

## **Sunday, October 24 - World Food Sunday**

### **Welcome/Announcements**

Good morning and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church. We are so glad you have chosen to spend this time with us. I can't see you... but I know you're there and your presence is very much appreciated.

Today we want to take some time to honour World Food Day. World Food Day was created by The Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations in 1945 to promote awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger and to help strengthen the link between agriculture and food security. Each year we are provided with worship resources to help share this message and some of what you'll hear today comes directly from those resources.

But before we move into worship, we have a few announcements to share.

McClure really is a busy community... lots going on and I hope some of these opportunities will be of interest to you.

Just before I tell you about some of those opportunities... I want to invite you to join us today at 11am... via livestream...to participate in the baptism of two babies. This will be our first attempt at livestreaming a real time worship service... so... fingers crossed. The link for that baptism was included in your email for today and you can also just go directly to the McClure United Church YouTube Channel and you should find it there as well. I have invited a few one of our families and a couple of folks from McClure Place to join us in representing all of you... but you can also represent yourself online and help us to welcome these babies into our faith family. The service will also be recorded and available for viewing at a later time. So if you are looking for a little joy and a sign of hope in our world today... tune in to this.

And then a little later today...at 1pm, please join me and Jordan Cantwell from St. Martin's United Church on zoom to discuss the 40 Days of Engagement on Anti-Racism reflections for this week. The Zoom link can be found in the email and on Facebook.

And while you're there looking for that link, take note of the link for our Bible Study on Wednesday at 1pm and our community check on Friday at 10am. I know its sometimes hard to join a new group or to find the motivation to sign on for one more thing to do... especially one more online thing... but I can tell you that both of these groups have been highlights for me during this time of pandemic caution. Sure, online isn't the same as face-to-face... but it is connection, and I am getting to meet and chat with some pretty awesome folks. So, check it out... I bet you'll be glad you did.

Other important things to note...

As Debra mentioned last week our 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be celebrated on October 31<sup>st</sup>. We would very much like it if you would take the time to send in a "Happy Anniversary" video greeting so we can share them on that special day. If you are comfortable to make your own video... do it and just email it to the church office or to me directly... and you will need to do that by next Sunday... that's the 24<sup>th</sup>. Or, if you aren't so comfortable making your own video, you can just pop on by the church on October 21<sup>st</sup> between 10am and noon or October 22<sup>nd</sup> between 1 and 2pm and we will do it for you.

And don't forget about the pie sale fundraiser.

You can help us out in one of two ways...

You can bake (or purchase) a pie and drop it off at the church between noon and 3pm on October 28<sup>th</sup>...

Or you can order a pie before next Sunday and pick it up on the 28<sup>th</sup> between 4 and 6:30pm. You place your orders by contacting Marlene Kells and her contact info is in today's email.

And if pies aren't your thing... or you'd like to top your pie off with a little bit of honey... then you'll want to pay attention to our "Bee the Church" honey fundraiser. We are selling 325-gram jars of locally produced Lucky Beez Honey for \$5. \$2.50 from each jar sold will go to the Global Gathering Place... an amazing organization that supports immigrants and refugee people.

That's it for things happening but I also want to draw your attention to the news about an exciting renewal project we are engaging in. It's called Rural Connect... and I won't take up too much time now talking about it but I just really encourage you to watch the video that has been created explaining this initiative bringing together urban and rural communities of faith. That video can be found in today's email, on our website, YouTube channel and on our Facebook page. If you have any questions about what you watch, feel free to contact Board Chair Terry Clarke, Chair-Elect Michael Gorniak, Debra or myself. We're always happy to chat.

And... that's it.

It is now time for us to move more fully into worship.

### **Candle Lighting**

Friends, in John's gospel Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to complete God's work."

Food is the source of our energy.

Jesus was saying that the will of God energizes him to live out his mission. As we worship we turn to God to replenish our sense of call and purpose.

We light this candle to be reminded that in our turning God is there, light to our path and nourishment for the journey.

*Light candle*

**Sung Call to Worship:** *Let us Build a House by Elin Sletmoen*

### **Opening Prayer**

Let us pray: God, the stories of our faith remind us that you are manna from heaven and water from rock. You are the miracle of the loaves and fish. You are our Bread of Life. In this time of worship, fill us up with your Holy Word and energize us with your songs.

Make us thankful, aware, and inspired:

*thankful* for the Earth that feeds us,

*aware* that food is a sacred gift,

and *inspired* to create a world where no one is hungry.

Amen.

**Hymn: Spirit Open My Heart** Elin Sletmoen

**Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:1-9** *read by Joanne Hamlin*

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

This is testimony from our ancestors in faith.

**Reflection**

Do you know what it's like to put every ounce of ability and energy into something... and have it flop miserably?

Do you know what it's like to do your best and find that your best just isn't good enough?

Do you know what it's like to wait for something good in your life to grow and then wait...and wait...and wait?

That day when Jesus was sitting in the boat in the middle of the sea, he was speaking to a worn-out crowd that felt just like that.

His followers had been working hard—really hard—to share the good news, but the message wasn't sinking in. Here they were, going from town to town, sharing Jesus' life-saving message that justice is attainable... that there are key values like kindness and generosity that... if lived out collectively... could save the world.

Yet despite their important message, everywhere they went, they brushed up against people who were too preoccupied, too bored, too self-centred, or too stressed to listen.

Each time a door closed in their face... their discouragement ramped up. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

Even though Jesus was sitting in the middle of the sea, it's like he could see into the very hearts of those gathered that day. And he told them stories to help them understand themselves and make sense of their lives.

One of them was the parable of the sower:

Some seeds will fall on the path and the birds will eat them. Some will fall on rock and the sun will scorch them. Some will fall on thorns and be choked out. But some will fall on good soil and bear an unbelievable crop.

The Parable of the Sower was a pep talk of sorts. It wasn't the kind you would hear in a locker room, though. It wasn't about how great Jesus' followers were or how they would succeed at every turn.

It was realistic...

He was saying, "Some of the work you do is going to feel like a waste of time. Some of it will even be sabotaged. But... keep going. Because there will be success. Trust me. Live your mission."

This, friends, is a millennia-old message that we still need to hear. Especially in honouring World Food Day.

690,000,000 people will go to bed hungry tonight.

Think about that.

690,000,000 people aren't asking, "What will we eat for dinner?"

690,000,000 people are asking, "Will we eat dinner?"

And they ask that question night after night.

Hunger is so pervasive you'd think that the whole earth was made of dust. That no crops could grow anywhere.

But we know there's nothing wrong with Mother Earth; the problem lies in the choices we make.

Poverty, land grabbing, climate change, the commodification of food and water, conflict and political instability...

The causes of hunger are so complex, so intertwined, so systemic, it's natural to wonder how you and I are really ever going to make a difference.

It's like we are standing on that shore right along with Jesus' disciples and there are problems as big as the sea itself right in front of us.

And even Jesus is sitting there admitting that addressing hunger isn't easy. He doesn't sugar coat the outcome of our work...

He said some seeds just aren't going to land where we need them to or create the results we want.

But, he also said, some seeds will fall on good soil and the result will be phenomenal. So, live your mission.

Jesus got in the boat that day and rowed into the sea so he could look at the whole crowd at once... so his voice would carry across the water to each and every one of them... so they would take his parable to heart and hear him say: Live your mission.

In 1966, a young activist by the name of Jim Forrest, exasperated by the ineffectiveness of the Catholic Peace Fellowship's efforts against the horrors of the Vietnam War, wrote to his mentor, Thomas Merton.

He expressed frustration that it seemed like no one was listening.

"And even if they are," he wrote, "What can we do? What can be done? Who can we become that we are not? What can we undertake that we haven't?"

In his reply, Thomas Merton said:

"Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the righteousness, the truth of the work itself. And there too a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything."

Bill Wylie-Kellerman, an American activist, theologian and writer, reflecting on Merton's words, recalls this story:

In 1971, the New York Times released the Pentagon Papers, a massive store of documents telling the truth about the US war in Vietnam, exposing the Big Lie that was being told by the administration...This was the result of an act of conscience on the part of Daniel Ellsberg, an employee inside the company contracted by the CIA to do military and social analysis. How did he come to the decision to risk his career and his reputation by releasing those papers? The answer to that question takes us back to WWII.

Franz Jaeggerstatter was an Austrian peasant during the German Anschluss who was drafted into Hitler's army. Because of his Catholic faith, he refused to join. His family, his neighbors, the leaders of his little town, even his priest urged him to cooperate, saying his act of defiance would make no difference in the war and no one would ever even hear about it. But, as recounted in a series of letters, he couldn't violate his understanding of the gospel and was beheaded on August 9, 1947.

Years later, Gordon Zahn was doing research about Catholic resistance to Hitler and stumbled upon these letters. He ended up publishing them and an account of Jaeggerstatter's life in his book, *In Solitary Witness*.

That book would fall into Daniel Ellsberg's hands just at the point he was struggling with the decision to release the Pentagon Papers. It was one of the nudges of the Spirit which confirmed him in the act.

So... an otherwise nameless peasant in the mountains of Austria is executed in obscurity and his witness ends up in a spiritual chain of events that helps end the US war in SE Asia decades later.

Let me share another story with you – this one connected to the work of United Church Mission and Service.

When Jesse was 12 years old, he had a traumatic brain injury. His life instantly changed because his brain didn't function the way it once did. By the time he was 17, Jesse had been hospitalized 32 times. Through the ups and downs, his mother took care of him. She was his rock. And then, sadly, three years ago she died of cancer. Without his mother, Jesse's life spiralled out of control. Two years ago, he survived the painfully cold winter in Newfoundland by sleeping in a storage unit. Then he went to Stella's Circle, a Mission & Service partner, where he was fed, received help to find a home, and is now

completing a greenhouse technician college program. Today, Jesse is leading a new social enterprise that grows food for sale.

This, friends, is what happens when seeds of faithfulness and generosity fall on good soil.

This is what happens when we live our mission.

Living God's mission is like planting seeds—each seed contains the basic material needed to pull off a miracle.

And like Jesus says, when they hit good dirt, miracles grow.

Thank you for taking Jesus' stories into your heart and letting them transform your lives.

Thank you for standing on the shoreline like disciples have for millennia listening to the Parable of the Sower.

Now, let's get to work planting seeds.

Let's live *our* mission. Amen.

### **Hymn: My Soul Cries Out Sacred Sounds**

#### **Prayers of the People**

Creating and creative God - I watched the wind scattering leaves [today](#). And the wind would not let them rest. The wind could not let them stay in neatly raked piles but like a restless child had to keep poking and picking at the edges until the neat heaps frayed and the leaves once again scattered to all corners.

We are perhaps a little scattered God, the realities of our world poke and pick at our attempts to manage and arrange everything into tidiness. Restless breezes tug at our hearts and minds whenever we try to concentrate - like the windblown leaves - our thoughts leap from one thing to another - even our commitment to you bounces about.

Hush the winds for a moment God, so that we can catch our breath, the breath of your Spirit. Help us to pray:

We pray for all who live scattered lives and who find no chance to breathe. We pray for families faced with the challenges of caring for the aging and for the young - we call them the sandwich generation - you call them compassionate ones. We pray for those who struggle with addiction and those grappling with their mental health. We call them wounded you call



them beloved. We pray for all who are ill – help us to be instruments of your peace and healing.

We pray for our scattered community. For health care workers who are exhausted, and parents who are worried – for front line employees and others working and living in high risk environments. We seem to have lost something in these challenging times – we use to trust each other and support each other – we use to be able to disagree with each other without writing each other off. We are calling each other nasty names – you call us your children.

We pray for our scattered world. We pray for those affected by oppressive governments, those living in the midst of war, those struggling for the right to education and for those who are hungry and thirsty for good food and clean drink. Teach us to feed those close to us and those far away. We call them the less fortunate – you call them first and lift them up as our family and our responsibility - for we are all your children.

God poke and pick at us - send us your wind to stir our lives and unsettled us to your way. Keep us aware of the breezes that move us to greater compassion and love. Let us be like the leaves who are stirred from stillness into dancing. Breathe on us, breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love what you love and do what you would do.

These things we ask in the name of the spirit which blows in unimaginable ways and in the name of Jesus who calmed the winds and invited us to pray...The Lord's Prayer...

### **Sending Forth**

May the God who cares about the welfare of each sparrow and feeds all living things grant you the fruits of the Spirit: wisdom, joy, compassion, and strength so that you may feed the world. May the presence of the risen Christ sustain you and give you new life, now and evermore. Amen.

**Sung Blessing:** *May the God of Hope by Jim Gillis*