder...

open to life and curious about our spiritual path..

May we be grounded in God's love,

rooted in the teachings of Jesus

and open to the Spirit's guidance in each metamorphosis moment.

Amen.