

Sacred Earth: Sacred Work

Week 2 – September 19

Spirit of Compassion

~Gathering~

Welcome and Announcements

Welcome to worship with McClure United church. As was described in the introduction we are a faith community that does its best to be a church of welcome and of service to others.

I'm glad you have chosen to worship with us today.

This is one of my most favorite times of year I love the cooler weather and I love how creation puts on the most stunning display of colours.

The United Church has named this time of worship together as a season when we pay particular attention to all of creation and to our interconnectedness with it. Laura and I have chosen to focus on our holy inter-connection with creation using a resource entitled "Sacred Earth: Sacred Work." As you take a deep breath of the crisp air, appreciate the changing colours of the trees and experience more time with the moon - as the days get in - it is our hope your heart will be moved to worship with deep gratitude and humility, our God of creation.

Though our focus for **our worship** time is clear how we worship is a work in progress. Many of us, including Laura and I hoped that we would all be back in the McClure church building enjoying the gifts of worshipping together and getting reacquainted however we need to be patient just a bit longer.

We were going to begin Live Streaming next week but we are going to wait on that. Live streaming would place our tech folks and worship leaders at risk. Though worship is important so to is our commitment to care for one another. So we will continue to provide worship as we have, these past 18 months. This means you will continue to receive an email on Sunday morning with the link to watch worship.

Youth, Young adult and children's ministry news.

Youth group will begin gathering next week but the format is still up in the air so watch for Laura's note to each of you coming this week.

Junior Youth - grades 6-8 will be led by Mark Anderson and again watch for format news.

Children (3 years to grade 5 or 6) we miss you so much – and we want to see you and have fun learning together but we are waiting to see you in person when the whole congregation gathers in person and we don't know when that will be. Eden will once again be providing leadership for our awesome kids and we will be checking with families again about interest in a Zoom gathering on Sunday mornings.

October 3 at 7pm Laura and I invite you to join us for an on line zoom communion service. Please bring some bread and some juice and an item from faraway. Perhaps you have a

souvenir from a vacation, or a little something you purchased at Ten Thousand Villages, maybe you have a travel book from another part of the world, or a postcard from a friend please bring that item with you to the service.

As we keep doing our best to **Be the Church** a reminder that the Outreach committee would like you to save all your cans and bottles in support of Cosmo Industries and bring them on over to the church parking lot on Friday, September 24th between 10am and 2pm. Money raised will go to Cosmo Industries.

Women's and Men's Saturday Morning 8am gatherings are starting again with the Men gathering this coming Saturday the 25 and the Women October 2 via zoom. Send me an email if you would like to get the link information or call the office.

Speaking of our **office** – Avyn has left us to work for Knox United Church so we are currently in the process of pulling together a search committee to find a new Office administrator. Irene our current part time office/finance person will be covering many office tasks while we search. So thanks Irene for being willing to help out and thank you also to some very special volunteers. We think we can keep the office open Tuesday – Thursday 9:00 till 3:30 as a result of us all working together. If you happen to call and know one is able to answer the phone please leave a message and know that someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

This list of announcement reminds me of those Sundays in September when we worshiped in the building and there was a long line of folks on the ramp ready to share announcements. It was nice to hear so many voices and to see so many folks offering leadership. You must be getting a bit weary of hearing my voice and Laura's all the time. I ask you to keep all our wonderful leaders in prayer even though we don't hear their voices or see their faces in the worship format.

Laura is now going to help us centre our hearts as we worship.

Intro to Theme

It is through the work of spiritual practice that we move beyond fear into compassion and discover our deep and true selves. Engaging in spiritual practices—whether that looks typically religious (like praying) or not (like walking) have *intentionality* in common. They draw us closer to the Creator and who we were created to be—free and compassionate beings. What practices in your life draw you closer to your true essence and closer to compassion for others?

Candle Lighting

Call to Worship: “Come all You People” MV 2

Opening Prayer

Compassionate God, You who know our hearts and love us without condition, create in us desire to see your essence within us so that we might see that in others, and honor your holy presence in all things. We praise you for this place, this day, this people, this planet. Amen.

Music: “For the Beauty of the Earth” - Elin Sletmoen

~Engaging~

Scripture: Mark 12: 28-34

Reflection: Rev. Debra Berg

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

This week I had the privilege of speaking with a nurse who works on the COVID unit at RUH. It felt like a privilege because I am in awe of what our health care workers are enduring. I heard in her voice discouragement and disbelief about the cruelty of some patients. I also so heard strength and purpose and a deep commitment to do the right thing and to care for others even when we disagree with them. Her stories both broke my heart and made me even more grateful to those health care professionals who are committed to “loving their neighbour” even when their neighbour is not easy to love. I heard her stories echoed in the stories of a health care worker, a doctor from Alberta, who was being interviewed on CBC radio Wednesday morning. Her stories were not easy to hear, stories of being physically and verbally assaulted as she attempted to do her work. People refusing to believe they have Covid even though they have tested positive and are struggling to breathe; stories about people who refuse to be treated as she, the doctor, recommends but rather are demanding to be given a horse de-wormer.

We all watched the news this past week and saw folks standing outside of City Hospital supposedly protesting – stating that no one has the authority to make them get vaccinated or to make them wear a mask. I’m not sure why they were outside the hospital – seems smarter to be at the legislature but in our province as my recording this sermon, there are only a few groups being mandated to be vaccinated and to wear masks.

Protests were held across our country with some people arguing about their human rights and government issued directives. I found it interesting that for many of these folks who - were so staunchly opposed to vaccination for the good of their neighbour - seemed to be first in line to be vaccinated when it meant they might not be able to go to a restaurant or football game. All this is to say we don’t have to look far to understand what it means to be living in a climate of challenge and anger.

Today's lesson from Mark, comes after several stories of challenge and argument. Jesus is challenged, by the religious leaders of the day to tell them by what authority he teaches. Then he is confronted by a question about taxes followed by a ridiculous question about whose wife a woman would be if she married 7 brothers in succession and they all died and then she dies. "Jesus way" is being challenged from various directions and then comes our story that Glenda read for us.

The story tells us that a scribe wanders into this atmosphere of challenge and argument - and he cuts through it all - right to the quick of the matter. He asks Jesus a different question a question he already has the answer to. He asks, Jesus what is at the heart of it all – what is the greatest commandment because from that all else will flow. Jesus answers. , "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ///The very simple answer is love God with all you got, and love your neighbour as yourself.

The scribe's question is so very helpful because it is not intended to divide or win or to prove superiority over the other, rather his question is one of finding common ground. And the common ground is love. Jesus states this truth clearly and the religious leader – perceived to be on the other side – agrees. At the core, beyond the rules and the laws and the mandates is God and God's call to love. //

When it comes to our very human relationship with creation we have argued long about our place.

Some would argue that we are to have dominion over creation. I think many of us have assumed that because humanity was – so the story goes in Genesis – because we were made by our creator on the sixth day – the last day - we are the pinnacle of creation. But have you ever noticed that cows were also created on day six. It is the only critter specifically named. The story talks about the creation of all living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind and people too.

So if we thought the sixth day was saved just to create us well, I'm afraid we share that honour with our grass eating, big eyed cow friends. It might also be interesting to note that God did not bless the sixth day of creation - the day humans were formed - no God blessed the seventh day. The day of rest and renewal – the day the whole of the creation started its life together, complete and good.

In 1967 historian Lynn White wrote an article for science magazine in which he charged that the roots of the ecological crisis are essentially religious. The ecological problems derived from Christian tradition in particular, he said, which has taught people to view themselves as superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim. This has been so very destructive.

One of the historic ways that people of faith have interpreted their divine right to dominion over the earth is this view that you don't have to ask a tree before you knock it over for a subdivision. You just knock it down push it into a pile with the corpses of other trees and set it on fire. Then you are free to scrape and clear cut earth free of green moss, unsuspecting toads and a couple of 1000 years worth of topsoil before calling the pavers to come cover the space with steaming asphalt. You are Lord over this playground after all God said so – is it is all for you.

A lot has of happened since 1967, so much that I don't hear many Christians sounding like those with dominion anymore. The word I hear more often these days is "stewards" we are stewards of God's creation - not masters - but divine servants entrusted with caring for the vineyard. In in this view you can still build your subdivision but you're going to save all the trees you can, planting two for everyone you cut down and at least covering the exposed topsoil with wheat straw so that it doesn't blow away.

And why will we go to all this trouble - which will certainly cost you more money - because the earth does not belong to us it is on loan to us. Steward is better than one with dominion but I think we are called to something even better. Because a steward manages an estate which likens the earth to a possession and links safekeeping to self interest. Steward suggests that we don't care for rivers fields and skies because they are a divine creation in their own right rather we do it because we'll get in trouble if we don't, we act from duty not love, which may not be enough for this warming world of ours. We will not work to save what we do not love.

That's why I want to keep scouring our tradition for more ways to conceive of our dominion over the earth by which I mean our high privilege of being in relationship with creation.

What if we, suggests Barbara Brown Taylor, what if we were considered "priest" in creation. Someone who looks at the vineyard and

sees more than low stone walls, hand plowed furrows and seed sacks
someone who sees an altar laid with God's good gifts just waiting for
someone to bless them and hold them up to heaven again.

Now the image of priest may leave some of us Protestants a bit cold
so how about we see ourselves as neighbor in creation. Neighbor will work
won't it - and who is my neighbor - do only two legged ones qualify or do
my neighbors include the four legged ones the winged ones the ones with
fins and fur ? Does compassion stop with human suffering or does it
extend to every creature in need of mercy - especially those with no voice
of their own to cry out for help - who will bind the wounds of the tree frog
the emperor Penguin, the trout - we will not work to save what we do not
love. Remember - God so loves us - but not a Sparrow falls to the ground
without causing a shudder in the divine heart.

I like neighbor but maybe even better – stick with me on this – what
about “Lover”. If we were put here in the image of the one who made us
then the only dominion we can possibly exercise is the dominion of love;
without condition, without distinction, without self interest, or secret
devotion to any other dominion including the one in which the value of all
things is reduced to their price

I think that is the way it is with God's creatures, we are here because
of the God power and if that energy made us and makes us; then we live
by love. We are here to preside over the dominion of love in God's name.
Now I'm not sure how to live this love in this argumentative, polarize,
and challenging time but I know I have to try – it is the only way,
It is the only way to save this planet,

it is the only way to get through this time of Covid

it is not easy and it is messy

but love is the only way

it is the way of Jesus.

God help us all.

God hold us

God teach us

God strengthen us

God love us all.

Amen

~Responding~

Music: “God, We Praise You For the Morning” – Jim & Jean Strathdee

Dedication of Offering and Prayers of the People

For months now you have continued your stewardship of this faith community as we found our way online. Covid may have kept us from being in the church building, but it has not kept us from being the church. So many of you have donated your time, helping us to discern and make decisions about keeping one another safe... the church board and many of the committees have continued to meet on Zoom... you've shown up for discussion groups and Bible studies... we've continued and you've continued to be a church that cares about and connects with the wider community through various outreach projects.

You have also continued to support the ministries of this church financially.

Thank you! Your gifts, whatever they may be, are a blessing!

And so we begin our time of prayer now with a dedication of all the offerings that have been freely given and gratefully received.

Generous God,

It is such a blessing to give and to receive, to share and support the ministries of this church as we do our best to live out our mission... our mission to worship, to study and to serve so that we might reflect your love in the world. May all of the offerings we have received be a source of hope and love in this faith community and in the communities around us. Amen.

And now I invite you... as Debra did last week... to make a fist with your hands and imagine in those clenched fists are all the things that you are holding tightly: maybe its fear, anxiety, worry, grief, loneliness, helplessness.

Or you might be thinking of a specific circumstance that is weighing heavy on you right now.

Now I invite you to slowly open your fists and imagine letting go...

letting go into the loving embrace of the Spirit...

the Spirit who receives and transforms all things.

As we let go and open up, may we see that now our hands and feel that our hearts are more ready to hold, with love, the concerns of others and the pain of the world.

And so we pray now for the the world...

There are so many places and people around our world facing horrific loss and ongoing danger. WE continue to hold the people of Haiti and China in prayer as they recover from earthquakes... we pray for the people of aghanistan as they continue to live in the midst of violence and fear. We pray for all countries where there is political unrest and corruption... where people live in fear and uncertainty.

We pray for our own country as we prepare for the election. We pray for all of the leaders and their supporters. Praying that respect and kindness will direct us all. Praying that those in leadership will be guided by courage, strength and integrity.

We continue to pray for all of those so impacted by COVID... for those who are sick, for their family and friends... for those who are isolated and desperately lonely... for those who have had to cancel special plans and celebrations... for those who are feeling the ache of not being able to hug their children, grandchildren and other special people in their lives... may they feel strengthened and supported by that love and by the care of others. And may we all continue to seek ways to reach out and offer that care in whatever ways we are able

We pray especially for all of the health care workers. May they be strengthened and sustained by your love and by the love and gratitude of so many of us. They are carrying a heavy load. Guide us all to know how we can help – may we be open to your wisdom.

We also continue to pray for all of the front line workers... they too are carrying a heavy load as they show up each day for work... doing what needs to be done – even when the risk is high.

... we all need your courage, wisdom and strength as we continue to move forward into the unknown

And we pray for all those in parts of the world who have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated. When in our city and in many other places across Canada, we all have the privilege of access to vaccinations... help us to feel the weight of that privilege and to carry our privilege responsibly... and with gratitude.

We pray ongoing violence and in Awe continue to pray for all of those in our community and around the world

We pray for all your people God who are struggling right now.. for those who are sick... those struggling with their mental health... those who are grieving, lonely, worried and afraid... for those fearful of their future – of the unknown.. those struggling with addictions... we hold all your people God in love, trusting in your presence and in the hope you offer. As prayed by St. Francis of Assisi.. .may we all be instruments of your peace... your love... your forgiveness... your hope.. your light... your joy.

I invite you to place your hands now on your heart and sit with God in just a moment of quiet... a time for us to lift up all those things difficult to put into words, but felt in the depths of our hearts...

Thank you God for receiving our prayers, for opening our hands and hearts... and for your love and compassion – holding us close, even while we are apart.

And we pray together now the prayer that Jesus taught as we sing together the Lord's Prayer.

Commissioning

Sung Blessing: *"You Shall Go Out with Joy"*

You shall go out with joy

And be led forth with peace.

The mountains and the hills will break forth before you.

There'll be shouts of joy

And the trees of the fields

will clap, will clap their hands.

And the trees of the fields will clap their hands,

**the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
the trees of the fields will clap their hands,
While you go out with joy.**