

Worship with McClure United Church

~ Epiphany 2 ~

January 17, 2021

Welcome & Announcements

Good morning friends and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church. As always we are so grateful that you have chosen to join us. It is our hope that during this time you will find something... something in the prayers, the music, the scripture, the reflection... something that will feed your spirit... something that will connect your spirit to God's spirit and to each other.

And we are gathered today on Treaty 6 territory... homeland of the Metis People. It is so important for us to take time in our gathering to acknowledge and pay our respect to the First Peoples of this land... and we do so with gratitude.

It's also important for us to continue to publicly declare that we are an Affirming Ministry of The United Church of Canada and have made the decision as a community of faith to welcome all people into our midst regardless of age, class, ability, race, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation. So please know that whoever you are, you have a place here with us.

Announcements:

Men's Gathering

A gathering of faith-filled McClure men meets for conversation and connection January 24th. Please Contact Norm Biram if you would like to join with them at biram@shaw.ca.

Email Book Club

Beginning January 18th, join other reading enthusiasts for an email book club.

Here's how it works:

- Once a group of names has been collected, an email will be sent out to all members requesting a book suggestion. The book can be fiction or nonfiction, faith-based or secular. The suggested books will each be assigned a month (hopefully we will have a chance to read and discuss everyone's book selection).
- On the designated start day, the person who selected the first book will begin the discussion by posting a little bit about why they chose that book and if they have already read it, what they liked about it
- Over the next month everyone will have an opportunity to send emails to the group sharing their own observations, questions, comments and others are welcome to respond.
- You can share as often or as little as you are comfortable.
- People can join at anytime
- Everyone is welcome

If you have any questions or would like to join the Book Club, please email me (Rev. Laura Fohse) at laura@mclureunitedchurch.org or phone/text 306-291-5838.

Zoom Bible Study

An opportunity to read, learn and discuss the Bible with other UCCan folks. Each week we will engage with one lectionary passage for the upcoming Sunday.

Beginning February 3rd and happening every Wednesday at 1pm.

To register, visit our website.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Broadview Magazine Subscriptions

Formerly known as the Observer, Broadview is an independent Canadian magazine featuring award-winning coverage of spirituality, justice and ethical living. Through compelling stories and engaging images, Broadview challenges and inspires readers seeking to live a purpose-filled life.

All renewals and new subscriptions must be received by the office by January 31st, 2021. Annual Group Subscription rate is \$25 each (taxes included).

Please phone the McClure Church Office at (306) 373-1753 to place your magazine order.

Scripture Readers Needed

Are you interested in reading scripture for our Sunday morning services? We are looking for a variety of people of different ages to share this ministry with us.

Generally people video themselves on their phone or computer and send it to our video producer by Friday of each week. If you would like to participate but do not have (or are not comfortable with) technology, we can help!

We would like to create a reading schedule until the end of March. If you are interested, please contact Laura at (306) 291-5838 or email laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org.

2021 Daily Reflections for Lent

This year we are encouraging people to order their own copy of this resource for Lent.

The 144-page book is available from the United Church Bookstore: <https://ucrdstore.ca/products/faith-on-the-move-daily-reflections-on-hope-and-change>

Synopsis:

Our spiritual practices carry us through the times of transition in our lives, when we wander in a metaphorical desert. For migrants, refugees, immigrants, and others, the journey is more than a metaphor. In this Lenten devotional, daily reflections by diverse contributors invite us to reflect on and embody God's welcome and love for people who are on the move for a variety of reasons.

Opening Prayer/Call to Worship

In the deep of night God calls to us

in the brightness of the day God calls to us

God is here – in the still small voice – in the burning of bushes – at the side of the lake – on the road -

loving us, waiting for us to say yes to the call

Today we receive God's call, boldly trusting in God's strength.

(Candle)

Prayer:

God of all people you call our name and we don't listen
you call our name and we run in the opposite direction
you call our name and we are afraid that we will be asked to change our
plans
you call our name

Call us again gracious God
push and pull us out of our complacency
open our hearts to know your way
make us bold, make us strong, make us yours,
call our name once again, Oh God that we might say yes.

Scripture

John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Reflection

In all of the gospel stories, before Jesus' career in ministry really took off... before he began teaching, preaching, healing... before anything else, he gathered up a small group of disciples.

And this is where we meet up with him today...

In the scripture you just heard, we find Jesus in the middle of gathering together some new friends... friends who will learn from him and share in ministry with him.

This is a passage about call... “call” to discipleship.

We talk a lot in church about discipleship.... But what is it?

What do we mean by discipleship?

There's probably lots of different understandings and descriptions of what it means to be called into discipleship...

But here's what it means to me...

Here's how I understand it.

The call to discipleship has everything to do with a call to action.

Discipleship is about how we live what we have learned... how we share it... how we show it... how we live it in the world.

AS I said, there is a story about disciples being called in each one of the gospel readings... this one is a bit different from the others... particularly in the little chat between Jesus and Nathanael.

In this story, Jesus first found Philip and invited him to “follow me”.

And like the other disciples Philip's decision to follow seems to be immediate.

No questions asked, just... ready to go.

Philip is so enthusiastic that he decides he wants to bring along his friend, Nathanael...

Who, unlike all the other disciples, is a bit... hesitant... doubtful.

So Philip invites him to come and see Jesus for himself...

And Nathanael goes with him..

When Jesus sees Nathanael coming toward him, he says: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

Nathanael comes to Jesus and Jesus sees right through him... sees right into his heart.

So, no doubt, Nathanael is a little taken aback by the familiarity and he asks Jesus how he knows him.

And Jesus says, “I saw you under the fig tree.”

Now... I don't really understand what Jesus meant by that... but clearly it meant something to Nathanael because suddenly he knows that this isn't just... nobody.

He knows that this is one sent by God!

There was something about this part of the scripture that really struck me.

The thing about discipleship... the thing that is both awesome and a little bit terrifying... is that the journey with Jesus begins with being seen for who we are...

being seen right to the very depths of our hearts...

We are seen...

and still we are loved abundantly and completely.

Now isn't that a beautiful kind of friendship?

One in which we are seen for who we are... our whole selves – seen

And still loved and invited into relationships.

O wonder if you have seen the movie *The King's Speech*?

If you haven't.. you really should.

It's one of those movies that is just good for the soul but make sure you have some Kleenex handy.

The movie is about King George VI who'd had a problem with stuttering ever since he was a young boy.

But really the movie is about the relationship that develops between the king and Lionel, his speech therapist, who arrived on the scene when the young king was forced into public life.

Like other speech therapists, Lionel had his techniques... but he also just had this way of being with the people he worked with.

Part of what is so beautiful in this story is how completely unfazed Lionel seemed to be by the difference in their social status.

Here he was... no formal credentials and working with the king...

He wasn't a man of wealth or privilege and yet there's never a hint of him feeling inferior... there's only his desire to help... the kind of help that comes not from some expert training... but from friendship.

And it's the friendship that is what makes this such an amazing story.

Lionel found a way to come alongside this king and make space for him...

He made space for his insecurity.. for his shame... his fear... his hopelessness.. his anger... his desire.

he made space for him and he made it safe for all of his carefully guarded stories to emerge.

He helped the king to see what was true... and he held that truth with love and with compassion.. and he helped the king to find the courage he needed to do what needed to be done.

It is a magnificent story of the power... the strength... courage... and the freedom that comes with deep and trusting friendship.

Jesus offers us this kind of friendship...

this and so much more.

As humans we will mess up... there's absolutely no doubt about that... we make mistakes, we hurt or disappoint our friends and loved ones... disappoint ourselves.

I think the best we can do is commit to righting the wrongs as they happen and to just work hard to be the best we can be.

The friendship that Jesus offers, is different though... it's a friendship built on faith.

Just as Lionel stood by his friend, giving him strength and courage and tenacity... offering him a sense of safety... Jesus offers us the same... but he also offers us something more...

Jesus' love is not limited by human failing.

That love is not even limited by our own failing ability to acknowledge and receive his love.

He knows us... just as he did with Nathanael... Jesus sees right through to our hearts... and still he stands by us with a love that endures all things... hopes all things... believes all things... a love that never fails.

We don't need to be able to touch or see the physical presence of Jesus to know this is true.

That's what faith is...

faith is daring our hearts... our spirits... to go beyond what the eyes can see... what the hands can touch.

Faith comes in all shapes and sizes... it's not easily describable... and how it is experienced by you is quite likely different from how it's experienced by me.. or by anyone else.

I can't describe faith to you... I can't tell you how I know that Jesus has called me to be his disciple... to share in his love and in his ministry.

But I can tell you a story...

Maybe it's a story that some of you can relate to.

Some of you may have heard me tell this story before – because it's one of my most profound and one that I continue to go back to when I need to be reminded of my faith.

In my early 20s I was in a pretty bad place... just in general... I was quite a little mess.

Miserable... feeling pretty hopeless.

One night I was having a little pity party in my dark and dingy basement suite... when I quite suddenly and unexpectedly found myself on my knees praying.

I was not, at that time, what I thought of as a spiritual person... definitely not a religious person...

I was quite sure I didn't even believe in God.

I don't remember my prayer specifically but what I do remember... very very clearly... is a new feeling... a sense that somehow, someday things were going to be ok.

I felt an easing of my anxiousness and just the slightest opening of hope in my spirit.

I believe what I experienced that night was an invitation into a relationship with God, through Jesus.

Jesus saw me... he loved me... and although I didn't hear the words, I definitely experienced the call... "follow me"

The invitation... the love... had always been there, I just hadn't been a place where I could respond to it.

That night though something was different.

Maybe it was desperation, maybe it was my desire for things to be different.. who knows...

but soon after I made my way to a United Church...

Now I want you to know that my life did not immediately become all butterflies and roses... it still hasn't... but that was definitely the beginning of a new way of being... of understanding.

Accepting that call to follow... accepting the offer of Jesus' friendship was both the best and the hardest thing I've ever done.

The best because it has led me to where I am today... which is pretty awesome.

The hardest because that relationship has demanded things of me that have really really challenged me.... and, as a result, have changed me.

See the thing about a friendship with Jesus... is that it isn't the kind of friendship that is content talking about the weather or sports or the latest binge-worthy Netflix shows.

It's so much more than that.

A friendship with Jesus is... discipleship...

A friendship with Jesus is a call to action.

Those words.... "follow me"... are an invitation to be transformed.

And transformation is rarely... if ever... easy.

For me the transformation meant examining my entire worldview.

As I read stories of Jesus ministry with the poor... with the oppressed.. those on the margins of society... I had to take a hard and sometimes

uncomfortable look at my own place in our society's power structure and what I was doing with the power I had.

As I read about his ministry of healing... of sharing compassion and love with those who were suffering, I had to look at the direction my own life had taken and learn to let go of my self-centeredness and open my heart more to the suffering of the world around me.

The invitation to friendship.. to discipleship with Jesus turned my life around... and its still a work in progress.

There are definitely times when I'm not as good of a friend as I'd like to be, when I make choices that I don't think Jesus would be proud of... choices that hurt him... disappoint him.

But I believe completely that even though I sometimes walk away from Jesus... he never leaves my side.

He sees me... he knows my heart and still he is always there...always loving, always hopeful.

sometimes that's kind of annoying... sometimes I don't necessarily want to be seen... but, as annoying as it might be – I wouldn't change it for anything.

I know not everyone has had the same kind of dramatic entry into friendship with Jesus as I did... but I have heard others share about their own more subtle but equally powerful experiences of God's love.

A flash of knowing, a sudden calmness in the midst of an anxious feeling.. a sense of awe and wonder.

I think Jesus is persistent in his presence in our lives because of how much he loves us...

he knows we need him...

but it's also because he needs us.

As disciples we are called to action and this action includes continuing the ministry that Jesus started... that he commissioned his disciples to live out. In the same way that we get as much as we are willing to give to our other friendships... our lives will be made infinitely richer and we will feel more blessed when we are actively involved in our friendship with Jesus.

I know for me that my peace, my contentment, my sense of hope and my experiences of love are directly proportional to the amount of time I spend nurturing my relationship with God... and that happens for me through my discipleship... my friendship with Jesus.

So I think we need to ask ourselves this...

How blessed do we want to feel? How loved, how content, how free? And that is exactly how much we need to commit ourselves to nurturing our relationship with God and then sharing the love with have received with others –

And there are simply so many possibilities and opportunities for us to do this – even in the midst... maybe especially in the midst... of a pandemic.

Amen.

Prayers of the People/Lord's Prayer

God who set a light in the Sky for the wise ones to follow, we thank you for the light that shines around us in our time the dazzling morning light, mysterious moonlight, stark stormy afternoon light, and the rosy end of day light.

We thank you for the welcoming light of home, for the light which marks our way on unfamiliar roads, and especially for the welcome glow in a loved one's face.

We thank you for the illumination you give to mind and spirit, for the witness of your word which is light to our path, the bright example of your Saints and the presence of your spirit

Especially we thank you for the light of Jesus who brings us clear vision and penetrating insight, who shows us our meaning and calls us to your purpose.

Fill us with light God and heal us of all shadows; open our hearts that we might follow your way.

In this precious time of prayer, we acknowledge places in our world where your light is hard to find - places of war, oppression, hunger, homelessness and poverty - teach us to be light bearers in a broken world.

God as we begin the week of prayer for Christian Unity, we confess the shadow of our fractured witness. We ask God that you would bless us with

new energy for ecumenical conversations, with respect for traditions and a united passion for doing justice in the world. Today it is our joy to pray for our brothers and sisters and siblings of Holy Spirit Roman Catholic parish. We celebrate the bonds that hold us in covenant with each other and with you. We thank you for your constant presence with us as we live out the challenge of unity to which you have called us. We celebrate the moments that together we witness to your love and light and we ask that you continue to guide us with your wisdom and grace.

God we would pray this morning as well for those who do not share the Christian faith but who carry light into the world. Teach us respect and help us honor all those who walk in love.

God, we take a moment now to pray for those among us and for others who are having a particularly difficult time seeing your light; those who are sick or alone, or are tired, or are struggling with issues of mental health. We pray for those who long to be noticed and those who would just like to rest for a bit. We pray for those who bear the burden of caring for others especially in these Covid days for those who care for the ill and who are responsible for the distribution of the vaccines. God teach us to be light bearers in the dark seasons of others.

And now in a time of silence we open to you the shadow places of our own hearts, trusting you will bring light to those places....

God of light to you we commend our dreams and our visions our lives and our paths shine in our hearts and minds be present in our lives continue to lead us into truth and wholeness continue to call us to the ways of light we pray these things in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father/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

Friends.. let's go from here to be the compassion of God.. to be the love of Christ... and to be the companionship of the Holy Spirit. The world needs our friendship. Go in light and love. Go in peace. Amen.