

Why We Do What We Do

February 23, 2020

Psalm 100 & Colossians 3:14-17

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

One of the things I do to take care of myself is to set aside an hour and a half each month to get my nails done. Usually a lovely young woman at the Nail spa helps me pick a colour and then she spends the next hour and a half making my nails sparkle. Last time I indulged I met a new nail technician she was young and very friendly. Early on in our “getting know you” conversation she shared with me that she was getting married.

I congratulated her and asked where the ceremony would be. She told me the wedding would happen outside somewhere – they hadn’t decided so I asked if she would be using a justice of the peace, a marriage commissioner or a minister. “What is the difference” she asked. Oh boy.

So we wandered through that question and of course it was revealed that I was a minister in a church and I shared that I had recently been asked to do a wedding - which was lovely - and I was so excited that I was asked to preach a little sermon as part of the ceremony. She responded – what is a sermon?

Totally a legitimate question - so I explained some churches call this part of the ceremony a homily or a reflection on scripture.

Her next question – what is scripture? Okay again scripture is an old word – a reading from the Bible I explained. She looked puzzled.

Clearly an hour and half was not going to be long enough to get through this young woman’s list of questions. I see her again Monday.

Shortly after this encounter with the young woman at the Nail spa – I was here, at McClure at a worship committee. As I sat in the meeting, with my shiny new nails someone asked: “given that it is flu season do we really need to pass the peace with one another before we have communion.”

SLIDE

I answered that we don’t have too but it is an important part of communion. Passing the peace with each other is the final act of confession and assurance and frees us to go to the table unencumbered. Passing the peace is saying - I am in right relationship with God and now I also want to be in right relationship with you my fellow Christians. Passing the peace is not a good morning but rather a “we are the one body of Christ”. Forgiving and forgiven. Many who serve on the Worship committee had no idea what the passing of the peace was about and I don’t blame them we rarely talk about why we do what we do in this place. Today – when we pass the peace we will put our hands together and bow toward each other – a way of passing the peace without touching.

SLIDE

Given my encounter with the young woman at the spa and the conversation we had at worship committee I thought we would spend some time this morning talking about why

we do what we do – here Sunday mornings. I am by no means an expert and my thoughts are by no means exhaustive – exhausting perhaps - but not exhaustive.

Worship begins before a word is spoken.
What do you see:

One of the first things you see when you enter is colour – The church has a unique calendar which reflects the life of Christ. Each the calendar is broken into seasons and each season has a colour. Did you know there is a whole team of people – we call them the “worship set up committee” who make sure the colours are displayed and the candles lit and the ministers have water. These folks keep track of all our banners and make sure the correct ones are on display for the given season of the church. We also have special banners for special occasions. The hanging of these colours connects us with Christian communities everywhere.

We are just finishing Epiphany which was green - Purple comes next for lent.
Easter will be white. Today because we are celebrating communion our special communion banners are hanging.

The Large white candle is our Christ Candle. Most churches have a Christ Candle and in some churches it is lit around the clock. Our Christ candle is a symbol of the light of Christ that shines for us at all times. The Life and light of Christ is central to who we are and the candle is a symbol of this. We light the peace candle from this eternal light.

Peace Candle

A History of the Peace Light

In 1986 a group of American Christians visited a number of Russian churches. Following a service in a Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow, an elderly woman placed three rubles in the hand of an American minister and asked him to buy a candle for his church. She requested that this candle be lit as a symbol of Peace during each service. The Peace Candle burns every Sunday in the First Presbyterian Church in York, PA, USA. The congregation of First Presbyterian Church, York, that fall, then passed Lights for Peace on to other churches. McClure United Church received the Peace Candle on March 31, 1991 from Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current, SK.

These candles are placed on the Communion Table

In the United Church we have a Communion Table - not an altar. An altar symbolizes sacrifice and is often up on several risers with several stairs to get to it. Often it is accessible from only one side. The United Church has a communion “table” and it stresses that it is the place where the people of God meet and are fed. The focus of our table is that it is a “gathering place” for all people not unlike our kitchen tables.

Our Baptismal font is new since I have been with you. In the past there was a simple bowl used for baptism and it was stored in a cupboard. In conversation with the worship committee it became important to everyone that we create a more permanent and public place for a baptismal bowl. So we asked Dennis Johnson to design and build us a font – that is a stand for a bowl. We purchased a bowl from 10,000 villages from

one of the countries in the world that Bob McClure served as medical missionary. The baptism font is now a more visible symbol of our life together. And for many of us it is central to our faith journey. It stands as a constant reminder of our baptismal vows. //

Have you ever noticed where your ministers enter the worship space? We come from amongst you – entering just as you do. We do not enter through a special door, you do not stand when we enter - as they do in some churches - but we come often into the space last - making sure you are all gathered. For me this is so important. This entering is an acknowledgement of my place among you – it means that for you - clergy are not set apart from you. It says our worship is the work of all of us

When we enter this space the first thing we hear is Music – We are blessed to have a rich music ministry amongst us. Each week it is my privilege to meet with Elin and Shirley and sometimes Brian to choose the music for our worship together. Sacred sounds chooses the hymns on the first Sunday of the month when they are in leadership. I hope you appreciate the care that goes into the choosing music and it is not easy given the variety of musical likes.

Music is chosen to set a mood, to prepare your heart, to open your heart, to settle your soul, to send you out with energy.

Anthems for the choirs and the Band are painstakingly chosen to compliment the theme of the worship.

Now the worship words begins.

The Prayer of Approach brings us together into the community of faith. It is a prayer that helps us recognize that we are in God's presence, and it invites us to acknowledge that we have come together to worship. We pray that the spirit will open our hearts and minds to an experience of God. The congregation then sings a hymn of praise. Having gathered we offer praise to God and thus we move beyond ourselves. As we acknowledge God's love we are made aware of our failings to be love in the world. So we confess – we confess so that we can be rid ourselves and our community of all the troubling things that keep us from knowing God. In the assurance we are reminded of God's love – no matter what - and we therefore can let go of that which holds us back. The hallelujah or song after the assurance is an active communal release into this new time.

Now we are ready to hear, learn and experience anew what God is offering. We begin to unravel God's truth through a time especially with children – trying - by creative and age appropriate means- with the children to seek God's way. Grownups in this time have the opportunity to learn from the children, to see God revealed through them and it is an opportunity for us, as a church, to keep our baptismal promise which is to care and nurture these little ones.

After the children leave we read from the Bible. We use to read several passages but our attentions spans have changed over time and we now usually hear one or two passages. We most often use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible – We are big in the United Church about good scholarship and the NRSV is considered a very scholarly translation.

After the Bible reading is complete - we follow with an explanation of it's meaning for us in our time and place. We call this the sermon or the reflection.

The final part of the worship is the Response.

We make our offerings of time, talent and treasure. We offer our whole selves to the work of God.

Then it is time for us to pray – a time to open us to the world - to consider our place in the world, the needs of others and ourselves and to be still.

We conclude with the Lord's prayer which connects us with all Christians everywhere. We are then sent out. Into the world to be God's people.

Today we are blessed to celebrate one of the two sacrament we have in the United Church.

So what is a sacrament? The most common definition of a sacrament is that it is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Or a sacrament provides an event in the Christian community in which people encounter God and by faith, receive grace and renewal. We have two sacraments in the United Church Baptism and communion.

What is essential in the United Church for communion? Ideally communion would be celebrated as part of a service where the bible has been read and an interpretation has occurred. That is why Communion comes at this time in the order of the worship. After the Word part.

And normally there would be a communion prayer and it would include in some form prayers of thanksgiving for creation *and* for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; or a remembering usually using the words of the story of the last supper this is called the “Anamnesis” and there is usually a prayer for the Holy Spirit to bring us into communion with Christ the “epiclesis”.

According to the United Church the “communion” happens in the actions of the community. What this means is it is not so much about the bread and the juice but about the community sharing the bread and the juice. And of course we use juice and not wine so that there is no barriers for those in recovery programs.

Now the United Church has several methods of celebrating communion. Our practice here is like our forebears the Methodists - one of the denominations that make up who we are. The Methodists brought the elements of communion forward along with the offering. This represented offering the ordinary things of life – money, bread, and juice to be used for holy purposes. In the Methodist church people were invited to come forward for communion, to stand up and move thereby making visible their commitment to Christ. To come forward means to choose. Having made the choice for Christ, the people are nurtured by the bread and juice.

All of this worship takes about 20hours of work to prepare. ///

Soren Kierkegaard tells a parable of a community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear the duck preacher. The duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. With these wings there was nowhere the ducks could not go, there was no God-given task the ducks could not accomplish. With those wings

they could soar into the very presence of God. Shouts of "Amen" were quacked throughout the duck congregation. At the conclusion of the service, the ducks left, commenting on what a wonderful message they had heard -- and waddled back home.

Sometimes we waddle away from worship as we waddled in -- unchallenged and unchanged. Perhaps it is because we are creatures of habit. Our worship is intended to be so much more. So I invite you to dive deep in wonder at what God is gifting us in this time together. May we appreciate the richness - the tradition and the opportunity we have in this time to be transformed – for the world's sake.

Rev Debra Berg

Scripture Lesson February 23, 2020

We have sung together our first lesson this morning – Psalm 100 – Make a joyful noise. And we remember the psalmist words and instructions to be people of worship.

Now we open our hearts and our minds to the words of Paul as he writes a letter of encouragement and instruction to the young church in Colossae.

Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

May these words open to us the Truth that God invites us to live.