

Worship for February 20, 2022 with McClure & St. Martin's United Churches

Acknowledgment Video

A 1 minute video acknowledging the land and that we are affirming ministries.

Welcome and Announcements *(Laura/Keith)*

Welcome to another adventure with McClure United Church as we continue to find our way on this journey into the world of new technology... and today we are so excited to be welcoming our friends at St. Martin's United Church who have been gracious enough to offer to come along for the ride.

As you all know we are soon going to be joining with our new partners from Carlyle and Radville United Churches as well as Abbey-Lancer Pastoral Charge for Sunday morning worship by satellite. St. Martin's are our... test dummies... I mean have offered to help us out with testing the equipment. And, in turn we get to help them out as one of their ministry team is off on medical leave. So today Keith Hall, one of the ministry team at St. Martin's United Church will be leading us in prayer and Brian Walton, who many of you will know, will be offering the reflection time.

Neither of our congregations currently have in person worship so its just Debra and I over here at McClure, along with our music leaders Shirley & Elin and our amazing tech support people up in the sound booth.

We hope this will be meaningful time of worship for our communities joining us on livestream today and those who will be watching the recorded version a little later. If its not meaningful... and I'm sure that would only be if technology goes haywire... I hope at least it is amusing.

We will be testing this out with St. Martin's today and next Sunday and then the following Sunday, which is the first Sunday in Lent... we will be joined by our partners... and hopefully before then we will be able to share some information with you about returning to in person worship.

We do have a couple announcements to share with you.

The details of everything I am about to share can be found on our website, Facebook page and in the weekly email you should have received this morning... so I'm just going to give a quick summary of what you should be looking for. Of course, if you can't find the information you need, please give us a call at the church office.

I'll share the most exciting announcement first... its budget talk time!!

Please join us for our congregational meeting... which will be on Zoom... on Sunday March 27 at 1pm to talk about our 2022 Operational and Capital budgets. Hard copies of the materials are available at the church office and online copies can be found on our website along with the Zoom link.

Also exciting.. is the Lenten Book study coming up. Debra and I will be leading study which will happen on Wednesday nights at 7pm... this will be happening both in person and on Zoom and we are asking the folks pre-register. The books have already been ordered but if you missed out you can still order your own copy – a digital or a hard copy on the united church bookstore website.

Secondly, we are still planting hearts for refugees and what a beautiful garden we have going on out in the snowbank. Its really starting to fill out but there is still lots of garden space so don't forget to make a \$20 donation to plant a heart in support of refugees.

I also want to let the families with children know that I will be delivering Lent at Home kits to you sometime in the next couple of weeks... if you do not normally receive those kits and would like one, please let me know as soon as possible and I will include your family for sure.

and that's all I have for announcements so we are going to turn it over to Keith to share announcements from St. Martin's.

Gathering Song: Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying (*Shirley and Elin*)

Candle Lighting/Call to Worship (*Debra*)

It has been a week!

From chocolate hearts to imposition of the "Emergency Act".

From Olympic medals to record high inflation.

From Hearts planted in the snow to support refugees to military build up on the Ukrainian border.

And some how our God is in the midst of it all.

Our God, whose light finds its way into the most shadowed corners.

Our God, whose warmth softens the hardest heart.

Is there

Is here

We light our Christ Candle as a sign of God's brilliant, and relentless presence. *Light Candle*

We are weary from the stresses of the week?

We are burdened with problems we cannot solve?

We are weighed down by the uncertainty of our times?

We come to worship;

for God meets us in

the music - the Word - the offering, the prayers and the blessing.

Come, let us find refreshment in community with God and with one another.

Come, let us find strength for our journey and courage so that we might offer all that we are for the care of our neighbour and for the sake of Jesus.

Come it is time to worship.

Opening Prayer (*Keith*)

Loving and generous God, you are the font of every blessing, the source of all we have. Your breath gives us life, your love gives us courage and strength, healing, and compassion. You care for us like a loving parent and feed our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. We thank you for your abundance given freely to all. For your love, which knows no bounds, and for empowering us to share your abundant love with others, we sing your praise. Make us deeply aware of your presence today as we gather together to worship, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: (*Shirley and Elin*)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that

is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Reflection (*Brian*)

I need to provide a spoiler alert at the outset of today's sermon. This sermon has no ending. For those of you thinking about your lunch reservations have no fear, the sermon will end in about 15 or 20 minutes. The issue is that there is no ending, no neat conclusion, no single piece of spiritual wisdom or quotable quote to take away from today's sermon. But before we worry too much about what is yet to come, I invite you backwards in time.

I invite you into a conversation that took place about two Mondays ago during breakfast at our kitchen table. It was the Monday after the first weekend of the so-called freedom rally in Ottawa. I was livid that a group of individuals, whose opinions about vaccines and Covid were so diametrically opposed to my own, felt it their right, even their duty, to overturn the lawful decisions made by a democratically elected government. For me the threat to democracy seemed palatable. Victoria, my rational and inquisitive partner, was earnestly pondering the issues at play in hope of gaining a deeper understanding. I was frustrated that she did not see things as clearly as I did. "They should be forcibly removed!" I declared. To which she responded, "And who would do that?" "Well, the police, of course, they are breaking the law!" I explained. "What kind of power do police have in the face of 400 large trucks?" she asked. As my frustration grew, I concluded, "then the army should be brought in." "And what good would that do?" she inquired. "They have tanks," I declared. "And what if the truckers still don't move ...?" In total exasperation I concluded: "They should fire their cannons!"

Later that morning, after my blood pressure had normalized, I received a call from Jordan Cantwell identifying this Sunday as one she would like me to cover during her sick leave. I went off to my study to look at the appointed Bible readings for today. I turned first to the Gospel where Jesus is speaking. He says: "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you ... Do to others as you would have them do to you." Clearly God has a sense of humour.

Since the weekly readings also contain a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures, I thought I might avoid this gospel challenge by turning to the book of Genesis. Alas, I was hemmed in. The Genesis passage described the scene in which Joseph, once sold into slavery by his brothers, is now brought face to face with them. You will likely remember the story of his brother's jealousy and how they chose to punish the young Joseph. After roughing him up and stealing his prized coat and they tossed him into a pit deep enough to prevent his escape. They soon happened upon some Egyptian slave traders and decided to sell their young brother into slavery. And so, at the age of 16 or 18, Joseph is taken into slavery in Egypt. He lives under some very tough circumstances but over the years he gains the attention of the Pharaoh who eventually appoints him Prime Minister of Egypt. A famine strikes the region and Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt to beg for food supplies.

Little did they know when they were ushered into the Prime Minister's court that they were coming face to face with their brother. What would you do if you were Joseph? Standing before him were the authors of his misery – his separation from his family and his enslavement. How would you respond if you were Joseph? What retribution could you imagine?

The story records that Joseph said, "Please come closer, I am your brother Joseph. Do not be upset or your blame yourselves because you sold me here ... God sent me ahead of you to rescue you in this amazing way and to make sure that you and your descendants survive the famine." Can you imagine uttering such a gracious response? Can you imagine welcoming your former tormentors with forgiveness and open arms?

It would have been easy to relegate such grace to the Bible alone had I not recalled a news article about Nelson Mandela. As you are aware Mandela spent 27 years in the Alcatraz-like prison know as Robben Island for protesting the apartheid system in South Africa. What is less known is the relationship between him and one of his jailers. Christo Brand came to the prison as an 18-year-old pro-apartheid prison guard whose best friend had been killed by anti-apartheid protestors. He came to his job as jailer with hatred and anger toward anyone who represented the anti-apartheid movement; yet, by his own admission he was converted by Mandela. Mandela's simple humanity so won over his jailer that Christo Brand came to refer to Mandela as a father-figure. After Mandela became the President of South Africa, he specifically requested that Brand, his former jailer, assume an important job in his office. Suddenly Joseph's story of oppression, conversion and forgiveness took on real-life proportions in the lives of Nelson Mandela and Christo Brand.

The more I reflected on these scriptures the more they confirmed what I have always been taught, namely that God intends for us to live in harmony and mutual respect. Was it possible for me to take a different attitude toward the protestors hunkered down on parliament hill? It was at about this point that I came across a blog from an Ottawa resident known as the Reformed Physicist. He is a federal civil servant and data scientist by day and a blog writer in the evening. In one of his blogs he wrote about leaving his downtown Ottawa apartment to meet some of the truckers. The following are but a couple of excerpts from his blog:

At 10pm I started my walk along ... Kent Street. I felt nervous ... I spotted a heavy duty pickup truck (and) waved. A young man, probably in his mid 20s, rolled down the window, said hello and I introduced myself ... (I) told them I lived across the street. Immediate surprise washed over the young man's face. He said, "You must hate us ... " "No, I don't hate anyone, but I wanted to find out about you." (He and his girlfriend) were from Sudbury Ontario ... The young woman in the passenger seat moved forward, excited to share. They said that they didn't want a country that forced people to get medical treatments such as vaccines ... but they were adamant that they were not anti-vaxers.

Behind (a) crowd from Gaspésie sat a stretch van, the kind you often see associated with industrial cleaners. I could see the shadow of a man ... He introduced himself and told me he was from one of the reservations on Manitoulin Island. He showed me his medicine wheel and he pointed to its colours, red, black, white, and yellow. He said there is a message of healing in there for all the human races, that we can come together because we are all human. He said, "If you ever find yourself on Manitoulin Island, come to my reserve, I would love to show you my community."

As I finally made my way back home, after talking to dozens of truckers ... I realized I met someone from every province except PEI. They all have a deep love for this country ... These are the people that Canada relies on to build its infrastructure, deliver its goods, and fill the ranks of its military in times of war. The overwhelming concern they have is that the vaccine mandates are creating an untouchable class of Canadians.

The article moved me. I still believe that vaccines and vaccine mandates promote the common good. I still believe that it is absurd to think that Canada could be better served by undermining the democratically elected government. I recognize from recent news reports that some protestors had a much more sinister intent than those interviewed by the blog writer. But my

reflection on this morning's scripture helped me to recognize the dilemma in demonizing people who think differently than me. Debate – yes; vehemently argue your viewpoint if necessary – yes; but be careful that conflicting views do not lead to writing off the 'other' as less human or of less value.

The scripture we read this morning was the third reading for this Sunday. St. Paul is writing to the early church about death and resurrection. There is much to ponder in this passage but I was drawn to the closing verses and Paul's observation that the prototypical human, Adam, was made from dust whereas the prototypically second human, Jesus, was made of spirit. Jesus invites us out of the dust of disagreements and divisions into a spirit inspired life. It is challenging to be sure. The contemporary theologian Richard Rohr says the spirit-life requires 'non-dual' thinking. Instead of being stuck in a 'them/us' dichotomy, Rohr invites us to see what is common and to pursue unity not division. Keith posted a simple but profound quote on his Facebook page earlier this week which read: "You will never look into the eyes of someone whom God does not love." Maybe that is the starting point.

And so we have reached the end of the sermon but there is no conclusion. I still vehemently disagree with those Canadians who have blocked borders and downtown streets in an attempt to thwart democracy. I still view vaccination as a decision to support the common good which I will always value about individual liberty. Perhaps what is different because of my encounter with scripture, and I acknowledge it's a very small step, but in recent days as I pause in prayer before going to sleep I have taken up praying for the protestors – praying that they might be safe, that they might be valued, that they might not become the untouchables. My actions seem small since I want to call myself a follower of Jesus, but it is a beginning. "You will never look into the eyes of someone whom God does not love." Hmm – I'll need to pray about that too. Amen.

Hymn: *(Shirley and Elin)*

Acknowledgment of Offering *(Debra words; camera at both behind communion table)*

When we choose to walk in the Way of Jesus we commit to the ways of justice. Our offerings give witness to our commitment. The giving of our gifts and the giving of our very lives speaks to our faithfulness.

And so, with deep gratitude we acknowledge and celebrate the many ways as disciples of Jesus, you and I, share our time, our talent and our treasury. We celebrate the strength of our witness today and long for the day we can offer even more.

Prayer of Dedication *(Debra words, camera both)*

Let us pray:

Gracious God, gifts given this week come from our hands and our hearts. They represent the products of our labours; they symbolize our commitment to your church; they show our willingness to walk in your Way. Bless their use. Encourage our talents and focus our actions, so that we too may be a blessing to others. We pray as followers of Jesus. Amen

Sung Offertory: All That We Have *(Shirley and Elin)*

Prayers of the People *(Keith)*

Let us join our hearts in minds in prayer, let us pray.

Living God

you raise us to fullness of being... in sharing the Spirit, the Christ-life together.

Teach us to pray and grant us confident, hopeful persistence in seeking your will and your way, that the power of love and faithfulness may meet to disarm the unjust powers of the world.

Healing God be present with those who are suffering with illness, with addiction, with grief, with fear, with pain. Be with those in our faith communities who names we offer at this time in the silence of our hearts.... (Pause)

Place your healing hand upon them, we pray, and grant them comfort, strength, and courage to face each new day. Place those in their lives who can offer solutions and grant them the wisdom to discern which healing paths to follow. May the whisper of Spirit inspire them, that they, too, may know freedom in the name of Christ, who represents freedom for all.

God, we pray for the world you so love and care for, as we are intimately interconnected no matter where we reside. We pray for all those in different parts of the world and we plead for wholeness for all God's people. May you grant the suffering strength and courage to sustain their faith and hope and continue their fight for justice, equality, and healing. May our collective care, effort, resources, and love bring an end to all that stifles life.

Companion God we often have more fear in our lives than faith. See us as we strain to make our way forward, come out to visit us, hear our fearful cries, climb into our boat, and calm our hearts. Be present with those who direct your people to unexpected places of hope.

Instil in them a spirit of humility, a compassionate heart, a loving kindness, and a clear vision, that those who seek their guidance may be restored by your power at work in them, and those who do not understand them may not fear them but come to respect your call on their lives.

May the energy of love move them, that they, too, may know freedom in the name of Christ, who represents freedom for all.

God, smile on us, your people, that we might experience the power of your love and through us may your work be done.

Loving God, receive, we pray, the prayers of your people. Grant that we might not only understand the things we ought to do but have the power and faithful grace to act.

And now we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught, saying:

Our Mother and our Father, 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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: *(Shirley and Elin)*

Benediction *(Laura)*

We have gathered from many places..

with many different hopes and needs.

And we leave this time of worship,

filled with the presence of one Spirit – holding us all.

So may we go, as followers of Christ,

seeking ways to love... and serve.

And may the love of God surround you;

the peace of Christ attend you;

and the Holy Spirit comfort you,

now and always

Sung Blessing: Take Up His Song *(Shirley and Elin)*