

Worship with McClure United Church

~ 1st Sunday in Advent ~

November 29, 2020

Welcome

Happy Advent everyone and welcome to the worship of God here with McClure United Church. Wherever you are and whenever you are watching this service, it is our hope that you will experience God's loving presence and the warmth of our welcome to you... a welcome that is extended to all people... no qualifiers – everyone is welcome here.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is my very favourite season in the church year... and, although this Advent will be like no other we have ever experienced, I'm sure, I pray will still be open to the hope, peace, joy and love that accompanies us as we wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

You may notice a slightly different format to our Advent services as we include a beautiful Advent song sung by Annalise Reinhart and accompanied by her mom, Elaine. Also we are including a sung Advent blessing and that is being offered by Kristie Elliott... who is also providing musical leadership for our hymns today. Our scripture reader this morning is Janet Clarke. Thank you to everyone who worked together to offer this Advent worship to you today.

Now I do have a few announcements to share with you today.

A number of you joined us this past Friday for our Zoom Connection time. And I would like to invite everyone who is able to hop on board for a time to check in and connect with one another every Friday morning at 10am. The Zoom link for that gathering is in the notes for this video and if you would prefer to join by telephone, please get in touch with me and I'll get that connection information to you. If you'd like to connect by Zoom but aren't sure how to do so, also give me a call and I will walk you through every step.

Many of you will have received the Advent Devotional called "Those Who Dream". It is a beautiful resource full of reflections, poetry and images. You are able to download this resource digitally from our website and the

McClure Facebook Group but if you'd prefer a print copy, please let the office know and we will be sure to get one to you.

Once again McClure is partnering with EGADZ to provide support to vulnerable teens and their families. This year we will be collecting specific items so there will be less sorting needed. EGADZ has identified these as priority items... to take a look at the list of items and for more information regarding donations, please go to our website, Facebook page or check out the weekly e-newsletter you should be receiving. Those items can be dropped off at the church, in the parking lot, on Sunday Dec 6 from 11-noon and Monday Dec 7 from 6-7:30pm. There will also be honey available for \$5 a jar with proceeds going to Refugee projects

It's not too late to get your tickets for the advent concert celebration "So That Our Joy May Be Complete" offered by Living Skies Regional Council on December 13 at 7pm. For info about how to get tickets check out our website, Facebook page and the e-newsletter. Funds raised will help to support ministries within our region and there is a place to type in where you would like to direct your funds to go when you purchase the ticket.

And the last announcement... join us today at 1pm for a communion celebration. We're trying something new! Bring your bread and juice and join us via Zoom as we continue our tradition of celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of Advent. Please visit our website or Facebook page for information on how to connect or contact Laura at (306) 291-5838 or email laura@mcclureunitedchurch.org.

Advent Song

"Dream a Dream" (Annalise Reinhart)

Opening Prayer

O Great Dreamer,

You dreamed up the stars in the sky.

You dreamed up that magic baby smell and the way cream sinks into coffee.

You dreamed up the crunch of snow and jazz music.

You dreamed up wisteria and evergreen and the pure magic that is a six-foot-tall sunflower.

And in the midst of all of that, you dreamed up a dream for your people— a dream of hope and justice, a dream for eyes wide open, to both the world’s suffering and the world’s beauty.

So today, as we read scripture, pray and hear the music of our faith, we ask that you would plant that same dream in us.

Pour out your Spirit on our hearts and minds so that we may see what you see, and dream what you dream.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

Hymn

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Kristie Elliott)

Scripture

Mark 13: 24-37 (Janet Clark)

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may

find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Reflection

I would like to begin this time of reflecting by sharing with you a quote from Desmond Tutu’s book “God has a dream”

You may already know, especially if you’ve begun reading the Advent devotional I spoke about in the announcement time... that our theme for Advent this year is “Those Who Dream”.

This theme comes from a verse in Psalm 126 that says “when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream”.

One of the questions that arises from this passage is this... “what does it look like to live as those who dream?”

When I read this I immediately thought of this book by Archbishop Desmond Tutu... one of my favourite writers and one of the most inspirational people ever. So I’d like to read for you from his chapter “God’s dream”.

Dear Child of God, before we can become God’s partners, we must know what God wants for us. “I have a dream,” God says. “Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God’s family, My family.

The intro to this theme from the devotional says that the prophets, the psalmists, John the Baptist, Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds and the Magi— they were all dreamers.

They received, discovered, and responded to God’s dreams for the world. In Advent, we step into the mystery and awe of God’s dreams and pray they shape our reality.

This theme is for the dreamers in all of us—
those who dream of a deeper connection with God and those who dream of
a better world.

It's for those who dream of comfort and for those who have given up on
their dreams.

It's for those whose dreams have been crushed and for those who show us
that dreams take time.

So this advent we will dream together...

we will dream alongside prophets and angels, Mary and the Magi.

This Advent we will seek together God's dreams for our world.

The scripture passage from the gospel of Mark that Jan read for us a few
moments ago alerts us to the risk of falling asleep to the realities of the
world.

We are commanded to "keep awake"... to pay attention to where God's
dreams for change and new life are emerging.

In Advent, we remember that God's ultimate dream is to be intimately
connected to us—

God's dream is to come and live among us.

As we light the Advent candle of hope, we keep awake by dreaming... by
dreaming together how we will live into God's promise to be with us.

God promises to be with us...

God was with us before the pandemic and God will be with us on the other
side.

The other side of pandemic and violent deaths and protests and tense
elections is not a return to normal.

The old normal is gone.

On the other side of all these challenges... and even right here in the midst
of those challenges... we must be living the hope of God's continuing
revelation of justice.

The passage in Mark is sometimes referred to as the "Little Apocalypse."

The Greek meaning of apocalypse is "revelation" and revelation is an
unfolding or unveiling of things not previously known.

What in our world right now feels like a "Little Apocalypse"?

What is disruptive, disorienting, and threatening?

In the midst of that turmoil, what is being revealed to us?

I can share with you some of my own revelations...

An obvious one is related technology..

Many of us have had to jump into new technology and learn quickly how to use technology and platforms to help us stay connected to the world and to our loved ones.

Some of us have had to figure out how to create and edit videos... we've have had to learn new programs and use these programs to help us do old things in new ways

The other side of this.. for me anyway... is the realization of how privileged those of us who have access to technology are.

One of the ongoing and deepest concerns for those of us who understand the importance of maintaining connection and support has been the dilemma of reaching folks who don't have a computer or access to Wi-Fi or who simply find technology too overwhelming...

and many of these are the folks who are most in need of connection.

I also have now a newfound appreciation for our "front line essential workers"....

Grocery store employees, pharmacists, delivery people, Canada post workers, transit drivers, and, of course, educators, health care workers and police services.

I've realized how important the early childhood educators and daycare workers are... without a safe place for kids to go... parents are immobilized.

A really hard realization has been the lack of care and support for older adults.

While we know there are many many care facilities who love their residents and provide the best care possible for them...

I was horrified to hear and read story after story of neglect and abuse of older adults in long term care during a time when family members were unable to pop by for a visit and keep an eye on their loved ones... and I

guess this isn't just an elder care issue but an issue for anyone who is in need of a long term care facility.

And those living in facilities aren't the only ones who have suffered neglect and abuse... this pandemic has really revealed the gap that exists between those of us who live with privilege and those who live with less privilege or even no privilege at all.

Not everyone has had the same access to resources, information, support, medical care - I know I'm not even close to being aware of all the folks who we are forgetting.

This pandemic has affected everyone but for some the effects have been devastating - life altering... even life taking.

On a more positive note... I've heard many people say during the initial shut down that they felt somewhat relieved at a slower pace... with the cancellation of extracurricular activities – for kids and adults – people had more time to relax and spend time together with their family. It became an opportunity to revisit priorities.

During this pandemic I've been reminded of something I have always believed but hadn't really had the time to put into practice.

It's best put in the popular children's song that goes like this "the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people".

We have had to get creative about how we are "being the church" without access to our building.

It's been a learning process and it is an ongoing process but I have felt so grateful for all of the amazing ideas that have been put into practice – sidewalk chalk messages of love and hope, front yard ice cream exchanges in the summer, parking lot outreach activities, phoning trees, card writing, zoom gatherings, and later today we will experiment with online communion.

And personally, I've discovered my own creativity... while I have desperately missed being in a face-to-face community, I have really quite enjoyed finding creative ways of expressing what I wanted to say.

My visit to the sheep farm on good shepherd Sunday was definitely a highlight.

I know I've had other revelations but I'm also curious to hear what your own revelations have been....

I encourage you to please take a moment when you've finished worshipping to share your observations in the comments section of this video.

I invite you also to share what you believe it means for you to live in a state of "wakefulness"—

How are we attentive to ourselves, others, and to God?

I find myself slipping in and out of wakefulness.

Wakefulness requires energy which is something I find myself often lacking.

And I know I'm not alone in this.

Pandemic fatigue.. loneliness, boredom, worry... all of these are causing folks to want to just go to sleep and wake up when it's all over...

I get that....

But I also know it is really really important to not miss the journey to the other side.

We are commanded (not invited) to "keep awake"... to pay attention to where God's dream for change and new life are emerging.

And we are invited to dream together how we will live this dream God has for us.

So I invite you to reflect on your own and then together in the comments...

Reflect on these questions:

What are the dreams you carry with you into this Advent season?

What dreams from this past year have unraveled or been deferred?

And what new dreams must be nurtured as you move forward?

There is a dreamer in all of us...

Let's dream together of a deeper connection with God as we share God's dream for a better world.

Amen.

Hymn

"A Voices Cries in the Wilderness" (Kristie Elliott)

Prayers of the People

Original Dreamer,

Over and over again in scripture, we hear your dream for a beautiful world.

We hear your dream for peace and reconciliation.

We hear your dream for harmony and togetherness.

We hear your dream for community and hope.

We hear your dreams, and yet we often do not open our eyes.

We continue to live with the curtains drawn, the covers pulled tight, eyes shut to the realities of the world.

Original Dreamer,

Over and over again in scripture, we hear your dream for vibrant communities.

We hear your dream for peace and reconciliation.

We hear your dream for harmony and togetherness.

We hear your dream for community and hope.

We hear your dreams, and yet we often do not open our eyes.

We continue to live with the curtains drawn, the covers pulled tight, eyes shut to the realities of our city and community.

Original Dreamer,

Over and over again in scripture, we hear your dream for love in all our relationships.

We hear your dream for peace and reconciliation.

We hear your dream for harmony and togetherness.

We hear your dream for community and hope.

We hear your dreams, and yet we often do not open our eyes.

We continue to live with the curtains drawn, the covers pulled tight, eyes shut to the realities of our most intimate of relationships.

God hear now our prayers for our world, our community, our families.

Forgive us and kindle a hope in us that will burn through the darkest nights.

Give us the strength and the will to keep awake.

With hope we pray,

As Jesus taught....

Our Father/Mother 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, 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.

Sung Blessing

“Hope Shines as the Solitary Star” (Kristie Elliott)

Blessing

In Advent, we step into the mystery and awe of God’s dreams and pray
they shape our reality.

God invites us to dream together -

So as we go into this season may we take up a posture of wakefulness.
Be Awake.

Discover and respond to God's dreams for us ... God's dreams for the
world.

May the candle of hope burn warm in our hearts today and every day.
Amen.