

McClure United Church

Worship for May 17, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Good morning. I don't know about you folks but this physical distancing has been going on a little too long – its hard to remember what day it is.

This weekly ritual of coming together while apart has become so important for Brian, Laura and I and many of you. Thank you for you feedback and encouragement.

Welcome.

As many of you have no doubt heard our beloved church was vandalized last Sunday by an individual who used spray paint to convey a hateful message. This individual has vandalized several other churches in the city as well as ST. Andrew's College, the University of Saskatchewan rainbow walkway and the city police station. We are doing our best to offer support and care to all effected. We have received a flood of support from other churches and communities as well as other Faith groups. We are being held through this time. Many of us are working together to counter this hateful act through chalk art and letters and notes of support. You would like to spread words and images of love please visit one of the churches effected and make your chalk offering. A fabulous way to honour the beautiful weather and to wash away hate.

Indeed the weather is beautiful and As the weather gets warmer families are taking advantage of the gifts of creation so some zoom gatherings that Laura has pulled together are coming to a natural conclusion. So please check our Facebook page or the website for updates.

Laura, Brian and I are glad to offer prayers, stories and thoughts as a gift of worship for you. And we are glad also to have Jim Gillis offering a ministry of music this morning.

Candle Lighting

Prayer

God, who creates, sustains and redeems all life, we come seeking your presence and comforting peace. We praise you for the joy and challenge of being your people. May your spirit be with us and move within us, in this time of worship. Give us hearts that hear your Word and minds that are open to the transforming power of your love. Amen

Theme Conversation

I'm here in front of our beloved church building where, less than a week ago, Debra and I received phone calls that someone had come in the night and spray painted an ugly, hateful message right here on these doors behind me.

When I arrived at the church and saw what had been written, I admit I felt hurt, sad and angry. I kind of wanted to find the guy who did it and give him a piece of my mind.

Well others arrived and very quickly we had the messages erased from these doors. That felt very good. But I was still angry.

Throughout the week though something pretty amazing has happened. Over the last few days we have received so many messages of love and support from many within our community... letters from other churches, from our Regional Council, from Moderator Richard Bott and we received beautiful letter of care and support from the Islamic Association of Saskatchewan. I also received a beautiful gift of origami cranes from a friend and colleague for the McClure community created by his family.

And then yesterday my partner, Jordan, and I went from location to location (7 in total) that had been impacted by vandalism. WE attended those places and we added our sidewalk chalk messages to those that had already been offered. There had been a city wide call for everyone to go to the places that had been vandalize and leave messages of love and hope.

So I have put together a video for this theme conversation of the sidewalk chalk art we saw yesterday. I hope you will appreciate and enjoy these messages and that they will offer you a word of hope and remind you that you are surrounded by love.

Scripture: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Reflection

When I first heard of the disturbing graffiti that covered the doors of our church last Sunday my mind suddenly remembered a horrific event in the history of the world known as Kristallnacht or the "night of broken glass." On November 9, 1938 Nazi extremists inspired a night of horrendous persecution inside Germany. It was a night

when Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked by anti-Semitic forces within German society. Over 7,000 businesses were damaged, 267 synagogues were destroyed and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested. The police and the fire brigade, for the most part, stood by and watched. History reports that while the majority of German citizens denounced these actions there were very few who chose to stand in solidarity with their neighbours against the Nazis.

For a few moments, I pondered what it would have been like to be a Jewish citizen in Germany the next morning. I am certain that my imagination cannot convey the anger, grief and fear that must have resided in every Jewish heart. Sadly, as history records, the holocaust ensued in the months and years which followed that night. How can such evil be perpetrated upon a people simply because of their ethnic origin, simply because they are different? Why are we so afraid of difference?

In recent weeks we have read in the news of the shooting of an unarmed young African-American named Ahmaud Arbery. He was chased down and murdered by a father and son who allegedly believed him to be a thief - simply because he was running. We now know that the public prosecutors privately told police to not arrest these perpetrators. A recently released video seems to reveal an innocent young man killed simply because he was a black man jogging. The question remains, how does jogging justify murder? Is Arbery's race the real reason he was targeted and his death under-investigated? Why are we so afraid of difference?

This question lingered in my mind as I considered the vandalism to our church doors last Sunday. News reports have evolved over the week revealing the perpetrator's persistence and his total disregard for the legal system. I wonder about his motivation, his mental health, his personal history. I also wonder why he is so afraid of difference. Unfortunately, there remains in our culture, those who seek to denigrate and threaten the LGBTQ+ community. Why is there such reaction to how people choose to love one another? Why are we so afraid of difference?

Our Christian ancestor, St. Paul, was no stranger to the oppression that arises out of difference. His conversion to Christianity quickly ushered him from being an 'acceptable member' of society to that of an outsider; from a being person who exercised power to a person who was subject to the powerful – and all of this because he chose to understand God in a new way. His oppression was severe evolving over time to beatings, imprisonment and, ultimately, his death. Yet, in today's scripture he offers up a perspective on his experience. He writes:

... we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint.

Is Paul suggesting that suffering is to be desired? Is he suggesting that those who suffer experiences of racism, anti-Semitism or homophobia should be glad that they are building character? These are difficult words if we hear them as individuals but he is not writing to individuals, he is writing to the Christian community in Rome. He is writing to the community of God in that place suggesting that suffering is not, and never should be, born by individuals alone. He is speaking to a community that suffers together and is committed to share the suffering of others. It is this kind of suffering that leads to endurance when shared; to character within community; and to the hope that can arise when God's people act and pray together.

Sunday after Sunday we hear the call to stand alongside those who experience rejection and encounter the human face of evil. Again and again we hear the call to love as Jesus loved – the outcasts, the marginalized, the oppressed – those deemed to be 'different'. And as we suffer together the load is lightened a little. As we endure side by side we are changed and hope is born.

While the state sanctioned church in Germany forgot the way of Jesus and aligned itself with the oppressors, the 'Confessing Church' was born, a group of Christians who refused to turn a blind-eye to anti-Semitism and continued, despite suffering, to endure in the face of Nazism. In the United States the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and so many black Christian leaders continues to affirm the rights and dignity of all African-Americans. And, in Saskatoon churches here and there, including McClure, affirm the right of people to choose how they love within the rainbow diversity of God's creation.

If we suffered a little last Sunday because our church was defaced and our sense of security was disturbed, we also have grown in our commitment to **endure** in the way of Jesus, and to **hope** ever more strongly that love will prevail. And if we needed any greater affirmation that suffering leads to endurance and endurance to hope we have but to look at the wonderful array of chalk art indicating the groundswell of love and solidarity that not only surrounds the people of McClure but loudly declares that all who love are to be blessed.

Our commitment to hope, endurance and solidarity is contributing to the creation of God's commonwealth. Perhaps there is no greater tribute to our endurance than a post that was left on McClure's FaceBook page this week.

I am deeply sorry to hear about the homophobic vandalism on you sanctuaries ... It has been some time since I began working aside with your leaders on these crucial civil rights issues for LGBTQ2SIA Christians, and I really cherish the support I have witnessed from you.

I moved to Victoria a couple of years ago because my husband wanted a better life for us. I left Christianity in hopes for a better life as well, simply because of what it has represented in my life (the) brainwashing and manipulative methods (of) some

evangelical churches. I worked with people like you afterwards and you have always had a special place within my heart. You are part of the movement of love no matter who we love. Thank-you for your continued support of the LGBTQ2SIA community and for being REAL Christians ... in hope – Ryan

Suffering produces endurance and endurance enhances character and character leads to hope. May the people of God say, Amen!

Prayers

Traditionally on this long weekend in May the plant nurseries would be filled with people. This year things will be more orderly. But the smell of dirt will bless our noses soon and we will dig and till and prepare for another season of growth and new life. God, make us faithful stewards of this our earth home. Be with us in this season of possibilities and renewal.

Plant the seed of wisdom within us. Bring to flower in our lives the virtue of truth-seeking. Make us alert to the lies which control and manipulate the lives of the powerless. Help us speak truth in the face of injustice. Help us stand with those in need – those whom Jesus loves so deeply and whom he called us to love.

Plant the seed of grace in us, God. Teach us to be gentle with ourselves and those around us – especially in these challenging times. Refresh our relationships and bless them with honesty, laughter, and joy.

Plant the seed of courage within us, strengthen all who face fear, whether in a palliative care ward, a line-up at a food bank, a shelter for abused women or standing at the doors to a beloved worship space sprayed with a hateful message.

We offer the prayers of our hearts in silence now – prayers of concern and thanksgiving for those close to us...

God plant within us the knowledge that we are your beloved children. Plant the possibility that our communities may become more truly a reflection of your heart. Plant your vision in us.

As followers of Jesus we pray as he taught us:

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

So as we leave now this time of worship, lets remember that we are surrounded...
entirely surrounded by the love of God.

And we are also challenged by the teaches of Jesus.

May we also then be comforted by the ever present strength of the Holy Spirit.

I pray that you will each feel God's blessing upon you and all that you love, this day and every day. Amen.