

Worship with McClure United Church

Easter 1

April 19, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone..

Welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning... we are so grateful that you are joining us in this way. We are grateful that even in the midst of isolation we can find small ways of connecting.. of remembering who we are and to whom we belong. WE are God's people... Christ's disciples... and it is good to be together in this way.

I was very much looking forward to seeing some of you at our Easter parade last weekend and was very disappointed when it became clear we could not follow through on that fun plan. It was a difficult decision to make but, in light of the recommendations from health officials to another congregation with similar plans, we became convinced it was the right decision to make. I know some folks didn't get the message in time and showed up ready for a celebration.. we apologize for that but hope you still managed to rejoice and celebrate the risen Christ.

A couple of announcements I wanted to share with you this morning:

First.. our Friday morning Virtual Coffee time continues. I have been really enjoying that time of connection with some of you. If you have not yet connected and would like to but are unsure of how to make that happen, please let me know. My contact info will be in the comments and I welcome hearing from you. As always the ministry team are very open to your questions, concerns and feedback as we continue to find ways of living in this new reality in the best possible way. Also, if you or someone you know would benefit from a phone call from one of us, please let us know.

Children, youth and young adults continue to meet weekly through Zoom and we also want to provide opportunities for older adults to connect.. so help us know how to best make that happen.

We are continuing as well with our live Facebook broadcasts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 11am.. tune in at those times to hear brief words of reflection , inspiration and any information or news updates that may be available.

I also wanted to highlight a 4 week online study group that I am hoping to get off the ground in the next week or so. This is a group for any adults who are seeking confirmation or membership at McClure and it's also open to anyone who is desiring to have open, honest and hopefully inspiring faith-based conversation with others. If you are interested in joining the

group, please let me know. Once we have enough interest, we will decide together on a date/time that will work for everyone.

I'm sure you already are guessing but I just want to confirm that our Annual Meeting which was originally scheduled for today has been postponed. We will keep you posted once we know when that has been rescheduled.

I believe that is all I have for announcements today.

Let us worship God...

Invitation to Worship

Together let us move into a time of worship.

Make yourself comfortable and take a nice deep breath.

I am going to light a candle and I invite you to do the same if you like.

Prayer

Holy One, we bring our undivided selves to worship this day.

We bring our certainty and our doubts.

We bring out despair and our hope.

We bring our fear and our confidence.

We bring our total selves into this time that we may worship you as we seek healing and refreshment.

As we worship, may your Spirit bless and renew us through the promise of resurrection.

Amen.

Theme Conversation

Laura read a story book called "I Am Love: A Book of Compassion" by Susan Verde and invited children to share videos/images of themselves answering one of these questions: "I see love..." "I see hope..." "I feel safe..." Everyone is invited to complete these statements and share them with Laura.

Reflection

We are one week past Easter Sunday. Easter was different this year. The Pope celebrated Easter mass in an empty Cathedral. McClure's plan to gather cars in our parking lot and drive around the neighbourhood, honking out the good news of resurrection, was cancelled when we realized it would qualify as a "mass gathering". In our home we had to rethink Easter as well. We still decorated the eggs and bought the ham, but we had to gather with family over

FaceTime and Zoom. The two-dimensional relationship of computer screens couldn't convey the smells or the hugs, yet we were fortunate compared with so many people of the world.

Living in these strange times requires much adaptation and in our house the use of computers and tablets has grown exponentially. Despite their utility, I mostly dislike relying on them so much. Yet every now and again something comes across the internet that invites deeper reflection. One such piece was written by Parker Palmer the Quaker activist and author. He referred to a poem entitled "The Threat of Resurrection." Now that was a new concept for me. It required a new mental synapse. It invited a new way of understanding the Bible **and** the world.

I am familiar with the phrase, "the promise of resurrection" but not the **threat of resurrection**. Christians have been big on the 'promise of resurrection.' The earliest followers of Jesus, living with a worldview much different than ours, translated an empty tomb and mystical encounters into the promise that Jesus would return with an army of angels and establish God's reign on earth. When that didn't happen generations of theologians massaged the idea of resurrection into a reward for the faithful after death. They took literally Jesus assurance that there would be place for them 'in the Father's mansion'. In my era, liberal theologians created the term 'realized eschatology' to explain their belief that Jesus' message of love and justice is resurrected every time **we** love our neighbour or make our society more just. And so, the promise of resurrection evolved from the promise of Jesus' return; to the promise of life after death; to the promise that the common-wealth of God is being realized in our midst. Promises of resurrection are familiar – not threats!

They Have Threatened us with Resurrection is a poem written by a Guatemalan poet name Julia Esquivel about four decades ago. In the 1970's and 80's Guatemala was beset by a brutal civil war. The military government used special death squads to kill or make disappear over 200,000 of its own people. Esquivel recognized that it was the relentless resurrection of hope amongst ordinary people that continued to threaten the military junta and that regardless of how hard the corrupt government tried to suppress the people hope kept resurrecting. Interestingly Esquivel noted another component of threat in resurrection. She suggested that the continuous resurrection of hope threatened her by calling her to also take a stand against oppression. In many ways it would be easier to keep quiet and let someone else do the protesting, but the persistence of resurrection hope demanded that she too accept the threat and stand up against evil.

With this perspective we see the threat of resurrection prominent in the traditional Easter story. It was the threat of a new spirituality that caused the Jewish religious leaders to call for Jesus crucifixion. It was the threat of a new social order that caused the Roman occupation forces to order Jesus' execution. And they, like the Guatemalan military, could not extinguish this threat no matter how hard they tried. Resurrection continued to threaten despite Jesus death on the cross. Like the poet Esquivel, we discover that the disciples were also threatened by Jesus' resurrection. In the earliest records we discover them denying him, doubting him and cowering away, afraid of their own arrest and persecution. Whatever his resurrection appearances were about they overpowered the disciples fear with hope. As we know from scripture and history, countless disciples over the centuries stepped out despite the threat to continue to proclaim Jesus vision of love and justice.

Parker Palmer, the Quaker activist, who introduced me to this poem explained how "the threat of resurrection" impacted him. He writes: "When I came across this poem I was experiencing the death-in-life called depression. The poem helped me understand a hard but healing truth. Figurative forms of death sometimes feel comforting; while resurrection - the hope of new life – can feel threatening."

He realized from his place of depression that to seize new life he would have to shed the comfort of his pajamas, the familiarity of his emptiness; and the belief he had nothing to offer. Resurrection threatened him with stepping out of depression and back into a life of relationship, productivity and hope.

Are we, the contemporary friends of Jesus, threatened by resurrection in this time of Covid-19. It is not because of Roman mercenaries or Guatemalan death squads, yet the risk to life is apparent. Like the disciples and the poet Esquivel we cannot fully see the life that is to be resurrected on the other side of Covid-19, but there are hints of what is possible.

During these long weeks of anxiety we have realized the absolute importance of relationship; we have witnessed acts of human sacrifice as fellow citizens have risked infection on our behalf; and we have seen selfless expressions of compassion. Even from this present Golgotha we have felt the earth breathe and the seas replenish and our deepest yearnings be expressed in something as simple as a walk in the park. Governments around the world have shut down factories and opened up food banks and – radically - created money to give to their citizens. The most visionary of these governments have re-imagined the concept of a guaranteed annual income.

Resurrection from Covid-19 threatens us with new life, with a new way of being in the world, with a new way of being together. Early in our days of isolation I was chatting on the phone with my son. While he and his wife continued to earn their salary, he wondered aloud to me whether they should continue to pay some money towards their daycare home and their house cleaner – people whose livelihoods were much more significantly affected than their own. ‘We’ve already sent a donation to the food bank,’ he explained as he pondered what else to do. While I’ve always known about my son’s good heart, his words on this day caused me to momentarily glimpse a world where human need outdistanced human greed; where the resurrection vision of “from each according to their ability; to each according to their need” was being revisited.

As we begin to enter the Holy Saturday of our current experience, the in-between time, we are threatened by the possibilities of resurrection out of which a new world could be created. A resurrection marked by shared resources and the recognition of being one human community. It seems that we are threatened by a choice to embrace this new thing, this fragile embryotic way of being, where the most precious possession is the hug of a grandchild; where we spend less and love more; where we resist rushing back into an economy fueled by shrinking ozone and endless plastics. We are threatened by a resurrection of industry that retools quickly – this time not for ventilators - but for solar generators and wind powered turbines.

When historians look back on this time and see the horrible moment when the whole world was stopped by a microscopic organism will they also see an Easter morning revival that changed the world as absolutely as the empty tomb did 2000 years ago? Or, will they report that resurrection was too threatening; that the past was too tempting; that we simply doubted the reports of resurrection and turned away.

Christians have been living into the life-changing threat of resurrection since Mary first kneeled at the tomb and dared to believe. Might we who follow in her footsteps be the vanguard of those who dare to believe that a new world is possible? Hallelujah, Christ is risen!! Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Ever present God, in our scripture lesson today – we are told that Jesus came to those who were discouraged, confused and lost in grief. We are told Christ came speaking words of peace and understanding.

In this story we find strength for the living of our days.

In this story we are encouraged to live with hope and trust.

We are not alone - in you there is courage to face our fears and struggles, patience to endure moments when the way ahead is not clear, and resilience in the face of new realities. We give thanks that we are not alone.

God we are living in a new time. And we would pray for the many places of brokenness in our world. We think especially of those suffering in this COVID-19 outbreak, those with the disease, those who have lost loved ones, those who live in fear of contracting the virus, those working hard to respond to the pandemic, and those who have lost work or hope. In a moment of quiet, and in these uncertain times we name the worries of our hearts, and all those places in us in need of your healing. (Silence for 10-15 seconds)

We are so in need of your presence— we need to hear you speaking words of peace and understanding in our time. We ask that the whole earth will experience your gift of peace, new life and hope.

God, one of the places we find new life and hope is when we gather to worship but this is not possible. Today we pray for our church family of McClure United – make strong the threads that bind us together in community. We are deeply connected to so many and so we would pray also for all other United Churches, for our covenant partners Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Parish and for all Communities of faith. We hold too our Jewish neighbours and our Muslim friends in care as they celebrate important holidays and feel the sting of not being able to gather together - may we all know peace in these challenging times. In these days of unexpected challenge, when worship and fellowship have been disrupted, strengthen our trust in the power of love and our concern for each other.

We are grateful that we can place all our worries and our concerns into your hands, O God, knowing that you will hear us and respond.

And so we would pray for ourselves, our family and friends. (Silence for 10-15 seconds)

Hear us now as we offer the words our Risen Lord taught us to say...

Our Father 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

And we continue our journey through this Easter season...

May we open our whole selves to the hope that is alive all around us...

Hope that comes from the power of God's love
A love that is stronger than despair
Stronger than darkness
Stronger even than death.
A love that brings light.. even if just a glimmer...
Into our world...
Into our lives.
So go into this week holding onto that hope
And allowing it to hold on to us –
Allowing God to hold us
Allowing Jesus to guide us
And allowing the holy spirit to inspire us
Amen