

# Worship with McClure United Church

~Revisiting Sunday School Summer Worship Series~

July 5, 2020

## Welcome and Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning.

I'm on my own here now... as Brian is off enjoying retirement and Debra is off hopefully enjoying some well deserved vacation time.

I welcome the gentler pace that summer brings and am grateful to have this opportunity to offer worship to you.

And, I'm not really alone. My partner Jordan, for those of you who don't know, is one of the ministry team at St. Martin's United Church. Early one morning a couple of weeks ago we were talking about some of the challenges of our favourite Bible stories and had the idea to do a summer worship series digging deeper into some of these stories and the dilemmas and gifts they seem to offer. So over the next 5 weeks we will be sharing the reflection time together – sharing, reflecting and hopefully learning from each other. We mention this in our reflection but I want to just say it again here... if this series inspires more questions within you (which would be awesome), please don't hesitate to give us a call and chat. Seriously.. we enjoy this kind of thing – very few things make us happier than good theological conversations... we actually even enjoy bad theological conversations – so let us know if anything emerges for you that you'd like to chat about.

In terms of announcements – the only thing I'd like to let you know about again is the Friday morning coffee time, each Friday in August at 10am in the church parking lot. We gathered for the first time this past Friday and it was amazing to see so many familiar faces. If you are interested in coming, you need to let me know by Friday evening. We are limiting the number who can come to 20 folks in order to ensure good physical distancing and so that everyone can hear each other. If you come you need to bring your own chair and your own coffee or other drink. We are not, at the moment, allowed to serve drinks or snacks. If you don't have a chair to bring, I will provide a few plastic chairs, already sanitized, for those who need. It's really just a very informal opportunity to get together and reconnect... to see how our faith friends are doing.

And as I am here on my own for the month of July I invite you to contact me on my cell phone or by email if you would like a phone chat or if you have any questions. Now listen.. I know you are a very kind and caring community and some of you may be thinking "oh my goodness that poor woman is all by herself, she doesn't have time for me"... well.. if you're thinking that, you're wrong. I always have time. So please don't

hesitate to be in touch. My contact information is on the church website and also on the church answering machine.

And so, now as we prepare our hearts for worship I invite you to take a moment now to open yourselves to the light and love of Jesus – our teacher and our friend. I light this candle as a reminder of Christ’s light and I pray you will feel the warmth of that light move through the airwaves and settle gentle on your heart. (*light candle*)

### **Opening Prayer**

We gather now God in your loving presence and in community with all those near and far who are watching this now. Open us to your love – inspire us with your wisdom – and challenge live in your way... as your beloved disciples. Amen.

### **Scripture** The Story of Creation from The Spark Story Bible

On the first day of creation, the wind of God blew. WHISH! WOOSH! SWOOSH! God said, “Let there be light!” CRACKLE! BOOM! BANG! There was light. God saw that the light was good. Then, SPLLLLLLLLITT! God divided the light and the darkness into day and night.

On the second day, God said, “Let there be a sky!” PILLOW! BILLOW! PUFF! There was a sky. God saw that the sky was good.

On the third day, God said, “Let there be water and dry land!” DRIP! DROP! KERPLUNK! There was water. CRACKLE! CRUNCH! SNAP! There was dry land. God saw that the water and land were good. The God said, “Let there be plants and trees!” RUMBLE! RUSTLE! POP! There were plants and trees. God saw that the plants and trees were good.

On the fourth day, God said, “Let there be a sun and a moon and stars!” GLIMMER! SHIMMER! SHINE! There was a sun and a moon and thousands of stars. God saw that the sun and the moon and stars were good.

On the fifth day, God said, “Let there be sea animals that swim and birds that fly!” WIGGLE! SPLISH! SPLASH! There were sea animals. FLUTTER! PUTTER! TWEET! There were birds. God saw that the sea animals and birds were good.

On the sixth day, God said, “Let there be animals of every kind on the earth!” GROWL! PROWL! SNORT! There were animals with fur. SKITTER! SKATTER! CREEP! There were bugs. SLITHER! SLINK! HOP! There were reptiles.

God saw that the animals and bugs and reptiles were good. Then God said, “Let there be people on the earth!” BLINK! WINK! HICCUP! There were people on the earth. God saw that the people were very good.

On the seventh day, God said, “It is time to rest!” WHEW! PSHEW! AHHHH! God and all of creation rested.

## **Reflection**

**Laura:**

I'm Laura Fohse and I'm one of the ministers at McClure United Church.

**Jordan:**

I'm Jordan Cantwell and I'm one of the ministers at St. Martin's United Church.

**Laura:**

A couple of weeks ago, I was sharing with Jordan a dilemma I often experience in doing Christian education with children. The dilemma being about sharing the Bible stories. I believe it is absolutely essential to share those stories with the children – as they are foundational to our faith, but I also want to share them in a way that helps them to take away some important message... some message of how we are called to live our lives as Christians and as followers of Christ. I understand, as somebody who is sharing the stories, that they are not intended to be taken literally but that there's some deeper meaning within those stories... but children are literal thinkers – they don't understand metaphor.

So this led into an interesting conversation between Jordan and I as to how we understood biblical stories as children and how those understandings might have shifted and changed over the years... so we thought this might make an interesting sermon series throughout the summer – to be able to explore some of our favourite stories that we learned as children, to share our own reflections of those stories with you and then hopefully to invite you to share some of your reflections back – as way of digging deeper into those stories and seeing what meaning they might have for us today.

**Jordan:**

Awesome. So why don't we get started with you, Laura. Talk a little bit about your journey with the creation story that we heard this morning and how that has sort of grown for you.

**Laura:**

So I think I remember the creation story in the same way that most of us would – that God created the world in 6 days and on the seventh day God rested... that God created, on the last day, the animals and then Adam and Eve came along... and I remember that all was beautiful in the Garden of Eden.

And then there was a snake that came along and tempted Eve to eat an apple... and she ate it and that's when things kind of fell apart. So those are probably the key points that I remember of that story as a child.

And then later when I was in my early twenties and made a re-entry into church after many years away, I came into the church through a more fundamentalist Christian tradition and was told by the pastor in the church, that reading the Bible was a very important part of understanding our faith. So I made a commitment to read the Bible from start to finish... and I think I made it part way through the Genesis creation story and started to feel really unsettled. There was something about the creation story, and the idea that it was created in six days, that didn't make any sense to me. I was confused about how, if God created Adam and Eve, then how does that explain, or how do we explain, all of the races that we know today?

And then I came to the story of Cain and Abel... and knowing that Adam and Eve had two sons, I was confused... if they only had two sons – where do their wives come from? So all of these little questions just started to bubble up inside. So I called the pastor of the church and I asked him my questions. I don't really remember how he responded but what I do remember is not feeling satisfied with his response... that it just left me with more questions and confusion and even really questioning the whole faith... because if I couldn't understand the Bible literally, then was it all a lie?... and what role did the Bible play in faith?... because I knew that I couldn't understand that the way I had understood it previously.

### **Jordan:**

Well that's really interesting, 'cuz that makes me think about many conversations that I've had with parishioners who have asked me questions like – I don't understand how, if the Earth was created in six days or seven days or whatever, where do dinosaurs fit in?... and where does evolution fit in?... what about the big bang?

And then I remember so clearly, a few years ago, I was in Bay of Quinte Conference – and I was at a congregation, speaking there... and for the children's time they had the children and the adults all put in questions to ask the Moderator (this was when I was Moderator)... and one of the questions – it was particularly about the creation story, but it was really about the Bible in general – the question was: Is it true or is it just a myth?... how are we to understand these stories – are these true stories or are they just myths?... and if they're just myths, then what relevance does the Bible have for us?

I thought it was such an interesting question, because it is suggested that myth and truth are opposites. What I said at the time, and what I would say today, is that – yes, the Bible is true... I understand there to be deep truths in the Bible... and yes, I believe many of the stories are myths... but I don't think that myth and truth are opposites.

We often suggest that something is either true – factual... or it's a myth – an untruth. But myths actually are stories that contain deep truths that are truer than fact. There are facts of how the world came into being... and we don't even know all those facts, but

science is illuminating some of them – those are the facts... but those facts don't necessarily reveal to us the truth about the universe... that's what myth is for. Myth is not true as in 'here's the factual, historical account of how things happened'... but 'here's a story that reveals deep truths that our ancestors in faith have discerned in the workings of Creation... in the world.'

And so the creation story and many of the stories in the Bible are presented to us – and I think the early readers and writers of these texts didn't have the same attachment to truth as factual, historical account... they understood stories as revealing truth, without having to be literal accounts of what happened. And so they shared stories that revealed deep truths about where they understood God to be working in the world and how they understood creation to operate and our place in creation... and all the stories from the Bible about how was God working in the lives of people and relating to God's creation... we've got so many rich, rich stories full of deep truths that are not literal accounts of what happened. This doesn't make them untrue... it makes them not factual.

I think we haven't done a good job of helping people understand the different ways of communicating truth... and that myth is one way and science is another way... and science relies on fact and myth relies on deep spiritual truths that facts can't reveal on their own.

Okay, so if we are going to explore looking at this creation story as myth that's revealing some deep spiritual truths about God and creation and ourselves – what is a spiritual truth that you glean from the story when you read it that way?

**Laura:**

There are many spiritual truths that this story holds up... but I think the one that I'll share about comes from the understanding I had as a child... of Eve eating the Apple... being tempted by the snake... and somehow, and I don't remember how I learned this, but somehow that was connected to the concept of original sin. And so I kind of grasped onto the idea of original sin... that we are all born sinners... because somehow that explained the mistakes I made and helped me to understand why I felt like I was making mistakes. It also, though, fed into the idea that I was not good enough... and I know I'm not the only person who struggles with the idea or the feeling that they're not good enough... that there's something just wrong... and so that is something that I have struggled with but kind of chalked it up to original sin – I can't do any better... this is my lot in life, so to speak.

I don't remember where I was or who said it the first time I heard someone speak about the understanding of original blessing... and reading the story again and seeing all of the times in the creation story where God looks upon what has been created and says that it is good... and then on the last day, after having created the animals and humankind, looking upon it all and saying this is very good.

And then reading the story again – and I had only ever heard the story, as a child, of Adam being created from the dust and Eve being made from the rib of Adam... and I didn't know that there were two creation stories – and so when I read it again and saw that the first story actually says that God created them in God's image... they were created man and woman, something to that effect... that was amazing to me! To read that we were created in the image of God... that totally changed my understanding of myself and of humanity... that we were created in the image of God, so therefore we were created good... we were created *very* good... we are a blessing.

So that shifted for me... that was actually the beginning of my journey into ministry... and those who are part of McClure will know that the very foundation of my ministry and my faith is about love... the belief that we were created out of love, into love, to share God's love with the world. And to be able to do that from the understanding that I am a blessing and that all of creation is a blessing has really helped me to be able to understand my capacity for love... it doesn't mean I always do it well... you know, I'm not without mistakes. I still believe that I am, like everyone else, a sinner... but it's not innate within me... what is innate within me is the blessing... and yes, we all make mistakes... but I'm not stuck in that place or the idea of thinking of myself as a sinner. Thinking of myself as a blessing has shifted my understanding of who I am and my role in the world and it has opened up my faith and helped me to let go of shame and other things that I think I carried from those original understandings of the story of creation.

So that's just one example of how understanding this story differently has been a blessing to me. What about you?

**Jordan:**

Well, I agree that this story is rich with all kinds of meanings... but one that I've recently been wrestling with, in that first creation account that we heard, is the order in which things are created... there's a very particular order in which things are created, and I don't think that's accidental.

I think that the Ancients who imagined these stories were trying to communicate something they understood about the interrelatedness of creation. And so we see that light is first created... and then the waters are separated... and then the land appears... and then the plants. They seem to have just understood something very important about the interrelatedness of life and what each part of creation needs for its existence. The

plants don't show up before there's dry land and water and light to sustain the plants... and the animals don't show up until they've got something to eat.

The order in which creation is imagined and comes into being says so much about the web of relationships that are necessary to sustain life. So it's very profound to me when I think that the last thing God creates in that story, before resting, is humanity. I remember growing up thinking that must mean we're the pinnacle of creation... we must be the best thing God created, because God kind of went, 'Yeah, okay, can't get any better than that.' But actually, when I read that story through this lens of the web of interrelatedness and interdependence, it means that we, as human beings (and I think the Ancients understood this), we are absolutely dependant on all other parts of creation... we couldn't come into existence, we could not thrive, we could not live fully, without all of creation being there to support our existence... which means we are the *most* dependant ... we cannot take out any part of creation and think that we can survive.

What a profound message from Ancients, who were thinking and writing and living long before conversations about climate change, and long before what science is teaching us now about how, when we start changing things up and removing species, we threaten our own existence... the story tells us that from the very beginning.

There was something I read just this morning about how God creates all of the animals, and the world is teeming with fish and with birds... and God creates herds of deer... but creates two human beings... only two.... Why not a whole community of human beings? And what the Jewish midrash suggests is, by creating only two human beings, the message is that we are all descended from the same ancestors and none of us can claim superior ancestry to anyone else... none of us can say, 'my people are better than your people' – because the story reveals that we all come from the same place... we are all related and our ancestry is completely connected to one another. So, all of this stuff about, 'oh, my people are better than your people' is completely refuted by the way the Ancients conceived of creation.

I thought that was pretty neat when I read that.

So this is where we want to turn to you and invite you to go back and read the story again... read the creation text and listen for what truth this story is trying to communicate to you... what is some deep meaning – beyond the literal – dig deeper into what is a truth that the story is trying to reveal? We encourage you to do that.

And we would welcome – absolutely welcome – if you wanted to then have conversation with us about that... give us a call and say, 'Hey, I'm not sure what to do with this' or 'Whoa, I just saw this!'... because that, for us, is like gold, when folks want to talk with us about what they're struggling with or what they're excited about in the Bible or in their

faith. Give us a call... you know how to reach us. But most importantly do it for yourselves and do it just to see what turns up.

**Laura:**

And if you have any responses to this and you want to post it in the comments to get some conversation going there, that would be great as well. I know that in this time, right now, we're not able to get together for face-to-face Bible studies and discussion groups... but that doesn't mean that we can't still discuss... so we just really encourage you to share – if not with us, with somebody else... get talking about those things that stand out for you and the questions you have... any celebrations, any blessing that you received from this text – share it with each other.

**Prayers of the People**

Holy One,

draw us now to be with you as you are always with us.

As we prepare our hearts for this sacred time of prayer, may we feel your love surround us, giving us what we need right now to be fully present to you... for the sake of our community, our world, and ourselves. In opening to you... to your power, strength and wisdom – we open ourselves to be conduits – channels of your goodness in the world. And we remember your goodness now as we take a moment in quiet to give thanks for all of the blessings you have shared with us... in gratitude we pray: (*silence*)

And now with hearts touching gratitude, we are ready to offer our prayers of care and concern for the world... for our friends, families and for ourselves.

We hold before you, O God, those who are in need of our love, our kindness, and our compassion... those in need of our prayers:

the ones who are struggling right now – with worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, anger

the ones who are living with health concerns...

the ones who are grieving...

the ones who are addicted...

the ones facing loss and change and uncertainty...

and we pray for the ones who care for them – for the support workers, family members and friends...

We pray all the painful places of injustice in our world and in our communities...

For the ones who live with trauma... the trauma that comes from discrimination, rejection, violent words and actions...

For the ones struggling with their commitment to be good allies, friends and neighbours...

We pray God for all the places of brokenness in your world...

We pray for your healing love and light to reach into those places, offering even a moment.. even a glimmer of hope to those who most need it.



And knowing that we all have our own places and people where brokenness exists, we take another moment now in quiet to hold our brokenness before God – opening even further to the love that is within and all around us. (*silence*)

O God, hear our prayers, receive our hearts and from your deep love may we find the healing and hope we need... today and every day.

And now, we share together the prayer that Jesus taught his friends and disciples:  
Our Father...

### **Blessing**

And now may we go from this time of worship

Open to God's love, inspired by God's wisdom  
and challenged to live our lives in God's way –

And as we go let's remember always that we do not.. not ever.. go alone.

We are not alone – thanks be to God.

Amen.