

a home for all (joy)

Welcome & Announcements *(Debra)*

A warm welcome to everyone who is gathered here in the sanctuary this morning and a warm welcome as well to those of you joining via live stream and those who will join later today or later in the week. Our community of faith continues to evolve and expand, and we are so glad that there is room for all.

We had a few hiccups with the livestream last week, but we hope we have them fixed but as always we are open to hear your feedback (as long as it's positive) some constructive criticism is also welcome.

There are announcements – must admit I miss the days when different folks would share the announcement around an event in ministry that they were working on but instead you are going to get those announcements only in my voice but remember there are a whole lot of people involved in all of this great work.

Let's begin with some gratitude:

Thank you, Carol Claypool and members of the Outreach committee, as well as the many folks who contributed to the **Socks for the Homeless** ministry. 105 pair of socks were created, and I think the Youth group added to that number. Good work everyone. Thank you to those of you who are now organizing and contributing to the Egadz bags. **Egadz** is an agency that supports at risk youth and our contributions lend a hand to these young folk. You can make donations all through the week and next Sunday, but things will be gathered and packed up next Sunday afternoon. You can make a cash donation to this ministry through the church as well.

Thanks to those who organized and contributed to the **bake sale** and those who made a purchase. I am available to help you eat those wonderful Christmas goodies at any time just call the office and we can arrange something. I do believe there are leftovers for sale after worship this morning.

Thanks to everyone who is contributing to the production of our **live streaming** and the recording of worship. We need a few more tech types to help out - we are looking forward to hearing from some new volunteers.

Thank you to everyone who brought a toy in support of the **Secret Santa** program. Your unwrapped gifts under the tree are fantastic and if you forgot but would still like to make a donation of a toy. You could pop by the church first thing Monday morning and make your donation. Things will be packed up at noon.

A huge thank you to Irene, in the office - our New Office Administrator as she has sold a ton of **Honey** for the Outreach committee - proceeds going to the Global Gathering group in Saskatoon who helps refugees get settled. Irene is also selling United Church **Calendars** for 10 dollars each and taking names of those who would like to take a turn driving the **van** on Sunday mornings – we need some new folks to help out.

Irene and the amazing team of office volunteers are also taking your phone calls each week so you can **register for Sunday morning** worship or to register for the two **Christmas Eve** worship services one at 7:00 and one at 8:30pm. Registration for the Christmas eve services needs to be done by next Sunday December 19th.

Now for two announcements:

Sunday December 26 worship will be a communion service via zoom at 10am. No in person worship that day.

January 2nd we are back to two "in person" worship services.

Please check out this week's email or go to the website for all the gratitude items and announcements.

Let us continue our Journey through Advent together – let us worship.

As we sing together our opening song. Please remain seated as we sing together...

Sung Opening: Jesus Came Bringing Us Hope (MV33)

Call to Worship (*Laura*)

A voice calls out in the wilderness.

It sings of a home for all.

It speaks of justice and peace.

We could choose to ignore it.

We could drown out that song. We could choose not to listen.

Instead, we come into this space.

We let the world grow quiet. We listen.

A voice calls out in the wilderness. Do you hear it?

We hear it. In listening, we worship.

Let us draw near to God.

Candle Lighting Liturgy (*Laura*)

A: Joy is seeing people you love after months apart.

B: Joy is hearing, "Come on over, it has been too long!"

A: Joy is the stretches and giggles of a newborn child.

B: Joy is making it home when the journey is long.

A: Joy is your dog sliding to meet you at the door.

B: Joy is the energy of a new season.

A: Joy is feeling found when you thought you were lost.

B: So today we light the candle of joy, because the welcome God has for us is nothing short of joyful.

A: Rest in that good news. Let it wash over you.

B: Family of faith, we are close to home. Amen.

Advent Song: Hope is a Star (VU6)

Call to Confession *(Laura)*

It takes courage to tell the truth. John the Baptist knew it. His job as a prophet certainly could not have been easy. And you and I know it.

Our job as people of faith—to create a home for all—has never been easy.

In our prayer of confession, may we channel some of John the Baptist's courage to tell the truth about ourselves and our world. We do not do this to shame ourselves or guilt ourselves for being imperfect. We speak the truth out loud because we know that we cannot grow and change without first being honest.

So let us be brave. Let us be bold. Let us be truth-tellers as we confess together now to a God who couldn't love us any more than God already does. Let us pray. . .

Prayer of Confession *(Laura)*

Expansive God, we know that the church is your house, and your house has room for everyone. Yet, too often, instead of setting the table for our neighbors, we block the door.

Instead of welcoming all, we judge others by our own standards. Instead of sharing our second coat, we hide it in the attic, holding on to fear instead of letting go with love. Remind us that your home is a home for *all*, that truth requires hard work, that truth requires uncomfortable justice. Help us to be bold enough to see it and brave enough to live it. With hope we pray, amen.

Words of Forgiveness *(Laura)*

Family of faith, God sent prophets like John the Baptist to us because this work is not easy. Helping create a world where all might have a home, and all might be loved, and all might know peace, is an audacious goal. Fortunately for us, when we mess up—when we lose our way or forget our call—we are met with grace. God could not love us any more or any less than God already does.

So, rest in this good news:

We are at home with God—forgiven, claimed, and loved. The door is always open for us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn: On Jordan's Bank (VU20 vs 1,3)

Prayer for Illumination *(Debra)*

God, whose love is like the sun warming me from the inside, if you are my home, then your word is the streetlight guiding me there. So, I want you to know—

I am trying to walk in your way, we are trying to walk in your way, and we are looking for a light.

Granted we've lost our way a time or two. And our bags are heavy—we're carrying an array of grief and fear. But we're on our way.

We're looking for your light. We're listening for your word. When you see us coming, when you feel our hearts move, we hope you'll run toward us and catch us.

Leave the light on.

We are on our way home. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Scripture: Luke 3:1-18²

Luke 3.2-18

²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” ¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Reflection (*Debra*)

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

There is an old story about two women, unhappy with their lives who travel many miles to seek out a wise one to help them with their quest for a joy filled life.

One of the women regarded herself as a terrible person, for in her youth she had deceived someone she cared about. She, throughout her life could not let go of the horrible thing she had done.

The second woman, on the other hand, had lived her entire life following the rules. She had not consciously made any large mistakes, in fact she felt quite pleased with herself and was able quite effectively to let go of her little infractions along her way.

The wise one asked both women about their life. The first wept as she confessed her great mistake, she felt that her mistake had been so great that she had no right to expect happiness little own joy. The second woman, confessed, she had not made any particularly large mistakes but perhaps had stumbled a few times along the road.

The wise one said to the first woman go, child of God, and look for the heaviest boulder you can find, one that you can barely carry and bring it to me.

And to the second woman the wise one said, you could not recall any serious mistake and so go and bring me as many stones as you can carry but they must all be small ones.

The women went off to do as the wise one had told them. The first brought a huge boulder the second brought a whole sack full of small pebbles

The wise one examined the stones and said, now I ask you to follow these instructions take the stones back and replace each one of them exactly where you picked it up and when you have put them all back, where you found them, come back to me yet again.

The women went off again to carry out the wise ones instructions. The first woman very easily found the place where she had taken the huge boulder and she placed it where she had found it but the second had no idea where she had picked up all her little pebbles. She had to return to the wise one without having carried out the instructions.

You see, said the wise one, that's how it is with our mistakes it is easy to take the big heavy boulder back to its place because you know exactly where you first found it but it is impossible to remember where all those little pebbles came from.

To the first woman the wise one said, you are very conscious of your mistake, you carry it in your heart and you have learned from it, from it you have learned humility and in this way you have been freed of the boulder of your wrongdoing. Leave the boulder here so you can be free to find your joy. To the second woman, who had come back still carrying her sack of little pebbles you have made so many little mistakes that you have lost track of the impact of those hurts. You have grown accustomed to a life of little sins; you have lost the ability to feel how your actions impact others. You have become entangled in justifying a less than generous life – your joy will be more difficult to find. //

Some of us care the big bolder of regret around with us, we know what we did, when we did it, and who we hurt. Sometimes putting the boulder down takes time - a year, or two - maybe ten – sometimes we never really escape the heaviness. Sometimes it helps us see the boulder that others carry and we respond with grace.

Most of us carry with us pockets full of pebbles. We work around them, sometimes forgetting they are even there. We have accumulated them so slowly that

we do not notice the weight of them. We are okay with our less than stellar response to God's call to faithfulness, grace and compassion.

Which woman are you most like?//

I don't know who was in the crowd that day on the banks of the river - the day John was preaching - but my hunch is there were a few folks carrying boulders and many more with pockets full of pebbles. All were searching. And their search led them to find the Prophet John.

His first words to the crowd. "You brood of vipers."

A greeting that they were perhaps not expecting.

John levels his gaze on the gathered crowd. *"You brood of vipers... _the wrath is coming... _the ax is sharpened and waiting... _the winnowing fork is at hand, ready for its grim work... _the unquenchable fire awaits..."*

Disturbing, yes, but John isn't trying to scare the people with turn-or-burn theology; he's getting to the heart of his important message, something substantial and constructive, even life-giving: He is telling them it is time to come clean and get real.

The call to come clean and get real is what the people needed to hear that day and perhaps it is the news we need to hear in our day as well. Maybe we need to be challenged to move out of our mediocrity, to move out of being okay with pockets filled with pebbles and set things right.

John's message back then and now is a call for the faithful to immerse themselves in a baptism of repentance, of reorienting their lives to God's way.

John tells them, **tells us**, do more than look good: walk the talk - bear the fruits of right living. Out there in the wilderness, John gets pretty basic about fruitful living. Share with those who don't have; be honest in your financial dealings; don't take unfair advantage of your power. This is what baptismal living, living the way of Jesus looks like. It doesn't ask for the dramatic, the heroic, or the impossible; it is within our grasp, every single day.///

As we have all muddled our way through this pandemic the McClure Outreach committee has been, for us, our John the Baptist. They have continued to challenge us each month. They have not been so rude as to call us a brood of vipers but they have challenged all of us to move away from our hunker- down and shut down survival mentality to the Way of God's people. Not called to build walls around the table but rather called to extend the table.

This past month the Outreach committee invited us to fill socks for the homeless and we filled 105 pairs with more to come from the youth group. Currently we are being challenged to help support youth at risk who are connected with Egadz. In September we were called out to support the folks who use the Cosmo industry organization and in late October to raise funds for the Global Gathering agency that helps settle refugees.

What you didn't see during the year is the plethora of donations the Outreach committee manages on your behalf through our operating budget. Your donations to the church has gone further than these walls. The Outreach committee has

researched dozens of helping organizations in our community and has donated on your behalf to,

Nashi an organization that works to prevent human trafficking,

The Canadian food Grains Bank which feeds the poor,

Operation Eyesight that provides medical care for the poor and

Change for Children that works to support children and youth who live in extreme poverty around the world.

Closer to home the Outreach committee - because of your generosity has contributed to the work of :

Out Saskatoon, Crocus Coop, the Lighthouse, Youth on the Rise, the Centre for Ecumenism, The Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Integrated Community Ministries the Saskatoon Sexual Assault Centre, and the Northern Saskatchewan Hospital Chaplaincy whose staff has visited our McClure people in Hospital when your ministry staff was not allowed or able to be in the three saskatoon hospitals.

John's message echoes through the ages. Share with those who don't have; be honest in your financial dealing; don't take unfair advantage of your power. Get real – we have a problem and being a follower of the Way means we must not look away. ///

In our city the - Saskatoon Tribal council has been our John the Baptist recently. The Saskatoon Tribal council has taken on the important work of providing necessary services to support those who are without a home in our city. The Tribal council has been looking for a shelter space so that they can provide food and other services for those in need. The City of Saskatoon has been talking about finding the best location for this shelter and together they have found a building that will contain the important work of caring for the very vulnerable.

Some in the core are uncomfortable with the shelter being in their area of the city. John's message echoes through the ages. Share with those who don't have; be honest in your financial dealing; don't take unfair advantage of your power. Get real – we have a problem and being a follower of the Way means we must not look away.

It would be so much easier to just continue to live, heads down with our pockets filled with pebbles but if we are to know the joy we seek. We have to get real with the God power.

Perhaps this Christmas we are called to be John the Baptist. Perhaps we must let our collective voice cry out in the wilderness—with good news. Share with those who don't have; be honest in your financial dealing; don't take unfair advantage of your power. Get real – we have a problem we must not look away.

And perhaps, as the message is heard, more and more people will join in building the world God dreams of, making it truly a home for all. This was, and is, a message of joy, especially for those who have lost hope, who have been hurt by the inequities and injustices perpetrated by the powers that be. Let us be the ones Crying in the Wilderness for the sake of all those who are made silent and in the name of the one we follow - who is love incarnate. Amen.

Call to Offering (*Laura at 9:15, Debra at 11*)

The people asked John, "What should we do?"

I've asked myself that a million times in my life.

How do I make a difference?

Can I really do anything that could help this hurting world?

Is it already too late? Is it already too big?

It can feel overwhelming at times, but John says, "If you have two coats, give one away.

"It's all that easy, and it's all that hard.

So friends, may we continue to offer our gifts, knowing that they help build a world where all have a home—where all are welcomed, fed, loved, and known.

What should we do? We should give what we have. It's all that easy and all that hard.

Your financial gifts can be made through PAR or online through our website, by e-transfer or by leaving your donation in the offering plates at the sanctuary entrance.

We continue to symbolize the bringing forward of our offerings – by building this little home –a crèche like structure – the first wall is hope, the second is peace and today we add the wall of joy. May this be a home for all.

Offering Hymn: I am a Child of God (MV157, vs 1,5)

Prayer of Dedication (*Laura at 9:15, Debra at 11*)

God who welcomes us home, who creates space, who leaves a chair with our name on it—

we have two coats and we are giving one away. That's what this offering is.

It's our second coat.

It's our hearts on our sleeves.

It's our audacious hope that there can indeed be a better world than this one.

So take these gifts and use them to move us closer to that promised day.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

Prayer of the People (*Laura at 9:15, Debra at 11*)

God of open doors and porch lights, of welcome mats and candles in the window—we cannot thank you enough for your open-door policy. You are forever welcoming us home. In a world where those without homes experience so many closed doors, you offer something radically different.

You welcome all of us, just as we are.

You paint a picture of a world that could be.

You remind us that there is enough love to go around, and that neighbor helping neighbor is who we are called to be.

Thank you for the voice in the wilderness that calls to us. Thank you for the radical welcome and the unchanging love.

Today, God, we give extra gratitude for the people and places that are home to us, but we also pray for all those without a home.

We pray for immigrants and refugees navigating the waters of trauma, change, and loss.

We pray for those who experience homelessness and for those scraping together every coin to pay last month's rent.

We pray for those who do not feel at home in their body— assigned a gender or an identity that does not fit their spirit.

We pray for those who do not feel at home in your church—wounded by strict rules or judgmental accusations.

We pray for those who long to build a home with another, but instead find themselves eating another meal alone.

God, there are so many who need a home, so help us be builders of that new day.

Give us the courage of John, who saw a way forward so clearly.

Turn our words into action and our conviction into change.

Gracious God, you are a God of open doors and welcome home celebrations.

Teach us to be the same.

And now we offer to you our personal prayers, knowing that you hear – we pray in silence....

Thank you God for hearing our prayers and for offering us a home in your love.

And we end this time of prayer by sharing together the words that Jesus taught his friends and followers: **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

Hymn: Joy is Now in Every Place (VU45 vs 1.2)

Benediction (*Debra*)

Now may the blessings of the Bethlehem baby wrap you in love.

May you feel the guidance of the Holy Spirit

And may you be light bearers and witnesses to the strong love of God.

Amen

Sung Blessing: I am Walking the Path of Hope (MV 221)