

1st Sunday of Advent

CLOSE TO HOME – Homesick (hope)

November 28, 2021

Welcome & Announcements (Laura)

Good morning and welcome to worship with McClure United Church.

Whether you are here in person or online, we are so grateful you are with us.

I have a few announcements to share with you today.

How do you know Advent is here?

Because our hallways are full of bins and bins to hold all of the generosity you have to share. We are still collecting socks for the homeless and soon we will also be collecting donations for EGADZ. The Outreach Committee is looking for 3 kinds of donations... hygiene products, toques and mitts and baby bags.

Hygiene products include family size containers of shampoo, conditioner, bodywash, deodorate, toothpaste... and also tooth brushes.

Bring toques and mitts for adults and youth.

And Baby bags containing receiving blankets, baby wipes, baby hygiene products, baby bottles, soothers, thermometers, nail clippers and sleepers.

You can also make a financial donation.

You can drop your donations off in the labelled bins during office hours between December 5th and the 19th or you can bring them to the church parking lot on December 10th between 10am and noon. Cheques can be made payable to McClure United Church, please indicate they are for EGADZ.

And... speaking of Christmasy things – how about a bake sale?

We will be holding an in-person bake sale on Saturday, December 11th between 10am and 1pm.

If you like to bake, please make some cookies, loaves, candies, squares or anything else with a little bit of sugar in it and bring them to the church on Friday, December 10th between 4 and 6pm.... you can just go ahead and leave those in my office... or you can take them to the multipurpose room.

If you like to eat that baking... or perhaps gift it to someone who does... come to the multipurpose room between 10am and 1pm on Saturday, December 11th.

Proceeds will go to the church's general revenue fund.

We would like to invite you to join us for our Blue Christmas Service next Sunday at 7pm. This will be in person and livestreamed as well for those who would like to participate at home. The link to this service will be sent to you along with next Sunday's email. WE know that this time of the year can be tough for many folks... if you are moving through the season with a heavy heart – for whatever reason – maybe this is a time and place for you to find some peace. You will need to register for this service as well and you can do that by contacting the office.

These announcements and so much more were emailed to everyone who is on our email list early this morning. If you are not on our email list and would like to receive weekly announcements, please let the church office know and you will be added.

And now let us ground ourselves in the hope that today offers, as we sing together our opening song.

Please remain seated as we sing together...

Sung Opening: Jesus Came Bringing us Hope (MV33)

Call to Worship (Debra)

Can one be homesick for something you've never known?

We are homesick for a just world, for peace like rivers, for the end of suffering.

Yes, we are homesick—

for joy that is contagious, for nations that feel like neighbors and for hospitals that run empty.

We are homesick for the world God promises.

We are homesick, but we are on our way.

God is here. God is still creating.

Let us worship Holy God.

Candle Lighting Liturgy (Laura)

A: We hope for a world where all are fed.

B: We hope for a world with more bridges than walls.

A: We hope for a world with wide open doors.

B: We hope for a world with contagious laughter.

A: We hope for a world where trees grow tall and creeks run clean.

B: We hope for a world where all people feel at home—in their bodies, in the church, in their physical homes.

A: We hope for that world.

B: We long for that world.

A: We are homesick for that world.

B: So today we light the candle of hope, because hope keeps our hearts alive as we wait.

A: May this light be a reminder that the wait is always worth it.

B: We are close to home. May we carry hope with us. Amen.

Advent Song: Hope is a Star (VU6)

Call to Confession (Debra)

When you're a kid and you get homesick at a sleepover or a summer camp, you call home and your parents come and get you. Sometimes, that's what love looks like. Love bails us out.

In the same way, when we call upon God to confess that we've messed up, or forgotten something, or overlooked the truth, God answers with grace. God answers with love.

So let us confess today, knowing that nothing could keep God from loving us.

Prayer of Confession (Debra)

Gracious God, we find ourselves with two options every day—to stay homesick for the world you had in mind, or to allow cynicism to win. Do we hope against hope, or do we throw in the towel? Do we insist on a better world, or do we assume it's impossible? Forgive us for the days when cynicism wins. Forgive us for numbing our homesick hurt instead of using it to fuel a better world. Kindle in us a hope that won't let go. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Words of Forgiveness (Debra)

Family of faith, even when we throw in the towel, even when we give up on hope, God does not give up on us. We are loved. We are claimed. We are invited closer to God's home. So hear and trust this good news:

There is room for us in God's house, and nothing can separate us from that love.

We are claimed. We are forgiven. We are welcomed home. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Hymn: O Come O Come Emmanuel (VU vs 1,3)

Prayer for Illumination (Laura)

God of the stars and God of our hearts—our days will pass but your words will last.

The earth might fade but your words will last. Our memories might blur but your words will last.

The grass will wither but your words will last.

The sky could go dark and your words would last.

So as we listen today, help us to hold onto what will last.

Help us hold onto you. Gratefully we pray, Amen.

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

A reading from the Gospel of Luke:

'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see "the Chosen One coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand secure before the Chosen One.'

May God bless to our understanding these words from Holy Scripture.

Reflection (Laura)

Now isn't that a strange scripture reading for the first Sunday back worshipping together on a Sunday morning?

On the first Sunday of Advent... right after lighting the candle of hope and hearing the beautiful litany offered by the Dickinson boys... a litany about hope for a world where all are fed, a world with wide open doors and contagious laughter... where all people feel at home... in their bodies, in the church and in their physical homes.

And then a passage where Jesus is offering a prophecy and parable filled with fear and mystery.

This particular scripture is within a longer section of Jesus describing the coming destruction of the temple, a public statement that - no doubt - added to all the conspiracies and plots that were

building against him.

The fate he speaks of here is filled with terrifying details: the temple demolished, false prophets, wars and uprisings, food shortages, natural disasters, persecution and epidemics.

Sound familiar?

Hits a little close to home... doesn't it?

Maybe not such a strange scripture reading after all.

But don't worry... its not all doom and gloom.

Just keep listening... that part is coming!

'Close to home' is our Advent theme this year. We're using this wonderful resource from A Sanctified Art – a collective of faith leaders and artists bringing their creativity together to offer resources for worship.

This is what they say about our theme:

"When something hits close to home, it affects us deeply. During the Advent and Christmas season, we journey through scriptures that are tender, heavy with emotion and vulnerable. We carry the memories and truths of this season close to our hearts. Close to home acknowledges the "already but not yet" tension of our faith: Emmanuel is with us... and yet, God's promised day – our everlasting home – is not fully realized. It names our deep longing for God to come close to us.

When I was reading through the material for today, I kept coming back to an image... a memory... or rather a set of memories... from my childhood.

You know how when you're heading home... especially after being away awhile... and especially if you have been travelling a long distance... and you get this mix of feelings – one part excitement... 2 parts impatience. Even if you've enjoyed where you've been, there's still this longing to be home – in your own place... to sleep in your own bed. And if you have a pet you've left behind... there's the excitement that comes with missing the furry snuggles.

Well... when you're a kid the ratio of excitement to impatience may be the same... but both of those are magnified 100%.

My dad developed a strategy for dealing with the constant "are we there yet?" whining coming from the backseat. The first time I'd ask... are we almost there?... he'd say "we have 6 more curves, 4 more hills and then we'll be there". So I'd sit back and start waiting and counting. After we'd passed the 6 more curves and 4 more hills I'd say again "are we almost there?" and he'd apologize for having miscalculated and reassure me that certainly after 3 more curves and 2 more hills... we'd arrive at home. Silence for a few more minutes.

Although I would get frustrated and my impatience would grow... so would my excitement as my belief that I would eventually get there never wavered. I continued to have hope – despite being tricked.

Advent feels a bit like that last hour of a road trip. We are close to home. God is coming. During

Advent we get a glimpse of a world full of hope, peace, joy and love. During Advent we get a glimpse of a world with angel choruses... a glimpse of a world where an unmarried teenage girl could have God's son and a group of outcast shepherds would be invited to witness it.

So this Advent we will journey together... taking steps to move closer to the home God envisions for us... a home full of hope, peace, joy and love. Are we there yet? No... but we are always getting a little closer.

So our overall theme for Advent and Christmas is Close to Home.

And the theme for this Sunday is "homesick".

Homesick holds within it an incredible feeling of longing.

I've always thought of homesick as a longing for a physical home... missing family or pets or even just the comfort of a favourite chair.

Homesick is usually tolerable because its often temporary. Just as I knew that we'd eventually get home on those long car rides... when I've felt homesick I've known that I would eventually go home too.

But the kind of homesick we are reflecting on today is much more expansive than that. It still holds that deep longing... but the longing is for... for what?

That's a good question.

What are you longing for?

What is our world longing for?

Let's head back to the scripture reading for a minute.

In this passage we hear distress... confusion... and fear.

I was a bit taken aback when I read this... the feelings that emerged pretty much mirrored those of the past almost two years — two years of a world in pandemic turmoil... suffering from so many disasters... both natural and human-made. This passage is speaking to the realities and injustices of a chaotic world. So... this passage must have something to say to us.

Thankfully, Jesus entered this world offering words of hope to a whole bunch of homesick people... people who felt far away from God and longed to be close to their loved ones in the middle of the crisis. "Stand up and raise your heads," Jesus said, "because your redemption is near . . . So when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near"

Have you ever wondered what that means?

The kingdom of God?

To be honest... I kind of struggle with that phrase.

Kingdom feels ... hierarchical... or, more to the point.. patriarchal.

Traditionally... a kingdom had a king... and that king ruled over the commoners.

And this just doesn't fit with how I understand God.

Preparing for today I found something written by ... Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz... a theologian and professor...that made me think...

She substitutes kingdom with kin-dom. She says that the word kin-dom makes it clear that when the fullness of God becomes a day-to-day reality in the world at large, we will all be sisters and brothers... kin... to each other. And she goes on to say that what binds sisters and brothers on this deeper level is a vision of liberation. We are guided and motivated by our hope for a future in which we can fully live.

And who doesn't long for that?!

To be fully alive...

And not just us... but all God's people.

I want to close by sharing this image with you. This is the visual image for the week. Its called Awake to Wonder and is by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity and inspired by the Luke passage.

This is what she wrote.

When I began this series of visuals, I printed an architectural blueprint on a large piece of cardstock. Using acrylic paint, I added fluid strokes of blue, obscuring the white lines in the blueprint so that the plans for building a home would appear present but also blurred and concealed. I added hints of gold leaf, trying to emulate the texture of paint peeling from the exterior of a building. I then shifted to digital media, photographing the painting from a number of angles and then drawing figures and details into my compositions with my stylus and iPad.

As I began this particular image, I imagined a scene of chaos and apocalypse. However, as I drew a woman lifting her head and reaching for the fig tree, I began to see a vision of beauty and hope, a glimpse of one's whole being awake to wonder. I think we all share a collective homesickness. It feels like nostalgia. It looks like the trauma hiding in our past. It can turn into foreboding fear that robs us of real joy. But in this image and in Jesus' words, I see a call to resilience despite the difficult realities that confront us. I see a longing so deep that it keeps us reaching—for a home restored, for comfort renewed, for the fruit that is sure to come.

These are words of hope for a homesick world.

Call to Offering (Debra)

Family of faith, it does not take long to see that we are not home yet. There are people who are hungry, oceans that are polluted, churches that are fading, walls that are growing. We are clearly not home yet.

So until we reach that promised day, until we make it home, giving what we can to make a better world matters. When we give our tithes and our offerings we help build God's home here. So with hopeful hearts, let us give.

Offering Hymn: There's a Voice in the Wilderness (VU18 vs 1,3)

Prayer of Dedication (Debra)

Holy God, we are homesick.

We long for the day that you spoke of when swords will be beaten into plowshares, the lion will lie down with the lamb, and justice will roll like waters. Until that holy day comes, take these gifts and use them to build that world here. We are hopeful. Amen.

Prayer of the People (Debra)

God of the weary and waiting, scripture tells us that where two or more are gathered, you are there. So we trust that you are here—listening to these words, drawing us close, stirring hope awake in us. And for that we are grateful. We are so grateful.

Today, Holy God, we feel close to home, close to you when . . .

when the candles are lit,

when we enter this space and someone knows our name.

We feel close to home when our children are curious, when we find moments of true connection, when we are brave enough to be who you call us to be.

However, God, even with gratitude for our close-to-home moments, we also recognize that buried deep within us we have homesick hearts.

Holy God, we are homesick for...

We are homesick for a world we have not seen.

We are homesick for a world where oceans are clean, trees are green, and animals are not endangered.

We are homesick for a life where days feel expansive and Sabbath feels possible.

We are homesick for days where mental health is not stigmatized, time is not a commodity, and self-worth is not a scarcity.

God who never leaves us alone, we are carrying both hope and homesickness all at the same time. Hold these two sides of the same coin tenderly, and fan the flame of both. For we realize, hope is a gift and homesickness is a reminder. For each conviction, we give you thanks.

Now with the confidence of children, we pray together, saying. . . **Our Father...**

Hymn: People Look East (VU 9)

Benediction (Laura)

As we leave *this* service, *our* service begins:

Comfort the homesick.

Open our doors to others.

Seek sanctuary.

Be brave enough to go home by another way.

And remember that here in God's house, all are welcomed—so come back soon.

In the name of our Foundation—God, Spirit, and Son—

go in peace

Sung Blessing: I am Walking the Path of Hope (MV 221)