

**McClure United Church**  
**October 10, 2021 Worship Service**  
**Season of Creation Week 5**  
**Rev. Debra Berg and Rev. Laura Fohse**

**Welcome and Announcements**

Good morning everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church on this Thanksgiving Sunday. It is so good to have you with us. I sure do wish I could see you right now. I'd love to know who is watching... are you smiling? Are you having a difficult day? Are you wearing your Sunday best? In your pjs?

I'll just have to use my imagination for now...

But you do all look great! Well, at least most of you do. And I hope you get a good helping of turkey or tofurkey or whatever is your holiday custom.

I'm disappointed... as I'm sure some of you are... that we are experiencing another holiday under the cloud of pandemic... and I do hope that you are able to find many things today to give thanks for.

I'm thankful for all of you... for your continued commitment to showing up for worship and all of the other activities as we continue to just find ways of connecting during this time apart.

Some of you I know are watching this together with me on Sunday morning at 10am. I hope you are able to figure out the chat feature... if you're interested that is. I didn't realize that you needed to have a google account in order to chat and I hope that won't be too much of a barrier. And if you are interested in chatting and didn't have a chance before the service started, I will be hanging around for about 15 minutes after worship for anyone who's like to chat.

As we continue to figure things out and how to reach the most people with our worship service, we have made a little shift again. We will continue to release the recorded worship video on Facebook and YouTube on Sunday morning at 9am and the link for those was in the weekly email. WE will also continue to livestream the service at 10am for anyone else who would like to watch together. Even if we don't chat... it is still very comforting to know that others are on line at the same time... listening to the service and singing the hymns. If in a couple of weeks it seems as though you aren't showing up at 10 for the livestream, we will let it go. That's been my motto for the past year and a half... try it, adapt, let it go, try again.

The link for the livestream service will also be sent out in the email each week.

And for announcements...

So we have all the usuals... Wednesday Bible study and young adult group, Friday coffee time and this past week Debra began the Devotions and Discussion small group online, that will continue for the next few weeks. All of the information for these gatherings can be found on our Facebook Page, Instagram, Website and in the weekly email.

Other things to note... this week on Tuesday we begin our 40 Days of Engagement on Racism series. This is a program of The United Church and is open to everyone interested in deepening their commitment to anti-racism. Each day from October 12 until November 26, excluding weekends, you will receive a new reflection on anti-racism as well as activities suitable for adults and children that can be done alone, as a family or in a group. There are also some online sessions for those interested. The link to sign up was sent to you in the weekly email. And then every Sunday from 1-2pm we will gather online with some folks from St. Martin' United Church to chat about what we've been reflecting on that week.

And finally... its pie time! We are having another pie sale on Thursday, October 28<sup>th</sup>. We are in need of two groups of people to help out with this... first, we need the bakers... or buyers... to donate pies. If you are able to donate a pie, please contact Ebba Eglgestone and her # is in the email. Then, we need eaters... that's you! If you would like to order a pie, please contact Marlene Kells and her # is also in the email. All order s must be placed by October 24<sup>th</sup> and picked up on the 28<sup>th</sup> between 4-6:30pm. All funds raised will go to the general operations of the church.

And that's it for today.  
Let's move into our time of worship.

### **Theme and Candle Lighting:**

A very happy Thanksgiving to each and every one of you.

Today we weave together the celebration of Thanksgiving and continue our exploration of the "theme of sacred earth, sacred work".

Creation centred spirituality rejoices in and courageously honors the rich diversity within the cosmos which is expressed in every individual and embodies multiple

cultures, religions, and ancestral traditions.

Creation is rich with variation and yet fear has driven us to try to tame, label and standardize it.

What do we lose when we privilege dominant voices limit perspectives?

Diversity is another name for God. Let us celebrate this reality.

As we worship, we light this candle with thanksgiving for the beauty and complexity of creation and in celebration of a God who walks with us into the mystery of all of life.

**Hymn:** Come All You People – Celeste Delahey and Tamara Ferguson

**Opening Prayer:**

God our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer: We enter into this time of worship with grateful hearts and with words of Thanksgiving on our lips.

May our worship be honest and authentic; may our hearts and minds be receptive to your Word; may we and our McClure community be responsive to your call to love. We come as your thankful people; be with us as our gracious God we pray. Amen

**Hymn:** Each Blade of Grass – The Coulthard Family

**Scripture Reading:** Genesis chapter 11

At one time, the whole Earth spoke the same language. It so happened that as they moved out of the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down.

They said to one another, “Come, let’s make bricks and fire them well.” They used brick for stone and tar for mortar.

Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let’s make ourselves famous so we won’t be scattered here and there across the Earth.”

God came to look over the city and the tower those people had built.

God took one look and said, “One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they’ll come up with next—they’ll stop at nothing! Come, we’ll go down and garble their speech so they won’t understand each other.”

Then God scattered them from there all over the world. And they had to quit building the city. That’s how it came to be called Babel, because there God turned their language into “babble.” From there God scattered them all over the world. May God bless to our understanding these words from scripture.

**Reflection** – Rev. Laura Fohse

I lived in many communities growing up... lots of small towns mostly in Saskatchewan.

My exposure to diversity in these communities was... limited. It wasn't until I moved to Saskatoon to go to college that I became really aware of difference,,, and I remember feeling both excited by this new adventure and all of what I was seeing and experiencing... and feeling anxious – nervous... everything was so unfamiliar...

I felt like a fish out of water and this was very uncomfortable.

But... it didn't take me long to become more comfortable...

and it wasn't because I became more comfortable with all of the diversity... it was because I was able to find people who I felt comfortable with. I moved from a community of 900 to the Big City and still my life stayed pretty small.

I hunkered down

So I kind of get what the people from our Bible story today were trying to do.

This story comes right after of the story of Noah and the great flood... which ends with God blessing Noah and his family and directing them to scatter and fill the earth. And that's what they did...

One branch of the family... the Hamites... descended from Noah's son Ham... went to Shinar... and settled there.

And this is where today's story begins.

Here we have this group of people who'd be wandering around...doing their thing... until they found this lovely place to settle down. It seemed like maybe it was time to create some roots. They didn't want be scattered throughout the earth... they wanted to stay together. Together was comfortable... it was safe.

And so that's what they did... they built themselves a city...

they learned how to make bricks so they could build a strong structure...

something solid, permanent...protective... something Fortress-like...that would outlast all of them...

something to keep out the riffraff...

something that would help them make a name for themselves.

And did just that. They built a walled city with a huge tower that could be seen from miles away.

One that would reach all the way to heaven.

Of course, God was paying attention to all of this... had watched them as they wandered around... watched as they found this perfect spot... built their homes and community there.

God watched and became very, very mad.

“One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they’ll come up with next—they’ll stop at nothing! Come, we’ll go down and garble their speech so they won’t understand each other.”

So I have two wonderings about this...

First of all... who in the heck is God talking to?

And... what exactly is the problem here?

I’ve heard it said before that God was angry because of the apparent pride of the Hamites... that they were trying to be like God by building this magnificent tower reaching the heavens... and God wanted to put a stop to that.

But this week I read an article in the Christian Century magazine by Rabbi Shai Held in which he wrote that this story of the Tower of Babel “is not a simple morality tale about a human attempt to storm the heavens and displace God. Nor, conversely, is it a primitive allegory about an insecure deity who is so threatened by human achievement that God needs to wreak havoc on the best-laid human plans.

The narrative is also not placed where it is in the Torah in order to explain the vast multiplicity of human languages.

Nor is it a lament about some lost primeval unity.

The story of Babel is, I would suggest, about something else: the importance of individuals”...

And I would add here... that its about the importance of the amazing... glorious diversity of creation... a diversity that God had planned right from the very beginning.

So seems to me that it was not just pride that made the Hamites want to build their fortress-like city and impenetrable tower.

it was fear that motivated them.

Fear of being scattered, fear of leaving the comfort of being with their people... fear of letting outsiders in... fear of what the outsiders might do if they get in.

They were experiencing the very normal human fear of change and the inevitable loss that comes with it.

They had found their perfect little spot and they didn't want to leave it. they NEEDED this tower in order to defend their turf. They needed to let God and everyone else know that this land was theirs. They just wanted to hold everything and everyone they love together in one place.

Their decisions and plans were grounded in fear of the outside world and those who were different from them.

And really... isn't that what we do when we're afraid?  
We surround ourselves with what makes us comfortable... build protective walls... are careful about who we let in.  
We turn inward...  
we hunker down?

When we are scared, we often want to be with others we are comfortable with... and that usually means others who are just like or very similar to ourselves...  
and we are careful around those who aren't.

And that is completely understandable... we all need people and places where we can just feel safe and comfortable... when we can let our guard down.

And we also need to step out of that comfort zone.

This story of the Tower of Babel is not about human pride or God's disapproval. It's about all the ways fear might cut us off from God's abundance... it's about God's uncomfortable push to move us outside of whatever walls we have built... to turn our attention outward...  
not to hunker down in safety but to step out with curiosity and openness.

And so God "muddled" the Hamites. God muddled them and forced them to confront their fears... forced them to learn another language... to find common ground between themselves and those they feared.

This all may sound a bit like punishment, but really it was an amazing "a learning opportunity"...

I had my own such learning opportunity in my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study for ministry when I was required to do a social ministry internship. I ended up in an inner city outreach in Edmonton, where I was living at the time. The safe little bubble I had hunkered down in when I first moved to the city was blown wide open...

and it was verrryyyyy uncomfortable –

but it was also the single most impactful learning opportunity during my time at the Centre for Christian Studies.

I went in to this practicum again like a fish out of water... understanding nothing –totally muddled...

but after a few months there, I left with a whole new perspective and appreciation for the beauty of diversity... my exposure to those who were very different from myself not only made my life very interesting... it also helped me to feel more courageous... less afraid being uncomfortable.

I still need to retreat to my comfort zone from time to time but I really try not to hunker down there... because I know that I am much better off when I embrace the muddledness of stepping out.

And that was God's hope for the Hamites... and a few thousand years later it was Jesus' hope for the people of his time... hope for unity... "that all may be one"

a hope that has not yet been fulfilled and will only be fulfilled when we are able to hold a deep and unwavering recognition of the blessing of difference.... when we are able to celebrate the glorious diversity around us... in our churches... in our families... our communities... and in the world.

This is how we find out who we really are.... not behind walls or in towers.

When we scatter out into this diverse world holding the truth of our own belovedness – remembering that we have been created in the likeness and image of God....

remembering that all of the others – all those with different perspectives and beliefs - are also created in the likeness and image of God... our understanding of the image of God expands... and, being created in the image of God... our understanding of ourselves expands as well.

For awhile now the pandemic has limited our ability to step out of our comfort zones... which are now known as bubbles. Our society has hunkered down like never before so that we can keep one another safe.

But let's not let the very valid desire for physical safety prevent us from seeing beyond our bubbles – diversity is still out there – we just have to work a little harder right now to engage with it... to learn from it. But there are still ways – book, tv programs and movies... and we now have access to a lot more online gatherings and forums than we ever have. In fact, beginning this Wednesday the United Church is offering a 6 week online program called “Bridging Poverty and Privilege: growing life changing relationships”. And you'll find more information about that in today's email and on our Facebook page as well. So let's not let our bubbles become impenetrable fortresses.

Let's not allow our church be a fortress either.

I know that might sound a bit ridiculous... we are an Affirming Ministry after all... and we do say at the beginning of every single service that everyone is welcome here.

But.. we are a pretty homogenous community... we're pretty white... and middle class...

This doesn't mean that welcoming diversity isn't applicable to us... in fact... we probably need to work harder... need to be more intentional... than some communities if we want to be in authentic relationship with those who are different from us. We have to go out and look for diversity.

And if we don't

if we don't scatter about...

if we as a community of faith build walls...

or if we don't pull apart the walls that have been built...

if we don't think that understanding religious and cultural differences is important for us...

and if we don't intentionally seek opportunities to learn about those differences, it's unlikely we will survive long into the future.

Hunkering down may feel like the safest... the most comfortable option... and it's definitely the easiest option...

but it is not an option that is in line with Christ's ministry of inclusiveness and radical hospitality.

We are called – as individuals and as the church - to live by faith... not by fear.



And we are called to demonstrate our faith by moving out of the familiar, by leaving the comfortable behind – the walls, the towers, watching out fearfully for those who are different from us.

And we have most definitely made some solid effort here... we became an Affirming Ministry... we seek out and support outreach projects that provide opportunity for us to learn and engage with diversity... we've welcomed guest preachers and speakers who offer a new perspective. And, of course, we have a long history of support for refugee families and I know that those who have had the opportunity to be in relationship with the refugees have felt blessed by those experiences.

Everything we do to step out brings us a little closer to God's hope that we will discover and hold that deep and unwavering recognition of the blessing of difference.

So with that hope in mind... may we truly honour who God created us to be...our own unique, diverse and beautiful selves...  
and may we also honour the uniqueness, diversity and beauty of others.

And when we find ourselves feeling muddled, may God grant us the courage we need to move forward and the openness we need to expand our hearts to all God's people.

**Hymn:** Joyful, Joyful – The Coulthard Family

**Offering Dedication:**

On this Thanksgiving Sunday we celebrate the bounty of this earth, the love of family and friends, the grace that surrounds our lives and the opportunity to be a means of grace in the lives of others. Through our many and varied offerings may your love and grace be known here amongst us and all around the world.  
Amen

**Prayers of the People**

As we enter into a time of prayer I invite you to make a fist with your hands and imagine in those clenched fists is all that you are holding tight: fear, anxiety, worry, grief, loneliness, helplessness or maybe you are holding onto a specific circumstance that has you tied in knots.

You are invited now to slowly open your fists and imagine letting go of all these things into the loving embrace of the spirit - who transforms all things – and

as we let go and open up we see that now our hands and our hearts are more ready to hold with love the concerns of others and the pain of the world and so we would pray:

God, our desire in this moment is to come before you with our prayers of thanksgiving.

For some of us, words of thanksgiving, flow easily from our lips.

For others trying to name our blessings may prove difficult.

Thanksgiving this year may be very different from previous years:

a new table at which to sit, new persons sitting with us, or a dear one absent, usually full tables a little less full because we still need to be careful – there may be worries crowding out our sense of blessing.

These realities may reshape our prayers from years past.

To seek joy may lead through heartbreak.

Whatever our reality, O God, We ask that you help us focus not so much on material things but rather on how we are living our lives.

Help us recognize all the ways you are present in our lives.

Help us gather the strength we need for today  
and for all of our tomorrows.

Hear us now as we offer to you our prayers of thanksgiving in a time of silence....

In this moment we acknowledge that - We are loved and blessed and thankful.

AND in this moment we acknowledge that we are connected - not only to you but also to our McClure community of faith. And so we would pray for those who are ill, afraid or lonely. We ask that those needing healing and comfort might find compassion in our eyes.

And in this moment we acknowledge that we are connected to people around the world. And so we would pray for our siblings who long for a safe place to live, who long for clean water and simple food. Who crave peace and justice. May these see compassion when they look into our eyes.

And in this moment we acknowledge that we are connected to this beautiful earth. We pray for those who farm and have stewardship of the land may they be safe and wise. We pray for the animals, the rivers, the sky. Teach us to honour our connectedness.

These things we pray in the name of the one who taught us to pray together singing the word's he taught....

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.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## **Blessing**

On this Thanksgiving Sunday may we move from this time of worship with gratitude for all the gifts of creations...  
And gratitude for the truth of who we really are... unique and beautiful... created in the image and likeness of God  
And with that truth solidly planted in our minds..  
may our hearts be open in to recognize and celebrate the uniqueness and beauty of others.

May we go from here now so filled with the love of God that all the world feels the welcome of it.  
The blessing and love and peace of God goes with us today and every day.

**Sung Blessing:** You Shall Go Out With Joy – Jim Gillis