

Worship with McClure United Church

May 10, 2020

Opening: *(Debra)*

Good morning

Happy Mother's Day to all women who nurture and care for life this day. In the church this is also Christian family Sunday. I hope you have much to celebrate today.

I'm feeling a bit blue this morning that we are not able to meet together in our church building on this special Sunday. This Sunday is one where I often get to see whole families together as folks are visiting to celebrate their mother or grandmothers. It is so nice to see everyone together. Even though we cannot be together it is so good that you are able to join

Laura, Brian and I as we share with you prayers, and thoughts that we hope will be a gift of worship for you.

This morning we are blessed to include gifts of music by the Coulthard family. Tanya, Ian, Aurora and Kaelyn.

Laura, Brian and I are doing our best to walk with you through this "time of Physical distancing and we want you to feel connected to us and to your church family. So we invite you impute as to how to best meet your needs.

Laura has several zoom gathering going for youth, young adults and children – please check out the website to find out how to connect with those or contact Laura directly by calling the church office and leaving a message. And she is hosting a Zoom Friday coffee time for everyone at 10am each week and if you cannot connect through Zoom you can still be part of this time via the phone so let Laura know if you would like to be part of the Friday coffee and she help you connect.

Brian and I are working on a couple of study group ideas – via zoom and we will have more details for you next week but if you have ideas of what you would like to study or discuss please feel free to send us your thoughts. Email is another effective way to contact all of us of the ministry team.

Prayer: *(Debra)*

God today we worship as one family – younger and older, single and those in relationship. We praise you that you create us in your image and that you create us to be your people in the world. Guide us this day and every day, that we might truly understand our connectedness and that we might learn to live into the justice, the peace and the radical love you call us to. Be alive in us. Amen

Theme Conversation: *(Laura)*

Invite kids to tell me about their families... who are they – what do they love...

What about extended families? Do they have grandparents, cousins?

This Sunday is Christian family Sunday... it's a Sunday in the church year designated to celebrate our church family... those who are part of our faith community.

Now our church family is similar to our other family...

I want to ask you some questions:

Are you and all of your family members exactly the same?

So you all like the same things? Same foods? Same activities?

Do you all have the same ideas? The same way of doing things?

No.. of course you don't. That's what makes your family interesting. It would be so boring if you were all exactly the same.

Can you think of any special gift you bring to your family? Is there something that you can do.. or something you care about.. or some part of who you are that is different from everyone else?

Those individual gifts we each bring to our families makes our families stronger, healthier and way more interesting.

It's the same with our church family...

We have one really big thing in common – our love for God and our desire to learn about and follow in the way of Jesus..

But we also have lots of differences... things that make us unique.

Can you think of some of the special things about children that help make our church family better?

And teenagers help us remember to question everything... and they challenge us to be authentic

Adults have lived longer and have more experience and so can offer advise on how to do things that maybe kids haven't experienced before. They offer stability.

And elders have so much wisdom to share. We all have wisdom but there's no wisdom like that of a person who has lived many many years. This fellow here has lived more than 100 years... he has so much wisdom to share.

Now I want to show you some photos.. this is our church family photo album. I asked people from our church to send me some pictures and many of them did. See if there's anyone here you recognize.

Scripture: Luke 10:25-28 - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (*Lorna & Josie Dosch*)

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.^[a] "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

Reflection: *(Brian)*

At some point in the 1960's The United Church of Canada declared that this Sunday, the one that coincides with 'Mother's Day', should be known as Christian Family Sunday. I am not sure why this decision was made, and a brief survey of the United Church web site revealed no clues. But since both Debra and I reflected on Mother's Day in our midweek FaceBook posts it seemed reasonable to keep with United Church tradition and celebrate Family Sunday. I have to confess that I possess a certain ambivalence about this term. I heartily endorse the Christian way of life and am increasingly of the belief that if such a way of life is to survive it must be preserved, lived out, and passed on through the family. At the same time I am aware that there are those within our culture who use the term 'Christian family' to exclusively describe a heterosexual union which produces 2.5 children; where Father is responsible for the majority of the household income and where mother is the emotional centre of the home. It is likely that this was the predominant description of family when the United Church first conceived of this Sunday. It was certainly the predominant view in the 1960's when television shows like 'Leave it to Beaver' and 'Father Knows Best' defined the culture's view of what a family should look like.

I don't know if families ever mirrored those Hollywood icons, but 'Leave it to Beaver' certainly doesn't represent the diversity of family that exists in the twenty-first century. Of course, there are homes occupied by a Mom, a Dad and two children. I lived in one until our children moved out. Yet, in our home, I'm first to admit that Father did not necessarily know best, nor did I always bring home the largest portion of the family income, nor did I absent myself from the family's emotional life. Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, families are as diverse as the people who inhabit them. Statistically, the second most common family to be found in our culture is that of a female parent raising her children more or less independently. Perhaps, on Mother's Day, our hats should go off to those mother's ahead of any other. But the diversity of family only opens up from there. Single fathers, shared parenting, same-sex parents, cross-cultural parents, custodial grandparents, fostering, adoption, stay-at-home Mom's, stay-at-home Dad's, communal lifestyles, guardianship ... the list goes on. Shame on anyone who would exclude this diversity from the definition of Christian family.

It would appear that those quarters of the Christian community who advocate a narrow view of family have not read their Bible's very carefully. While we may describe Mary, Joseph and their children as the 'Holy Family' (albeit that their family commenced without benefit of marriage), diversity is far from unknown in the Christian scriptures. We Christians share the same great grandparents with our Jewish and Muslim neighbours, and Abraham and Sarah had anything but a 'normal' family. Childless for most of their marriage Abraham, at the urging of his wife, had conjugal relationships with his wife's servant Hagar. Ishmael, the child which they conceived wrestled a favour from God even as Sarah, at an advanced age, was finally able to conceive. Turning in the other direction from Mary and Joseph we must look at their son,

our Lord, Jesus. The testimony of scripture suggests that Jesus never entered into marriage or fathered any children although he acted like a favourite uncle to many. It would appear that Jesus made a family out of his band of disciples, a kind of communal family - would it be akin to modern day communes or Hutterite colonies? Jesus even goes so far as to challenge those who limit the definition of family, rhetorically asking, 'Who is my mother and my brother?'

If a Christian family cannot be described in sociological terms, then what constitutes a Christian family? I believe that a Christian family is comprised of spiritual, not sociological, characteristics. Jesus answered his own question by telling people that his mother and his brothers and his sisters were anyone who did the will of God. And what is the will of God? While there are many potential responses to that question, Jesus restated the old Deuteronomic maxim which has become known as the Greatest Commandment: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your soul; and love your neighbour as yourself.'

Surely a family - be it a single mom and her kids, a gay couple or a husband and wife with a new set of twins - surely a family becomes Christian to the extent that they are able to live out this maxim to love. Love God with heart and mind and soul. How do we do that as a family? How do we teach that to our kids? Well, first off, by speaking of God within the family. For too long United Church folks have relied on the culture and the institutional church to teach their children about what is Holy. We are now in crisis mode for the culture is refusing the job and the church is struggling to remain relevant. Teaching your children to have God in their heart and mind and soul now, more than ever, falls to the family.

I was surprised, when Debra and I first worked together, by her conviction that children needed help to learn the Lord's Prayer. Since my kids attended a Catholic School, I was totally unaware of how in the public system the Lord's Prayer had become as archaic and unfamiliar as the lyrics to God Save the Queen. This central and comprehensive prayer of Jesus is vanishing from many homes. I don't blame the school system for their decision for we live in a wonderfully diverse culture, I challenge Christian families to pray together. Of course, there is a difference between kids learning to pray by rote and kids learning to pray as their parents pray. My forty year old neighbour told me the story about her seventy year old father. Her folks had come into the city for her mother's surgery and my neighbour's Dad was staying with her for a few days. Her Dad had always talked about prayer but my neighbour didn't know what it meant to him until she accidentally walked into her Dad's bedroom to find him on his seventy-year old knees saying his nightly prayers. Prayer took on a whole new meaning for my neighbour that night. Intimations of a Christian family.

Perhaps one way in which a Christian family might experience the love of God is through love of neighbour. We live in a culture that is increasingly suspicious of neighbour. Police checks are routinely required of scout leaders and ball coaches. Parents keep their children home on Hallowe'en. People with strange names or customs are suspected of terrorism. A Christian family need not abandon legitimate concerns about safety, but must surely teach

their children to look for the Spirit of God in others. My friend from St. Martin's – the refugee advocate – always encouraged her children to have a concern for the neighbour. As she welcomed refugees to Saskatoon she also included them in her family expanding the thanksgiving table to 15 and 20 people. Her children learned about diversity, other cultural traditions and the ability to survive hardship by intermingling with these folks who had been "adopted" into their family. This opened their eyes to the abundance they had as a family and together they decided to forego Christmas gifts with each other, instead selecting individual charities to be recipients of the funds that would have bought presents. Intimations of a Christian family.

Finally, a Christian family encourages its members to love and honour themselves. It is when we are able to do this that we can genuinely reach out to others. The person unable to value their own worth is often the first to criticize someone else for being different. A Christian family promotes love of self by valuing its own members and by listening to and respecting the views of its members. A child comes home from school embarrassed with a hundred lines to write. One of the rowdy boys had shoved her down at recess and she responded by swearing at him. The teacher chastised her and sent her home with lines to write. That evening, after the lines had been written, her mother sits at her side. Her mother explains that while there may have been a more creative response than swearing, that ultimately she needed to do whatever was necessary to protect herself. She was a person of worth and under no circumstances should she settle for bullying, her life was too precious. Intimations of a Christian family.

The Christian families I know don't wear a sign around their neck, nor are they described by the number of parents in the home. The Christian families I know attempt, in ways large and small, to love God, to love neighbour and to love themselves. And, from time to time, they place themselves in the midst of a community such as the church for renewal and refreshment. Together we welcome one another singing out: 'Come in, come in and come in and sit down, for you – all of us together - are part of the family.' Amen.

Prayers of the People: (Debra)

Loving God and Parent of All, as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wing, gather us now in prayer.

God, we give thanks for the women among us and around us, who live with the privilege and the challenge of being mothers and mother figures.

For all mothers, everywhere - Strengthen them in the ways that they raise their children, grant them wisdom for the lessons that they teach, discernment in the ways that they direct and love that transforms and inspires.

We thank you for grandmothers, sisters, aunts, teachers, Sunday school teachers, adult mentors, big sisters, and anyone, everywhere, who plays a mothering role in the life of a child. Grant them the ability to model holy love for all within their influence that they might share the love that you have so freely show to all of us.

We give thanks for all women who are working on the front lines during this pandemic. Challenge us to support and care for them as they support and care for us.

We pause to remember those for whom Mother's Day is a source of discomfort, anxiety or pain:

For some, this day brings to mind melancholy - remembrance of their own mothers who have died. For all those who grieve grant your peace and comfort.

There may be those for whom Mother's Day is a painful reminder of their own singleness, or their own inability to have biological children. Give these your special care and love - grant them your assurance that they are not alone.

And to those for whom their experience with and memory of their own mothers has brought enduring anger, pain, remorse, and guilt, grant the power of healing and forgiveness. Remind us of the wrongs we have done to each other, and the power we have, in your name, to bridge even the deepest divides.

And now God as we rest in your loving arms, we offer prayer for our troubled world. We pray this morning for those who do not have a home, who struggle for simple food, who are alone. May all find a place of refuge and may those who can reach out find the courage and resources to do so.

We continue to hold the people of Nova Scotia in our prayers for even though their story is no longer in the news we know their hearts still break in grief.

We pray for our brothers and sisters of the North where the pandemic is surging. Let us be swift in sharing resources and quick to respond to needs.

We know that during this pandemic incidence of Violence against women has been on the increase. Turn our thinking that allows this abuse to continue and open the ears and hearts of those who can help.

God who is loving father and mother to us all hear our prayers this morning and in your love answer. We pray as followers of Jesus who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 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: *(Laura and various church family members)*

Whether together or apart, we... the people of McClure...
this Christian family... have built a where love can, and does, dwell.

We are the love of God.

Individually we make this world a better... brighter.. place

Together... bound by the unity of Christ... we are unstoppable.

Together... we can fill this place... from floor to rafter,

From the earth to the sky...

With the welcoming and abundant love of God.

May it be so. Amen.

(this blessing was followed by several members of the congregation saying the words to the hymn "All Are Welcome")

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.