

Our hearts are saddened at this Anniversary time by the news that the wonderful man from whom our Congregation was named is in failing health. Our prayers are offered for Dr. Bob and Amy McClure, two people who continue to be an inspiration to all who know their story and honor their ministry.

A Name to Live By

Proverbs 22:1 *“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.”*

The book of Proverbs has an archaic, old-fashioned flavor to it. If we were to read all of Proverbs this morning, some of us might be alternately bored and offended by its language and ideas. And yet this collection of sayings attributed to King Solomon contains some very up-to-date advice. For example, Chapter 22 verse 1 says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.”

Now who could argue with that? Well, maybe and Alex Keaton or a Jimmy Bakker! But I hope all of us here would agree that, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.”

Twenty-five years ago, a new congregation of The United Church of Canada was searching for a name. It was unlikely that this congregation would ever have great riches. (It would have a lot of budget deficits through the years.) There really wasn't a choice between “a good name” and “great riches.” But the congregation in question did choose a good name.

In the beginning, there were a number names suggested. One that might have been appropriate for a congregation in southeastern Saskatoon was “Arlington Avenue United Church.” A few lots had been set aside as a building site on Arlington Avenue – and the name does have a nice ring to it. Or, the congregation might have been called “Brevoortview” or “Eastpark”. However, the discussion over a name came to an end when Margaret Anderson suggested “McClure”. (She explained that the name had come to her in a dream.) In a vote by ballot, that was the name that received overwhelming approval.

Now all this happened about 1966 – at a time before Dr. Robert Baird McClure had been elected Moderator of The United Church. He was in India then, in Ratlam, serving as the medical director of a United Church Mission Hospital. Even though Dr. McClure was a great adventurer, who had spent most of his life outside of Canada, he was well known to members of The United Church.

The media loved this irrepressible, unconventional missionary surgeon because, whenever he was home on furlough, he was given to making outrageous statements that jarred people into paying attention. It should also be remembered that Dr. Bob was the son of missionary parents, and in those days, largely through the efforts of the Women's Missionary Society, most congregations were well informed about our overseas missionaries. I remember when I was a very small boy, that one of the highlights of the year was when some missionary came home on leave would visit our little community and keep us spellbound with stories of far-away places, sometime illustrating the stories with “magic lantern slides”.

Because of his dynamic personality, and because of his habit of getting quoted in the press whenever he was on Canadian soil, Dr. Bob McClure, the missionary surgeon, gained a reputation as a colorful and courageous Canadian, a reputation that gave him status and honor far beyond the bounds of The United Church. His two-year term as Moderator was not without its controversies. He did have his detractors, both inside and outside the Church, but there was no denying his popularity or his ability.

One might think that two years as head of Canada's largest protestant denomination would be enough post-retirement labor. One would think that at the age of 70, one could afford to sit back and let others do the work. Surely one deserves to take it easy – rest a bit, read, take some time for golf and bridge. But after Bob McClure was finished being Moderator he was off to Borneo, Peru, Zaire... and he hasn't stopped since. When we invited this 91 year old man to come share in our 25th Anniversary celebrations, his crowded schedule showed only two date available between August and Christmas, and one of them was September 29th.

So, this is McClure United Church! The charter members of the congregation chose a name that has had a powerful impact on who we are and on how we behave as a church community. In the context of the lives of Dr. Bob and Amy McClure, "McClure" means *service, courage, humanity, and hope*.

Some of us spend quite a bit of time complaining about how much we have to do. I suppose some of us, maybe all of us from time to time, get upset by the expectations that other people put on us. We are not amused by the number of times we asked to give to the church or to do something for the church. We look for ways of avoiding tasks that somebody has to do but that we would rather not do. Now I suspect that Dr. Bob and Amy McClure, in their humanness, are not unlike the rest of us. They get tired and frustrated too. However, when one looks at how they have spent their lives, one sees most clearly their willingness to assume responsibility, their determination to express their love for God by the way they live. They have consistently shown their love for people by giving and doing all that they possibly can.

The name "McClure" implies active service, implies being able to see the needs around us, and implies the initiative to do something about meeting those needs. The name "McClure" inspires an outreach ministry. This doesn't mean that all of us have to be globetrotting, risk-taking missionaries. Amy, who returned from China at the beginning of the war and spent her life carrying the burden of the family and working faithfully in the church at home, was no less heroic than her hyperactive husband. As a congregation that carries the name "McClure", we are challenged to be sensitive to the opportunities for service that open before us. We are challenged to look beyond ourselves and our own needs, beyond our own comfort and self-interest to the challenge of telling and living the story of God's love.

The McClures found their motivation where we find ours. They found their motivation for a life of Christian service through their commitment to the One who said to those gathered around him: "Come, take up your cross every day and follow me."

The quiet courage of Amy McClure and the breathtaking courage of Bob McClure, must make an impact on any congregation that is named in their honor. Whether he was being shot at on the Burma Road, or struggling with primitive hospital facilities in remote areas of Africa, Bob McClure, kept his head up and his eye on the goals that were before him. Amy McClure, in her role as community work, mother, church worker, and friend, possessed great inner courage and strength. This courage and strength kept her in love with a man who was seldom home, nourished her sense of humor and kept her in intimate touch with God. These are people who are willing to take great risks. They have made decisions that sensible people have thought foolish but, from their point of view, their behaviour was the natural result of their principles and their faith.

As a congregation that bears the name "McClure", we have taken risks in the past and we will be challenged to take risks in the future. The name "McClure" will inspire us to chart our journey, not on the basis of what is safe or comfortable or profitable, but on the basis of what is right, on the basis of what is possible, and the basis of what is the will of God for us at any point in our journey.

One of the most wonderful characteristics of Bob and Amy McClure is their down-to-earth humility. These people, who have hobnobbed with the rich and the powerful, not just in our own country but in many other lands, are truly humble. They are people who have accomplished so much and who have not an ounce of false pride or snobbery in them. They are able to laugh at their own weaknesses – and see their own mistakes. They are comfortable with all kinds of people, and especially with children. Surely any congregation that calls itself “McClure” will be in trouble if it cannot be open and inclusive, and if it cannot chuckle at its own weaknesses. Here again, our humility will be measured by the Gospel. Jesus rejects our labels and our pretensions. He makes fun of the games religious people sometimes play. Jesus makes it clear that meekness, genuine humility, is one of the most necessary and valuable gifts of God.

It is a very hopeful sign when a 91 year old physician is still passionately concerned about the welfare of his sisters and brothers in Canada and all around the world. It is a hopeful sign when a 91 year old man is still out there making a difference, being faithful to his God and telling stories to little children.

“McClure” people will be hopeful people. They will be people who look to the future with confidence and trust. This kind of hope is not a soft-headed idealism. It is a way of believing and behaving that shows our faith in a God who will not fail us or forsake us. It is a way of saying that we believe in each other and in the task we have been called to do.

May God continue to bless and to guide this people called, “McClure”.

Rev. Dale Morrison
McClure United Church
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
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