



April 26, 2020

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church

April 26, 2020

3rd Sunday of Easter

Worship prepared today by

Rev. Marion Loree

We acknowledge with respect the history, spirituality and culture of the Indigenous peoples with whom Treaty 4 - also known as the Haldimand Tract - was signed and the territory wherein our church resides, and we acknowledge our responsibilities as treaty members.

Welcome

My name is Marion Loree and I am the minister at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario. We gather in community. Even though we cannot be together physically, we share in the community of faith through things like this - printed or videoed worship. This service is prepared for Sunday April 26, 2020. I was on study leave last week so it has been a couple of weeks since I talked with you.

Much is happening and has happened in our world in those few days. The Covid-19 pandemic continues and we remain in isolation as we continue to practice social distancing. And just this past weekend a horrific situation has unfolded in Nova Scotia with 22 people killed in the worst mass shooting in Canadian history.

So we come to worship with heavy hearts today. It is at times like these that we need each other most. It is at times like these when we need to hear and hold on to the stories of resurrection and hope passed down through our ancestors. It is at times like these that Jesus's message of love and hope is needed more than ever.

And so, I invite you to join me in a time of worship, a time in which we search together for hope and healing.

Sharing the Light *(take a moment to light a candle and centre yourself to prepare to enter in to a time of worship and prayer. As you light the candle repeat the following words)*

I light a candle

in the name of the God who creates life,
in the name of the Christ Presence who loves life,
in the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.

Centering words:

-Wilfred Pelletier & Ted Poole (Earth Prayers).

Wherever you are is home
and the earth is paradise
Wherever you set your feet is holy land.
You don't live off it like a parasite.
You live in it, and it in you,
Or you don't survive.
And that is the only worship of God there is.

Call to Worship:

I invite you now into a time of worship.
A time for recognizing and acknowledging
the still small voice within each of our hearts.

A time to listen and reflect on issues of the day.
A time to find calm and hope and inspiration.

Today we also take time to honour Earth
our mother and our home.
We are connected although we are unique.
We are one people on one planet.
We are the body of Christ.
Come, let us worship together.

As we look forward to spring and summer weather with the amazing renewal of the plants and trees after the long winter, let us remember how truly wonderful God's creation is and how grateful we are for being part of it.

Hymn: Morning has Broken VU 409

**Morning has broken like the first morning,
blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!**

**Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
like the first dew-fall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness where God's feet pass.**

**Ours is the sunlight! Ours is the morning
born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's recreation of the new day!**

Opening Prayer:

As we gather today, we give thanks, God of all creation. We offer our commitment to be good stewards of the earth so the generations to come may also enjoy the beauty of the earth. Creator, let us grow to love and respect nature and the beauty that surrounds us every day.

Today we mourn with those who grieve and we search for signs of resurrection and new life along with our lament and sadness.

And today we give thanks for each other as we join our hearts in love to support those who need it most. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35 (The Inclusive Bible: the First Egalitarian Translation)
(Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus)

That same day, two of the disciples were making their way to a village called Emmaus - which was about seven miles from Jerusalem - discussing all that had happened as they went.

While they were discussing these things, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them, though they were kept from recognizing Jesus, who asked them, "What are you two discussing as you go your way?"

They stopped and looked sad. One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these past few days?"

Jesus said to them, "What things?"

They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people - how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him.

We were hoping that he was the One who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today - the third day since these things happened - some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn and didn't find the body; they returned and informed us that they had seen a vision of angels, who declared that Jesus was alive. Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but they didn't find Jesus."

Then Jesus said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Didn't the Messiah have to undergo all this to enter into glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of scripture which referred to the Messiah. By now they were near the village they were going to, and Jesus appeared to be going further. But they said eagerly, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening - the day is practically over." So he went in and stayed with them.

After sitting down with them to eat, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately vanished from their sight.

They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning inside us as this one talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven and the rest of the company assembled. They were greeted with "Christ has risen! It's true! Jesus has appeared to Simon!"

Then the travelers recounted what had happened on the road, and how they had come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Message:

I want to talk to you about a couple of things today. My original plan was to talk mainly about Earth in honour of Earth Day which took place this past Wednesday, April 22. And I will still touch on that but given the recent events in Nova Scotia I feel the need to talk a bit about that, too. And, of course, the Covid-19 pandemic continues.

We are in the season of Easter. Contrary to what some may believe Easter is not just a day but a season which lasts until Pentecost which happens 50 days after Easter Sunday. For those who are not familiar with church language - Pentecost a day when we celebrate the event at which Jesus' followers were infused with the Spirit. The Bible describes it as a powerful event experienced by many. It was the event which inspired them to actively follow 'the way' that Jesus had taught them and so it could be said it was the birth of the church. During the 50 days of the Easter season Jesus appeared to a number of his followers until finally he 'ascended to heaven' as the Bible puts it. We might say he crossed over into the closer presence of God.

Anyway, as I said, we are in the season of Easter. And what is Easter? It is the day of resurrection. The day that Jesus is said to have risen from the dead. As I said in my Easter meditation, I don't believe that his body was physically resuscitated but I do believe that something extraordinary must have happened or his message would have simply died out. Who, after all, would risk their own life teaching a message that had taken their leader to the cross of execution? So something must have happened to infuse those followers with the courage and conviction to carry on in his 'way' of radical change.

So, regardless of how it may have happened everything that followed hinges on the notion that Jesus (or his message) did not remain in the grave.

My dictionary defines the word 'resurrection' as "the action of resurrecting or reviving someone or something". This fits for me. Jesus had died. They had watched as he hung on that cross until life was gone. But now his message and his teaching and his 'way' of being was being revived in and by his followers. They were not about to let his message die. Jesus had taught them a different way of being - a way that gave them new life and offered new life to everyone. So they set out to spread the good news of resurrection - new life - that Jesus had taught them.

It is a message that has been carried down through the ages, albeit in some bizarre forms at times, but the basis of it remains - we are beloved of God, the source of all that is, and becoming aware of that frees us to be and become all that we can be. It frees us to love and be loved just for who we are.

So what difference does resurrection make in a world of Covid-19 and tragic mass shootings. How can we derive hope from anything when we are seemingly surrounded by death? How can we offer hope to one another when we can't be together to hold and hug those who are grieving? It is difficult, so very difficult and I was feeling a bit overwhelmed with it all this week and found myself wondering how I could talk of resurrection in the face of all we are coping with right now.

Then I came across a reading in a wonderful book called "CPR for the Soul" written by Tom Stella. There is one section in that book that reminded me of how resurrection happens every day often in some very ordinary ways. I want to share it with you now. Stella offers us the following '*Signs of Resurrection*'

When an alcoholic works the 12-Step program...

When an inner-city child graduates from college...

When an abused child becomes a responsible parent...

When an abused spouse says "no more" and means it...

When a couple in a troubled marriage begins counselling...

When a smile pops to the face of one long lost to depression...

When after a long winter, nature begins to bud and blossom...

When nations reduce rather than replenish their store of weapons...

Tom Stella writes in part:

Death in its many forms looms large in our world. Whether demonstrated in the physical demise of our bodies, seasonal decay in nature, or the relational and situational declines that so often characterize our life circumstances, death is both real and unavoidable. End of story. Or is it? As my examples above suggest, enter Easter. Enter resurrection. Enter the possibility that death does not have the last word.

There is within all creation an innate vitality, a drive to be alive. There is a built-in dynamic that refuses to be defeated before its time. This same life-force, this unquenchable Spirit, could be what Jesus' followers experienced as his presence after he died.

Easter celebrates that the Spirit with which Jesus lived is at work in the world today. Easter invites us to view resurrection as an ongoing reality. Many of us are prone to overlook signs of resurrection but the statements above are examples and signs that resurrection is not just an historical event in the life of Jesus, but an ever-present dynamic in ourselves, in nature, and in the circumstances which so often overwhelm us.

Faith understood as the radical willingness to open our hearts to life's innate vitality empowers us to emerge from the grave-like fears and insecurities that entomb us.

Wise words from Tom Stella. And his words bring to mind the story I read for you about Jesus' followers not recognizing him on the road to Emmaus. It wasn't until he broke the bread at table that their eyes were opened. It was in an ordinary, everyday action that they realized their teacher was not dead but still very much alive in them and in how they lived. Jesus was changed. He was not the same and so they did not recognize him immediately but the Spirit of his life was very much alive.

We also have a difficult time remembering that death is not the last word, that new life will come. Sometimes we don't have any idea how because we are so mired in our grief but there comes a time when we have to raise our heads, look around and know that death is never the last word - that life will always find a way forward. Our loved ones may be gone in body and our lives will look different and we will never be the same but love does not die.

This season of spring teaches us every year that life goes on. We look around and see the trees coming into bud, the grass turning green and flowers beginning to burst forth in vibrant colour. Resurrection is happening all around us.

Our mother earth is enjoying resurrection in other ways right now, too. As the pandemic forces people to remain in their homes we hear reports of skies that are normally polluted by too many vehicles on the roads being clear for the first time in years. We hear other reports of animals and birds returning to deserted beaches and people being able to see to the bottom of canals they haven't seen in a long time. Yes, our Mother earth knows all about resurrection and perhaps it is time we took some lessons from her.

So this week has been a mix of emotions for me and I am sure it has for you, too. After 4 or 5 weeks staying in our homes we may be settling somewhat into new routines and starting to get used to it. But on the other hand, not being able to visit in person with family and friends is getting more difficult as time goes on and many people are coping with the loss of wages and income as well, not to mention those who are grieving the ones who have died of the virus.

The events in Nova Scotia can be hard to hear about in a time when we are already dealing with turmoil in our lives and trying to figure out ways to cope. And who can think about the Earth and what is happening with the environment when some of us don't know how we will put food on the table or pay the rent next month?

But this is the season of Easter and we do need to look for signs of new life and resurrection which will help give us hope for the future. Hope and resurrection are found in the positive things. Things like:

Indications that our social distancing and isolating at home appears to be working as 'the curve' of virus infection starts to flatten and go down. We can see that an end may be in sight - that is a positive.

People are reaching out in so many different ways to stay connected with friends and family. Some of us are learning all about technology to do so - that's a positive.

Talented people are offering on-line or porch concerts and entertainment to help keep spirits up and encourage everyone - that's positive.

People are volunteering to shop and run errands for those who are quarantined or cannot get out to do it themselves - that's positive.

So many Canadians have rallied together to send messages of condolence to those in Nova Scotia affected by the mass shooting - that's a positive.

We see people world-wide researching renewable energies and working to find ways for all of us to live in a sustainable way on this planet - that's a positive.

All of us are more aware of how the actions of all of us affect the environment and how serious climate change is - that's a positive.

There are so many signs of new life and resurrection - of hope - around us if we will only open our eyes and see them. We are a resilient species and our Christian tradition is a tradition of hope. The Bible is full of stories of people - ordinary people - who faced tough times but with faith and trust in the Divine Presence were able to overcome sometimes incredible odds to come successfully out the other side.

I am confident that we, too, will come out the other side of Covid-19, of the intense shock and sadness over this mass shooting, and of the suffering of our earth that humankind has inflicted on it. These things will have consequences and we will be changed by them and nothing will ever be the same again but life goes on. We will get through it. It is entirely up to us how we come out the other side - with strength gained through what we have learned or with bitterness and anger that we had to experience it at all. That choice is up to us.

Easter, resurrection, new life - it is waiting for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Preparation for Prayer: *As we prepare our hearts and minds to enter into a time of prayer I invite you to sit comfortably and quietly for a moment. Breathe deeply a few times paying particular attention to your breath as it moves in through your nostrils and fills your lungs. Picture your breath as a light entering your body and filling it with love and relaxation. Then when you exhale imagine the breath taking all your tensions and worries with it as it leaves your body. Do this a few times until you feel relaxed then move on into the prayer time.*

Prayers: A PRAYER FOR EARTH DAY

Good and gracious God, source of the evolving universe, source of all life, all creation is charged with your divine energy.

Ignite your spark within us, that we may know ourselves as truly human and holy, irrevocably part of the web of life.

All creation, each star and every flower, each drop of water and every person, each and every atom, down to its very electrons, explodes with the revelation of your sacred mystery.

Our minds alone cannot fathom such splendor, our hearts can only respond in awe, praise and gratitude.

Forgive us, we pray, our ignorance and insecurities which blind us to your thumb print writ large, that deafen us to the sacred space between two heartbeats, that prompt us in arrogance to demand and dominate, that numb us to the destruction we've caused, that hold us hostage to "either-or" thinking and living.

May we always walk gently upon this earth, in right relationship, nurtured by your love, taking only what we need, giving back to the earth in gratitude, honoring all with reverence, reconciling and healing, mindful of those who will come after, recognizing our proper place as part of, not apart from, your creation.

Help us eradicate the earth of diseases that ravage. Walk alongside us as we strive to heal ourselves and others. Be with those who work in the depths of scary spaces. Grant all peace and strength.

Grant us the strength and courage, we pray, for such radical transformation into your kin-dom. Then we, too, with the very stones will shout, "HOSANNA."

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of St. John's United Church, Elmvale and for all those who work on our behalf in other parts of our country and the world. And we pray for ourselves, as in a moment of silence we lift up the things which weigh heavy on our hearts at this time...*(silence)*... We pray today for the people of Nova Scotia and especially the families and loved ones of those whose lives were take so tragically. Our hearts are numb with the shock and our minds cannot comprehend such acts of violence. We pray for the families and loved ones of those lost to the Covid-19 virus. We pray for those who risk health and safety to provide for our needs and to care for the sick. We know your heart breaks, too, compassionate One. We know that our tears are your tears as we mourn the loss of so many.

Give us strength. Give us patience. Give us compassion and open our eyes to the signs of resurrection and new life around us. The signs of hope that will lead us through these difficult times.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together saying:

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name,
 thy kindom 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 kindom, the power, and the glory
 forever and ever. Amen.

Offering:

If you would like to do your part by making a monetary donation to Melville United Church there are a number of ways to do that.

1. *Cheque (post-dated cheques are welcome): made payable to: Melville United Church - which can be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 41, Fergus, ON N1M 2W7 or put in the mail slot beside the parking lot door.*
2. *Donate online through the Canada Helps web-site*
<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/melville-united-church/>
3. *Call or email Lynda, to arrange Pre-Authorized Remittance payments (PAR).*
4. *E-transfer directly from your bank. E-mail to secretary@melvilleunited.com*

Thanks to all of you who continue to contribute so much to make Melville the caring community of faith that it is. May you be blessed.

Hymn: In the Bulb There is a Flower

VU 703

In the bulb there is a flower;
 in the seed, an apple tree;
 in cocoons, a hidden promise:
 butterflies will soon be free!
 In the cold and snow of winter
 there's a spring that waits to be,
 unrevealed until its season,
 something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence,
 seeking word and melody;
 there's a dawn in every darkness,
 bringing hope to you and me.
 From the past will come the future;
 what it holds, a mystery,
 unrevealed until its season,
 something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;
 in our time, infinity;
 in our doubt there is believing;
 in our life, eternity.
 In our death, a resurrection;
 at the last, a victory,
 unrevealed until its season,
 something God alone can see.

Blessing:

May you keep your hearts and eyes open
 for all opportunities to be a blessing
 in your small corner of the world -
 to be a blessing to your loved ones,
 a blessing to your neighbours and friends,
 a blessing to the earth.

Go, knowing you never go alone
 for God is with you - always!
 Amen.

Prayer of the Week:

Always present God, open our hearts and hands to extend love and grace to those in need,
 following the example of our brother, Jesus the Christ. Amen.