



May 3, 2020

<p>Melville United Church 300 St. Andrew Street West, Fergus, ON N1M 1N9 Mailing address: PO Box 41, Fergus, ON N1M2W7 519-843-1780 Team Ministry</p>	
Minister of Worship, Pastoral Care & Outreach	Rev. Marion Loree
Faith Formation & Youth	Martha Duncan
Ministry of Music Team	Suzanne Flewelling
Office Administrator	Lynda Rivet
Custodian	Robert Mitchell
Chair of Church Council	Allan Hons
Chair of Pastoral Care & Prayer Chain Captain	Alison Rainford, Rev. Marion Loree
Office hours	9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. T.,T. & F.
E-Mail	secretary@melvilleunited.com
Web Site	www.melvilleunited.com
Pastoral Care Numbers	519-835-8605, 519-843-3841

**Melville United Church
May 3, 2020
4th Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday**

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 May 3, 2020.

This week we hear the familiar and comforting words of the 23rd Psalm along with other scripture images of a shepherd caring for his flock. And faith is all about God's care, something we especially need to remember in trying and difficult times. We can still live with abundance even if we are not allowed to gather together physically right now. There is still much to be thankful for.

And so, I invite you to join me in a time of worship, a time in which we search together for hope and meaning and ways to strengthen our faith.

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.

The centering words this morning are the ending verses of another Psalm. These words are a paraphrase written by Nan C. Merrill in her book called "Praying with the Psalms." I was especially taken with these words when they were introduced to me recently. I hope they speak to you too.

Centering words:

Though we are beset with many fears
that cause illness and troubles,
The Beloved is ever ready
to comfort us in our sorrows,
to strengthen us on our soul's
journey to wholeness.
The Beloved renews the life of all
who surrender to Love.

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.

We gather to listen for the voice
of the giver and guardian of our lives.
We gather, longing to hear the voice
of the Beloved calling our name.
We gather to worship and praise together.

Hymn: God is Here**VU 389 (vs 1,4)**

God is here! As we your people
meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit
into open minds and hearts.

God of all, of church and kin-dom,
in an age of change and doubt
keep us faithful to the gospel;
help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive;
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe!

Opening Prayer:

God, who calls us and leads us,
we long to know your voice through thick and thin.
We long to rest in your care for all of our needs.
We hold out our hands
as a sign of our desire to hear you and follow you.
And we hold the hands of our neighbours,
grateful that through them we also encounter you.
Open our hearts, ears and minds to hear you now. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 23 (New Revised Standard Version)

(God is my shepherd)

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff - they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil,
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

Message: The Shepherd's Voice

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." Aren't those beautiful words? Perhaps some of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture. They are words that have brought comfort to many people throughout the centuries. The 23rd Psalm is one of the most famous, if not the most well known, out of all 150 that are included in the Hebrew scriptures. This Psalm, or at least parts of it, are even recognized by people who do not attend any church or who do not profess any religion at all.

It is not surprising that biblical writers applied the shepherd image to God in the Hebrew Scriptures and to Jesus in the New Testament. The shepherd is a person with whom they were familiar.

A shepherd in our modern, urban society is strangely out of place for us, but not so in the pastoral scenes of biblical days. The occupation of shepherd is the first mentioned in the Bible. Abel, Adam's son, was a keeper of sheep (Genesis 4:2) the many references to sheep and shepherds throughout the Bible indicate that sheep were the most important domestic animal of those times. Flocks, together with agriculture, were basic to the economy. Wealth was measured in sheep. So good shepherds were important.

Shepherds were the sheep tenders and it was a respected livelihood. The economic value of sheep stands in direct proportion to the amount of supervision (i.e. guidance and protection) these beasts require. Sheep become lost easily; once lost they are defenseless. Although the shepherd's work was often boring, it was undoubtedly a job that called for diligence and endurance. They had to constantly be on the lookout for predators and thieves and, in parched Palestine, know exactly where to find water for the flock. So it really is no wonder that writers of those times thought the shepherd image was a very good one for God and for Jesus and while the imagery may have changed, the point the image makes has not.

Whether we choose it or not, whether we like it or not, we are influenced and guided by key people in our lives: parents, teachers, friends, spouses, bosses and various professionals. All have had some input as to who we are as people at this moment. Some people have had greater influence on us than others but every one we meet and interact with leaves their stamp on us in some way.

Our parents and immediate family are probably the most influential and make the biggest impact. Sometimes we are not aware how much of our parents we have absorbed until we have children of our own and one day find ourselves doing or saying the very same annoying

things that our parents did and that we swore we would never do. And how often have you heard someone say, "I looked in the mirror one day and saw my mother (or my father) looking back"? In a sense we are born as a blank slate for all those we come into contact with to make their mark. We are vulnerable for and to guidance.

Unfortunately, we can be guided for good or for ill. Our young minds and hearts cannot discern at the beginning what is good and what is not. And so young people are often wounded greatly before they are able to decide for themselves which advice to take or whose leading to follow. And some are left to their own devices with no guidance at all - good or bad. These could be truly called 'lost sheep'. For we are like sheep in many ways. And I don't mean in a way that denotes stupidity or lack of resourcefulness or ingenuity but rather in a way that means we cannot become fully who we are in isolation. By ourselves we do not grow and thrive. People need people and we only discover who we are in relation to other people. The down side to this is that sometimes the influence of the group and our desire to fit in can overcome our own better judgement.

This little story illustrates what I mean. An experiment was once conducted in a college sociology class. Seven pieces of string precisely two feet long were placed side by side on a table. Next to those seven pieces the experimenter placed an eighth piece of string which was a clear six inches shorter than the others.

Six people were then brought in to the room. Five of them were actors, the sixth was the subject of the experiment. The experimenter asked several questions, among which was "Are all these pieces of string the same length?"

To this question, the first actor answered with an emphatic "YES!" Then each of the other actors did the same, in turn, continually reinforcing the first "yes." In 75% of such experiments, the subject of the experiment also answered "yes".

When the experiment was repeated with just the subject present the response was "no" 99% of the time. Peer influence, according to these data, is very powerful.

You may have attended meetings where something along this line has happened. Everyone agrees with the first couple of speakers on an issue, right or wrong, just because everyone else does. The point is that guidance is extremely important. People can be led and misled, depending upon the one doing the guiding. In this way we are often like sheep. Not because we are stupid but simply because it is part of our human make up. Our most exceptional leaders are those who are perceived to offer us the soundest guidance and the guidance which benefits the most people.

And that is precisely where Jesus, the Good Shepherd comes in. He is one who was not so easily fooled by the group because his inner guidance system was directly connected with the Source of all creation. His inner guidance system did not rely on other human people around him or even on human wisdom, it relied on the divine guidance system of God. Unlike us who are so easily influenced by what people around us are doing or saying, Jesus was influenced by the Spirit of God acting through him. It is that kind of guidance that the Good Shepherd, in turn, offers us.

The voice of God within us is our guidance system, or should be. The voice of Spirit will lead us to "quiet waters", life-giving waters, the water that is necessary for us to be able to grow fully into who we are meant to be. The voice of the Shepherd can calm our fears and help us to overcome whatever peer pressure we are facing. The voice of the Shepherd comes to us in the silence of our own hearts. And it is that voice, if we take the time to stop and listen to it, that can still the fears which hold us back.

Just like the sheep, though, we need to become familiar with our Shepherd's voice. We need to take the time to listen for it and, once found, we need to hear the voice over and over again until there is no mistaking whose voice it is. The sheep learned to recognize their own shepherd's voice by continually hearing it. They could not recognize what they had never heard and they would not trust, even a familiar voice, if it continually led them in the wrong direction or into harms way.

And so it is with us. Unless we listen and learn what the Shepherd's voice sounds like, we won't know which voice to follow. We won't know the Shepherd's voice from the many other voices which can lead us astray and leave us lost.

A number of organizations and people that I see on Facebook suggest that this time of isolation is an opportunity for us to slow down and focus on our inner selves. I think that is good advice. Take some time for prayer or meditation. Read some spiritually focused authors or search out some inspirational speakers on-line. Or simply open your Bible and let it speak to you. There is so much wisdom out there that can feed us and guide us on our spiritual journey. Even if you are not a Christian follower doesn't mean you are not spiritual and cannot benefit from spiritual guidance. We are all spiritual beings and we all need to awaken to the power of Spirit that dwells within each of us.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Beautiful words, true words, comforting words. We are God's sheep and we will be guided to the living waters if we only open our hearts and spiritual ears to hear the Shepherd's voice. Maybe then the world would learn peace.

I want to leave you with a poem that is printed in the worship resources for this week. It was written by Maren C. Tirabassi and it goes like this...

It's Familiar...

When the community is a shepherd,
then no one will want.
Imagine everyone having
a safe place to lie down,
water to drink,
education to restore the soul,
and a meaningful path
of work or retirement -
for God's sake, God's sacred.

There are many dark valleys
of illness, loss, depression,
addiction or fear,
but when there are companions -
with a walking stick of guidance
and a staff of assistance -
then there is comfort.

Imagine the community's table set
with the kind of generosity
that changes enemy into friend,
the greatest honour anointing a stranger
and every empty cup
of the most vulnerable overflowing.

Surely, then our breaking bread
and all our prayers
will mean something,
and our neighbour's goodwill follow.
No one will worry as much about p
personal God's-house-dwelling,
as the community's hospitality to others -
Day by day by day by day
and all our lives long.

Thanks be to God for poets like Maren Tirabassi. 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: *Our prayers today begin with a paraphrase of Psalm 23.*

God, you shepherd me and so I lack for nothing.
Your Spirit lets me rest in peaceful places
and leads me to quiet pools of refreshment.
You revive me and guide me along true paths.
My way may be difficult and fearful,
but I know that your love is with me
and this gives me comfort and courage.
God you are a bountiful host to me.
I am fed with abundance,
while my adversaries look on.
I am showered with good things
and your kindness and love are constantly with me.
I will always be part of your family.

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of New Hamburg United Church and for all those who work on our behalf to shepherd people with love in other parts of our country and the world.

We pray for all those who are working so hard to care for people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and to provide for the needs of those of us who remain in our homes. We pray for those who grieve the loss of loved ones at this time whether that be from the virus, from violence or from natural causes.

We pray that we may all find this time of physical isolation an opportunity to journey deeper into the terrain of our spiritual centre for that is where we connect with you, Great Mystery.

And we pray for ourselves this day. We take a quiet moment now to offer our individual concerns, our individual joys, our individual requests for ourselves and others. Hear, now, the prayers of our hearts... (Silence)...

O God, our good shepherd, in you there is fullness of life. In you is where we find our centre, our rock, our foundation upon which to live. In you we find peace, healing, comfort and the greatest love we will ever know.

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: I Have Called You by Your Name MV 161 (vs 1,3,4)

I have called you by your name, you are mine
I have gifted you and ask you now to shine.
I will not abandon you;
all my promises are true.
You are gifted, called, and chosen; you are mine.

I know you will need my touch as you go;
feel it pulsing in creation's ebb and flow.
Like the woman reaching out,
choosing faith in spite of doubt,
hold the hem of Jesus' robe, then let it go.

I have given you a name, it is mine;
I have given you my Spirit as a sign.
With my wonder in your soul,
make my wounded children whole;
go and tell my precious people they are mine.

Blessing:

Beloved of God, we have been fed in this time of worship by our good shepherd,
the one who leads us in right paths.

We go into the world with God's love in our hearts.

We go into the rest of our life following Jesus' example.

We go into every future, knowing we never go alone,
for God is with us - always!

Amen.

Prayer of the Week:

God, in whom we find shepherding love, may we hear, follow and embody this love in all the days and in all the ways of our lives. May words and deeds joyfully testify to the abundance of your faithful love for us and for all. Amen.