

Worship for January 19, 2022

Baptism of Christ Sunday

Acknowledgment

Welcome and Announcements

Hello friends and welcome to the worship of God with the McClure United Church community

Wow, a lot happens when a girl takes a couple of days off. In person worship has been suspended for the time being and I'm not sure if we are back to plan B or are now on plan C or D but it is good to still be able to worship together through recorded technology.

We are hoping to resume in-person worship as soon as it's safe to do so but we are taking Dr. Shahab's advice and choosing not to have in-person gatherings.

I want to thank everyone who continues to do the hard work of shifting and changing and making adjustments over and over again not only around worship but so many other things as well - we will get through this together.

I think it's more important than ever to take time to care for our spirits. So, continue to use this resource for worship and perhaps seek out other online resources that give your mind and heart energy. One of the best ways to feed our souls is to connect with those we love and care about - so perhaps call a friend you haven't talked to in awhile and check in.

One activity you might find interesting is a noon hour bible study available during the week of prayer for Christian Unity which begins Tuesday January 18 and runs through until the 25th. Participation is free - visit our website or check the link in today's email to find out how to register and other details.

You may have heard Laura being interviewed by CBC radio on Thursday morning or seen her on CBC News the other day. Laura has been busy making a multi-colored wall in her front yard. Laura has been inspired by a multi – regional challenge to create something of joy using ice and snow. Early in February Laura and I will be inviting you to bring your ideas and your warmest pair of mitts so that we might create something of joy on the grounds of McClure United Church. We will link this activity with our February focus on caring for refugees. So, find your warmest snow pants, a few heart shaped molds and get your thinking toque on.

Now most churches explored the Baptism of Jesus last week – on the actual Baptism of Jesus Sunday but hey we are bending the norm a bit and so we are hearing this blessed story this week.

So, I invite you to quiet your self and imagine yourself on the banks of the river Jordan, with its muddy waters lapping the shore and your feet.

Call to Worship

As we gather for worship, we light this candle – as a symbol of the light that Jesus brings and a reminder for us to let our light shine so that others may know his love,

(light candle) Jesus Christ – light of the world.

Let us Worship together...

Gathering Song: Hope Shines as a Solitary Star sung by Kristie Elliott

Opening Prayer:

Let us take a moment without words, to listen to the sound of pouring water – water that symbolizes life... nourishment... renewal. AS we listen, we prepare our hearts and minds for worship...

remembering the baptism of Jesus... let's hear God speak "you are my beloved – in you I am well pleased". Let us also remember that those words are for us as well. Feel God's love surround you...

listen to the water and remember that you too are God's beloved – you are loved... God's heart belongs to you... your heart belongs to God.

Let us pray in quiet – listening for God in the sound of water. (pour water)

Amen.

Hymn: Like a Healing Stream sung by Sacred Sounds

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17 read by Karen Kovac

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to Him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Reflection

I didn't like swimming lessons, but my parents felt it was an important skill to learn - just to be safe. I did not like putting my face in the water which is an important component in learning to swim. I could never coordinate my breathing to take in air and blow it out through my nose when in the water. I just managed to suck water up my nose and surface just in time to choak, cough and sputter. It wasn't pretty, but I can tread water and float so thanks Mom and Dad.

My first boat ride began off the front step of my Aunt Freda's doorstep on 1st Street. Saskatoon had had a terrible storm and my aunt and uncle had called the family in - as their street started to flood. We parked by the library – higher ground - and walked over to the house. The water kept rising. Different members of my family were strategically placed around the house on the inside. Two were at the back door mopping up the water that snuck under the door and there was one person at each basement windowsill wiping soaking up water. My job was to stay out of the way. We all managed our jobs for several hours and things seemed to be going rather well until the sewer backed up and then it was rescue what you can. I remember watching from the steps as the freezer float by along with a tub of Christmas wrap. What a mess. We left that day via a canoe from the front step atop 3-4 feet of water. All this to say - I am not fond of the water.

Sally Haynes tells this story:

It was the summer after my senior year of high school, and I was working with a Christian outreach ministry with other college students on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. It was my day off from my paid work of cleaning bathhouses, so I wandered over to the small sailboat franchise we also helped run. There wasn't a paying customer in sight, so the two guys working it decided it would be okay if we took a boat out onto the water. It might even drum up some business for someone to see our sail. And so there we were, the three of us. As the guys steered and managed the sail, I looked lazily into the water below. There were schools of jellyfish beneath us, and somehow seeing them below while we sailed across the surface seemed to magnify my sense of security and enjoyment of the beauty of the day.

Until that moment when the wind changed suddenly. Our small boat capsized, dumping all three of us into the water. I heard the yelps of the guys immediately as they splashed into a school of jellyfish. But not me. As chance would have it, I had been flung into the sail. There I sat, in water but surrounded by the sail, as if I was in my own private wading pool. And there was not a jellyfish to be found in my private pool.

"Sally, get off of the sail so that we can get the boat up!"

I would like to say that, as soon as I heard the cries of pain of my friends, I immediately and bravely leapt out of the sail into the school of jellyfish.

I would like to say that. The reality wasn't nearly so community minded.

Instead, I hesitated - doing the math in my head. I was pretty cozy in my bubble. I didn't even have to tread water because the sail was keeping me afloat. I was perfectly content to hang out there a while. Especially because the boys continued to get stung by jellyfish out there. I could hear their rising impatience at me, but I knew that the moment I splashed out of the sail into the water, I would get stung by jellyfish, too. Nope, I decided, I was perfectly content sitting in my sail.

The thing that finally got me out of the sail? The mathematical certainty that if I didn't get out of the sail, we'd never go anywhere. And even I knew that we couldn't stay out there all day and all night. And so, I finally plopped myself into the jellyfish-laden water, getting stung immediately and continually while we righted the boat as quickly as possible and clambered aboard. We sailed back to shore as quickly as we could to tend to our stings.

Sally's story rings true for me. Things are just fine and dandy on the dry ground or surface of the water but the water itself holds many challenges - even dangers.

Scriptures would seem to agree. In our one of our creation stories, water is the fathomless deep which God must divide to allow for sky to be created. Water must then be pushed aside and gathered together to allow for the creation of land. When God saved the people from slavery according to the story from Hebrew Scriptures, God doesn't give them swimming lessons. No, as God's people are fleeing slavery in Egypt, God parts the chaos of the sea so that they can cross through safely on dry land so they can continue their journey to the Promised Land. Through God's wisdom and grace, they do not have to deal with the dangers within the watery deeps.

Scriptural witness is consistent that water is a place of chaos and flooding, and a place of danger, somewhere that should only be ventured into with divine protection.

And that is exactly where God sends Jesus in his baptism.

Now, I raised my kids largely in the 1990's and 2000's, which tells you that I raised them in the era of overprotective parenting. Without wanting to sound immodest, I want you to know that I was very good at that. Before any child of mine went to play at a friend's house, I had to meet the parents first. Before they walked into a classroom, I already had checked out the teacher. Even when they were of the age to drive, I knew where they were driving and who they were with at all times, well at least as much as possible. You can ask my boys, they'll confirm my excellence at protectiveness, although they just maybe might roll their eyes a bit as they do.

And so, I hate to sound judgmental of the parenting skills of God but sending your boy into the water? It's dangerous in there.

Here is Jesus, about to start three years of desperately needed ministry. He'll be teaching and healing and feeding people. He will develop passionate followers and determined opponents. People will follow him, and they'll turn on him. They'll praise him and wave palms and yell crucify him, and we all know how that story turns out. And in preparation for the hazards of life ahead, God sends Jesus into the water?

The protective mom in me would have been standing on the side of the Jordan river, saying, "Jesus! Put on a life preserver! Watch out for jellyfish and sharks and, oh my!"

But, no, Jesus goes right up to John, who plunges him deep down into the water for who knows how long. John then pulls him back up, and Jesus has water in his hair, in his eyes, up his nose and as Jesus catches his breath and shakes off all that water, God's voice echoes, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

I'm glad you were pleased, God, but why did you let him get there in first place?

Once again, it is great good news that God is God, and I am not.

I prefer to stand safely on dry land, with my feet dry and my hair unmussed, living life safely on the surface, sitting happily in a sail like Sally.

But of course, life is not lived in the safe places, and I kind of hate that.

Yes, there are warm and sunny sailboat days, and yet life happens often in the water, in the dangerous places. Life happens during sleepless nights and worry-filled days. Life happens in the families that we have been given, even if they're not always the ones we would have chosen. Life happens in the schools and libraries, both the ones that are well-resourced and the ones that struggle as much as the families they serve. Life happens on the streets and in the prison cells and in the legal system. Life happens at the ballot box and in the food banks and the safe shelters. Life happens at the bedsides of the children's hospital and nursing homes and the hospice. Life happens in the bodies of people with disease and in the research labs that seek cures. Life happens in the rain and cold, on the sidewalks outside of places of power and inside of those same places of power, too. Life happens in the hurricane, earthquake, flood-afflicted parts of the earth. Life happens in the churches that are thriving and in those that wonder how they'll keep the lights on, if not for themselves then for - what new thing God is doing amongst the next generation. Life happens in the uncomfortable conversations we'd rather not have but must. Life happens everywhere that people exist, which means that life happens on lovely cloudless days, and it happens on every other day also.

And it turns out that when life takes us into the deep water over our heads, the same waters Jesus' entered in his baptism we are reminded of an important truth.

We aren't the first ones in.

Jesus has already gone ahead of us. It's not that we are farthest from God when we are at our lowest point, but rather we are simply treading water where Jesus has already been swimming.

When we find ourselves exactly where we never wanted to be, if somehow, we're able to listen through our fear and our pain and our tears and our hurry, perhaps we might hear the echoing words of the One who loves us so very much and who never leaves us:

You are my beloved child, and in you I am so pleased.

I cling to the belief that this is enough. This assurance that God is so pleased with us, not because our lives have been smooth sailing, but because even in the deepest waters we are, of course and always, God's beloved child.

Just maybe these words will bring us a bit of peace in these challenging times. We can take confidence and manage to keep our head above water just a little bit longer, beloved and bedraggled as we may be in the waters of life, because we know with certainty this one thing:

Jesus went into the water and came out again, and so indeed shall we. So shall we.

Amen.

Hymn: Out of the Deep Unordered Waters sung by Merrilyn Coomber

Prayers of the People

And now let us gather our hearts and minds and offer our prayers to the source of all love and all life

Holy One... through the baptism of Jesus, you have infused the world with your Holy Spirit – We pray for your love and mercy for this world; for all nations and peoples who continue to struggle in this pandemic, for government and community leaders, making difficult decisions in the midst of competing voices; for those responsible for the fair and equitable distribution of vaccines, and for the exhaustion and continuing burden carried by hospital and front-line workers. Help us to remember and give thanks for all who work on our behalf. God of grace:

Immerse us in your Spirit.

For the vulnerable in our midst- Indigenous communities, those in long-term care, in prison, and for the homeless, and all those whose ordinarily difficult daily challenge of providing food and lodging for themselves and their families is made more desperate in this pandemic time. Help us to see and respond to the less visible in our community. God of grace: Immerse us in your Spirit.

For all who are suffering in mind, body or spirit -; for those working with strained or broken relationships, and those suffering with addictions, depression or despair; for those trying to offer

primary care, pastoral care, and support in the midst of pandemic restrictions. Help us to embrace your world. God of grace: Immerse us in your Spirit.

For those who are struggling with being separated from family, from friends, and from their faith communities, in this congregation and around the world – especially those who are isolated from their usual supportive relationships; for all who are part of the McClure community struggling to celebrate together the gift of the Christ, and to experience our unity in the Spirit. Help us to reach out to them. God of grace: Immerse us in your Spirit.

For your Church around the world; for its leaders lay and clergy; for The United Church of Canada.... our Moderator, Richard Bott, for all the communities of faith who are committed to serving you. May we seek and embrace your will in all things, trusting that you will empower us to be a source of your love to everyone we encounter. God of grace: Immerse us in your Spirit.

Living God, we thank you for revealing the depth of your love for us in person of Jesus Christ, the light of the world... your beloved son. Help us to respond to the gift of your Holy Spirit and thereby follow Christ in all that we think, say, and do. This we pray in his name.

And we continue to pray together the words that he taught us.... Our Father/Mother, who art in

Hymn: Bathe Me in Your Light sung by Lorna Dosch

Benediction:

Today we joined Jesus at the Jordan;

We give thanks that he entered its waters.

We celebrate that he came out changed and assured that he is God's beloved.

We celebrate that we too have entered the waters of baptism and heard God's whisper – you are my beloved.

With water dripping from our hair and the echo of God's assurance may we go into our week.

Assured and blessed for the work of assuring and blessing others.

Amen.

Sung Blessing: We are Marching sung by Sacred Sounds