

## **February 14, 2021- Transfiguration Sunday**

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Good morning and welcome to worship with McClure United Church this morning. And happy Valentines day as well. Today is a day of love... and how better to celebrate love than by worshipping together and opening ourselves to the ultimate source of love. So, I hope that today you will take some time to acknowledge that love... God's love and your own love and your loveability.

And it is out of our desire to share God's love... for everyone, that we remember at the beginning of each service our commitment as an Affirming Ministry of The United Church to do our very best to not only welcome but also to celebrate the beautiful diversity of God's people. No matter your age, class, ability, race, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation we are grateful you have joined us for worship today.

And we are worshipping here in Saskatoon on Treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Metis Nation and we take a moment to acknowledge and pay our respect to the ancestors and keepers of the land.

I have a few announcements to share with you today and I'd just like to note that all of the information I'll share with you now can be found in the weekly email, on the website and the Facebook page – so go there if you need contact info or more information on how to register and attend.

To begin with, we are soon entering into the season of Lent - and I have two announcements I'd like to share related to that. First, we will be offering a live Zoom Ash Wednesday Communion service for those interested in joining. That service will be on Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. All you need to participate is the Zoom link, a piece of bread and some juice for communion, a small bowl of water, and a candle if you have one.

And the next evening at 7pm we will begin our Lenten Book Study series. We will be using the United Church's Lenten book "Faith on the Move" for the study. The books have arrived. Hopefully, everyone who ordered a book has made arrangements to pick it up by. If you did not order a book, I see they now have an e-copy available at UCRD for \$7.95. I have put the link for that on the Facebook page.

Our new weekly Bible study has also begun. We are gathering each Wednesday at 1pm for about an hour. This is really more of a discussion than a study and everyone is welcome to join whenever you are able – there is no commitment to come each week – although you are certainly welcome to do so

Have any of you driven by the church recently? We have a garden of love and it is beautiful. Thanks so much to our Outreach Committee for the "Plant a Heart for Refugees" fundraiser happening now. For every \$20 donation received during the month of February, a heart will be

planted in the snowbanks in front of the church. Cash, cheque or e-transfer are accepted. Please be sure to designate your donation to McClure United Church – Refugees”.

And speaking of love... how about sharing a little with the staff and residents of Amy McClure House. Everyone is invited to write or make a Valentine’s card for the folks at Amy’s. You can either drop your cards off in the mailbox at the church or mail them directly to Amy’s and that address is 292 Heritage Way and the postal code is S7H 5T4.

If you are looking for a way to connect with friendly faces, please join us on Friday morning at 10am for a chat. We’d love to have you join us...

And now, let’s breathe deeply of God’s love and prepare our hearts for this time of worship...

### **Opening Prayer**

The light of Christ shines on us and in us.

The light of Christ leads us.

The light of Christ transforms us.

We light this candle in the certainty that Christ’s presence is here with us today.

Let us pray:

O Spirit, breathe among us here. Inspire this time of worship. Share with each of us your amazing grace, your mindfulness, your peace. We want to be on the mountaintop with you... to be in so aware of your love... of your goodness. We want to know we are loved and to know how to love. We want the light, the voice of reassurance. And yet we know that our openness to your love is imperfect... we know that there are times when we turn away from your call to us... your call for us. Help us in our desire to be open to you and all your ways. Help us to turn away from our weakness... from our pride... from anything that stands in our way of being fully who you call us to be. Amen.

No matter where we are... God is with us.

No matter what we have done... God forgives us.

No matter our reluctance to be open to God... God accepts us.

So, with that assurance may we receive all that God has to offer and live in fullness and in hope.

### **Hymn**

#### **Scripture: Mark 9:2-10**

<sup>2</sup>Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup>and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup>And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup>Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup>He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup>Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the

cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" <sup>8</sup>Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup>As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup>So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

## Reflection

I love the transfiguration story...

It is a story so full of wonder... and hope...

it's a story so full of... God.

One of my favourite ways to read scripture when I'm preparing to preach on it... is to take the passage and to read it over and over until it's familiar and then to imagine myself into the story... to allow myself to be there... to witness the story as though I was actually in it.

This is a great story to do that in...

Just imagine with me for a moment...

Imagine you have been invited by Jesus to travel with him to a mountain top...

you've been travelling together with Jesus for months now... teaching, preaching, healing....

you are exhausted yet full of anticipation...

you feel as though this journey to the mountain top is important...

it's going to lead to something wonderful...

and you get to experience it with Jesus.

You arrive on the mountain and suddenly...

you see there Moses and Elijah...

they are talking with Jesus... and Jesus....

suddenly he looks different now...

he... seems to be glowing...

light radiates from all around him.

You look to your friend, Peter, looking for confirmation of what you are seeing...

and one look at Peter and you know that you are not alone...

Peter speaks the words you are thinking...

his voice full of a mix of excitement and panic...

"Let's just stay here" he says" this is a good place to be... please... can't we just stay?"

And then there is another voice... a voice that appears to be coming from a cloud that says

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

At that moment you experience your friend Jesus...

the man who you have grown to love and trust... your friend...

you experience him now in a new light...

looking at Jesus you know that you are looking at the Divine...

experiencing Jesus is experiencing God...

experiencing the holy... sacred.

I loved imagining this story.

I could feel the presence of God...

I could feel the safety of Jesus... of his friendship.

I knew that what had happened was magical... that here I was one with God and everything was just....okay.

I didn't want to read the last line of this passage...

the line that says "they were coming down from the mountain".

Wait a minute... I'm not ready to go.

I like it up here.

What's wrong with Peter's idea of building a dwelling.

We could live here, couldn't we?

A happy little family basking in the glow of God's presence & love?

What's wrong with that?

But the passage says... "they were coming down from the mountain" ... and so I needed to go.

I am an optimist.

I am also by nature a bit of a conflict-avoider.

I like things to be nice.

I like to be happy.

I like when I have that warm glowy feeling inside...

when I just know that everything is okay...

when I am deeply aware of God's presence in my life and am living out of hope.

I have learned... often the hard way...that life isn't a bowl of roses.

I know there are thorns along the way.

We're in a bit of a thorny patch right now.

I've accepted that... but that doesn't mean I'm happy about it... or that I wouldn't rather at times pretend the thorns don't exist at all.

Yet I know that I have received the most learning in my life from the difficult times...

From the times of darkness.

I know that without experiencing darkness...

I wouldn't be able to recognize light.

I know these things...

but that doesn't mean I'm happy about it...

that I wouldn't prefer to just live in the light...

and if we were already in Lent...

which we're not... not for a few days yet...

but if we were and I was preaching about Lent,

I would probably say that the only way to get from the mystery & awe & brilliance of transfiguration to the hope & new life of resurrection... is to spend time in the wilderness of Lent...

and to then place myself face to face with the horror and death of Holy Week.  
I know this... but that doesn't mean I have to like it.  
I do... however... have to experience it... to live it.  
We all do.

So next week we begin our time of Lent... a time of contemplation... of self-examination... of confession...of prayer and preparation for the death of Jesus.

We need Lent... we need this opportunity to empty ourselves in order to make room for God so that we can fully appreciate what it means to be an Easter people.

To experience the prick of a thorn... so that we can enjoy the wonderful scent of a rose...

But we're not there yet....

This isn't Lent... Lent doesn't start until Wednesday.

We do have to accept the importance of the Lenten journey...

but we don't need to rush into it.

I don't want to rush us away from today... from this encounter with God...

But this is another tendency many people have... and clearly, I'm one of them...

either we want to stay on the mountain top forever and ever, clinging desperately to our encounter with God... or we want to rush right on through... a quick up... and down... so that we can get down to the business of living...

straight to the flat lands...

or maybe... for some of us... diving right down into the depths of the valley.

We allow little or no time at all for the encounter with God.

We are in such a hurry to get to point B in the journey that we miss what's happened along the way.

We fail to see Moses & Elijah... we don't notice the transfiguration of our friend as we run on by....

we miss the opportunity to see the divine...

to be reassured by Christ's hand upon our shoulder...

and to be empowered as we travel together down the mountain path.

So how do we know?

How do we know when to begin our journey up the mountain?

How do we know what to do when we get there?

and how do we know when it's time to move on?

Unfortunately, the reality of our lives doesn't follow the neat little packaging of the Christian calendar.

Opportunities for mountaintop experiences... encounters with the holy... opportunities for transformation....

do not happen in our lives every year precisely on Transfiguration Sunday.

Individual journeys into the wilderness...

times of personal reflection and self-

examination do not only happen during the 40 days of Lent...

Times of desolation... of death... grief... pain... do not save themselves for one day each year...

the last year have been proof of that.

Personal pain does not wait for Good Friday.

and the good news is that we don't need to wait each year for Easter Sunday to arrive in order to experience the resurrection and new life of Jesus Christ.

No... the very nature of life is that it carries unexpected moments... surprises... uncertainty... Life is unpredictable... and now so more than ever

We can... however... find ways within the unpredictability of life to ground ourselves in what is constant... God's love for us and our response to that love.

The story isn't that the disciples just casually ran into Jesus and followed him to the mountaintop...

The story is that Jesus called his disciples together...

for months they lived together... worked together... prayed together.

The disciples were called by God, through Jesus, to live their faith.

They were grounded by their love of God.... their commitment to Jesus... the ministry they shared.... and their friendships with one another...

First... they were grounded...

then when they were invited to the mountaintop, they were ready to go.

and when God was revealed to them, they were able to see and they were transformed by what they saw there.

and finally... when Jesus said it was time to go... they listened... just as God commanded them to do... and followed him down.

So can we expect mountaintop experiences if we don't take the time to encounter God in the flatlands & valleys of life? Can we take advantage of the pandemic valley we find ourselves living in?

And when we do experience the dazzling & awesome presence of God... can we trust Jesus Christ... our friend & our guide... to lead us away... when the time is right... to face together whatever may lie ahead?

And a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

## **Hymn**

## **Prayers**

It is a strange time of year, O God. We linger between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent.

We are between the joy of your appearing and the horror of your undoing at the hands of those who would not or could not embrace your way of life.

Perhaps we – like Peter, James, and John – wait for you to appear in dazzling light and unmistakable clarity: We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus... a glimpse of the way through the mix and mess of this life.

And within that mix and mess is your creation.  
Renew and restore in us a vision of care for creation.  
Remind us to take what we need and no more.  
Encourage us in a counter-cultural faithfulness that is not about consumerism.  
Spur us with new insight and deeper understanding that we may live mindfully each day, conscious of the impact of we do and fail to do.

Also within the mix and mess are your people...  
those we know and love, those we know and struggle to like and those we don't even know...  
and we offer a prayer for them all... praying for a glimpse of the dazzling light that holds within it comfort... and hope... and the possibility of transformation.

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the truth – the truth that love is stronger than hate; peace is possible; and life can emerge even in the midst of devastation. We pray for that truth to be known to all who need to witness it.

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the life; inviting us to follow in his footsteps as he walked the way of love and justice, inviting us to follow him in prayer as he lived out his faith and made your love known to all who would listen.

We give thanks for the good news that unfolds in the world as people dream your dreams, follow your nudging, and seek you in the faces they meet each day. Perhaps, O God, it is the only Transfiguration we really need.

For all those who are quiet witness to your love and way of life, we give thanks, O God. May they feel strengthened by your spirit and enfolded in your care.

Draw us to the rhythm of Lent as it unfolds in our midst; a sacred invitation to explore the corners of our soul. Open us to your light that we might see ourselves clearly, with all our fears and faults and faith,  
with all our desires and dreams and duties. Help us to see our journey as a place of your appearing –  
that like Peter, James, and John we may come down from the mountain and set one foot in front of the other in your name and for your sake. **Amen.**

**Sung Blessing**

## **Blessing**

So as you go into this coming week,  
Hold onto the truth that God's radiant love shines brightly  
You may be on the mountain top...  
You may be near the bottom of the valley...  
Wherever you are may you experience the presence of God,  
the friendship of Jesus  
and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform you,  
to transform the world.  
May it be so. Amen.