



July 19, 2020

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church, Fergus Ontario
Sunday July 19th 2020

Worship prepared today by
Ruth Cooke

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.

The Christ Candle Is Lit

Call to Worship/Prayer of Approach

O God, you pour out the spirit of grace and love. Deliver us from cold hearts and wandering thoughts, that with steady minds and burning zeal, we may worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Hymn: Spirit, Open My Heart **MV 79**

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-10 (The Message)

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:21-26 (The Message)

Murder

“You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.

“This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.

“Or say you’re out on the street and an old enemy accosts you. Don’t lose a minute. Make the first move; make things right with him. After all, if you leave the first move to him, knowing his track record, you’re likely to end up in court, maybe even jail. If that happens, you won’t get out without a stiff fine.

Ministry of Music: When Peace Like a River

Meditation: How to Change Your Mind

Let us pray...

Last time I preached, I talked about systemic racism and how it has ordered our society so that a few of us, mostly those of us with pale skin and European ancestry, get rich at the expense of those who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour.

It’s a challenging topic, made even more challenging by the fact that Jesus calls us to change both the system and ourselves. And we cannot change ourselves without first understanding that the things we’ve been taught are sometimes wrong and even more times biased. We cannot change ourselves without opening our eyes and hearts to the inequity in our world. We cannot change ourselves without understanding that what seemed good enough for ourselves and our parents is not good enough for our children and grandchildren.

If you are thinking, “I’m good Ruth. I understand when things need to change and I’m willing,” try out your reaction to this statement.

I think spanking and hitting children to make them behave should be against the law. I consider it abuse. Period.

I know that maybe a few of you would agree with me, but I’m willing to bet that many, if not most of you, are having a very visceral and even angry reaction to that statement, which, by the way, is my actual position on the topic, and one I’ve taken a lot of heat for.

“I was spanked as a child, and I turned out okay.” Maybe that’s true, and maybe that’s not true. The truth is, we all tend to think we’re “okay” kind of people, even if the majority opinion is against us. Very few people fancy themselves as an evil villain.

But the truth is this: if you were spanked and you turned out okay, it wasn’t because you were spanked, it’s because you were loved most of the time.

“But kids will end up being spoiled if they aren’t spanked.” Again, not true. The only way to spoil a child is to give things in place of love. The child then equates things with love, and demands more and more in a fruitless attempt to feel loved.

Not spanking a child doesn’t mean they’ll end up in jail. It doesn’t mean they’ll end up as good-for-nothing layabouts.

I’ve spanked my eldest child exactly once, the other two not at all. I don’t think anyone who knows them will say that they’re spoiled or good—for—nothing layabouts. You don’t need to spank your child in order to discipline them.

In order to raise my children without spanking, I had to unlearn what I’d been taught as a child, and learn new skills in coping with children who were acting out, because my kids were still normal kids, not angels.

But even before that unlearning and relearning, I had to have my eyes opened to the truth. That “aha” moment came for me when I spanked my eldest son for the first and last time. He was two, and he had just run out into traffic.

And I realized in that moment that I was not spanking him to make him aware that he’d done something wrong—my entire demeanour had taught him that before my hand even hit his bottom.

I was spanking him because I was angry and frustrated and I needed for ME to let off that steam somehow. And I realized that if I acted out physically in times of stress, it would be easy to take it too far.

That woke me up to the fact that the hitting had nothing to do with discipline. The key to disciplining my children was the bond of love that we had for each other. For me to merely say, “I’m disappointed in you,” was more than enough to move them to tears of remorse and encourage them to change.

I changed. I hope that this little story encourages some of you to change, but that’s not the purpose of the story or the sermon.

What I want to point out is that changing how you think and how you act is a process that involves several steps.

The first step is contained within our scripture readings today. Paul says, “We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete.”

We don't know it all.

I think most of us are willing to say this out loud, but living it requires a large dose of humility that seems rare in today's world.

Let's talk masks for a minute.

At the beginning of the pandemic, masks were not only not mandatory, they weren't recommended. Except in Asian countries, where they were in common use even before the pandemic. Before the pandemic, I used to shake my head when I saw a person out walking or in a store with a mask on. I didn't see the point, and neither did our top doctors.

Then the numbers started coming in, and it quickly became apparent that the Asians had it right and we had it wrong and our doctors started changing their tune.

But people still protest. They deny the reality that's lived out every day. They say masks cause breathing difficulties, especially for people with asthma. Not true. My mask is hot, but I can still breathe quite easily.

They say masks don't work. The numbers say they lie.

A little guessing game for you:

This past week I heard about two hair stylists in the US who tested positive for COVID. They had passed it on to their families, so they were definitely infectious. They saw 139 clients in the week it took for the test results to come in for the first stylist, who chose to keep working even though she had symptoms.

And guess how many of the clients were infected.

None. Zero. Because the stylists wore masks and the customers wore masks and the masks worked.

But a sizable number of people still either refuse to wear them or grumble about it. Many more wear them incorrectly.

Our doctors and politicians have changed their minds, but many of the public hasn't. There's a marked unwillingness to say those three simple words—I was wrong—and to change actions.

So we are maybe a bit more enlightened than most, and deep down inside we have an understanding that maybe we don't know the whole truth, and maybe we don't know even a small part of it.

After that, we have to overcome the attachment that we have to the past.

“Changing my mind would be disrespecting everything my parents taught me.”

“Toppling statues is disrespecting history.”

“Changing the name of my favourite sports team is disrespecting the history of the organization and all the players and coaches and owners who have made it what it is. Besides, changing all of our logos is expensive...”

Let me ask you a question:

How many of you live and work exactly as your parents did 50 years ago or even 100 years ago? Is doing things differently about disrespecting them, or is it about growth and learning?

When you change your mind, whether it's about what's right, or about how you do things, or about what happened in the past, you're not disrespecting those who taught you, or those who helped you get where you are now. You're building on the foundations they gave you, growing something new and exciting where before there were only building stones.

Once we've admitted that we are or could be wrong, and that what we learned in the past isn't the whole story, we can begin to move forward.

We move forward first by learning.

In the case of injustice, we need first to listen to those we have wronged, and we need to do it without being defensive.

Listen to a Black person talk about what it's like to grow up Black in Wellington County:

I hope after reading this you will choose to actively be anti-racist.

I am confident that you would not wish this treatment upon anyone in your family, so why let it happen to mine? You must realize that your silence does not condemn racism. You need to speak up.

My full name is Emma Kyra Nankivell and I started going by my middle name in Grade 10 to “feel more black” among other reasons.

I lived in Centre Wellington until I was 18 and finally escaped to Toronto. I attended Ponsonby and Elora public schools and Centre Wellington District High School (CWDHS).

I now study civil engineering at the University of Toronto. I know, a black person in engineering – crazy.

I want to share my experiences because I've been told that it helps people recognize their ignorance and try to understand.

The first time I saw another black person in school was in Grade 9.

I never fully understood my situation until Erick Baptiste (my boyfriend) looked at my CWDHS 2018 yearbook and saw pages and pages of white kids in every grade. He was just in awe.

Obviously I wasn't an idiot and there was racism, but it became so normal to me. Racism became normal to me ... now that is messed up.

Here are some of my specific experiences.

- 1. Getting my hair braided and having almost every teacher ask me if I went on vacation.*
- 2. Going to track and field meets in Guelph and actually seeing black people was the first time I felt normal.*
- 3. People touching my hair 24/7 and people asking why I don't straighten my hair more because it "looks better."*
- 4. Countless black jokes that weren't funny at all. "Hey Emma, what sound does a chainsaw make? Run nikkka-nikkka-nikkka." There was one guy who repeated this "joke" every morning and others laughed. Going to school and being humiliated because of your skin colour is a terrible way to start the day.*
- 5. Being mistaken for the only other non-white girl in the room – or better yet, people assuming this person is related to me.*
- 6. People comparing their skin to mine after a sunny day/week, "I'm almost as tan as you!" No, no you're not. I'm black. My skin is naturally darker than yours and guess what, I tan too! Crazy.*
- 7. Playing hockey and only seeing a handful of black people. I experienced racial slurs like "monkey", "N---r" and comments such as "Why are you even playing hockey?" "Your parents can pay for this?" "Why don't you go back to Africa?"*
- 8. In 2017, I worked at McDonald's in Fergus and a customer refused to let me serve him because I'm black. He wouldn't even make eye contact with me as he asked for a white person. Seriously? Will my blackness spoil your Big Mac?*
- 9. Girls at my high school asking me to hook them up with my black friends. If your only criterion for guys is skin colour, that's your first problem.*
- 10. I tried to switch high schools after crying to my parents, saying, "I hate it here, no one understands me." I told a guidance counsellor my reason for switching was, "There's not enough diversity at my school." But we had to spend a couple of weeks trying to "legitimize" my transfer because being bullied under the radar (sometimes on the radar) because of my skin colour apparently wasn't enough.*

I assure you, I could extend this list indefinitely.

This is not just an "American problem"; this is very, very real in Canada. The fact that people are brushing off racism as just some American issue is disgusting.

Wake up, people.

I know this article will be read by a predominately white audience and it's hard to admit that you're part of the problem, but it's not about you.

If you are getting tired of hearing that "Black Lives Matter," imagine being black.

Better yet, imagine being black in Wellington County.

I hope this column makes you uncomfortable, because I was uncomfortable for 18 years.

I love everyone; I don't care if you're black, white or purple.

But right now we all need to get behind this because I don't want to raise black children in the society in which we currently live."

This does make me uncomfortable. I want to tell her I'm not "like that," I wouldn't have refused to be served by her, I wouldn't ask to touch her hair.

I want to make excuses, and if I make excuses, I'm not listening, and I'm not valuing her input.

This happens all the time to those who are Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour. When Indigenous persons challenged Trudeau on his lack of action on justice, reporters attacked the challengers, not Trudeau.

"But look at how he's handled the COVID crisis..."

"He's done more than any Prime Minister before him..."

Again, we want to make excuses, not listen.

Because listening and truly hearing leads us to the next thing we have to do, which is act.

We have to change what we do and how we do it.

In our non-confrontational society, a society where "not my monkeys, not my circus" is an ingrained rule, we have to start speaking out.

We may not be the one to refuse to be served by a person of colour, but what would we do if it was the person in front of us?

Would we simply wait our turn, order, and maybe say to the cashier, "I think you're a good cashier?" Or would we record the video on our phones, call out the racist behaviour, ask the manager to remove the customer from the store?

Because while the non-confrontational method might make us and maybe even the cashier feel good in the short run, only confronting the behaviour head on and saying it's not acceptable will change things in the long run. Because once those who engage in racist behaviour realize that what they're doing is unacceptable, a few of them will change. And as the racist behaviour becomes less common, and less acceptable, those who engage in it will no longer feel the safety in numbers that our non-confrontational methods give them.

But it's hard. We have to admit that in being silent, we've been part of the problem. We have to learn and rehearse new behaviours.

And we have to be willing to get it wrong before we get it right.

In the end, it comes down to love. Do we love our fellow human beings enough to give up our status and our sense of being “right” in order to give them space to breathe?

Do we have the humility to understand that it’s not how many mountains we can move, or how many people we can save, or how many questions we get right on a test, but how much we love that really matters in the end?

Amen.

Hymn: Make Me a Channel of Your Peace VU 684

Prayers of Confession & of the People:

From self-righteousness that will not compromise, and from selfishness that gains from the manipulation of others, deliver us, O God.

From the lust for money or power that drives to kill, deliver us, O God.

From the arrogance and thoughtlessness that abuses your good creation, deliver us, O God.

From trusting in the weapons of war, and mistrusting the councils of peace, deliver us, O God.

From hearing, believing, and speaking lies about other nations and persons, deliver us, O God.

From suspicions and fears that stand in the way of reconciliation, deliver us, O God.

From words and deeds that encourage discord, perpetuate racist assumptions, sexist stereotypes and classist attitudes; from everything that contributes to oppression, deliver us, O God.

God, in this time of pandemic and rampant disinformation, we pray that you might give us courage to fight the good fight, that our actions might benefit all of those with whom we come into contact, and not simply pander to our own comfort.

In this time of global environmental crisis, we pray that we might learn, day by day, to tread more lightly on the earth.

In this time of racial unrest and growing awareness of long-standing inequity, we acknowledge that most of us here listening have benefitted from a system that has given us riches and advantages by taking them from others. Grant us the humility to listen without defending, and to change both ourselves and the system so that all might have the same chances in life.

This we pray in the name of the one who taught us to say as we pray:

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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

Go forth into the world with the courage to be instruments of love, justice and peace for all of humanity:

The courage to speak up,
The courage to stay silent and listen,
The courage to act, even in the face of opposition and danger.

God's grace and love extends to all without exception.
Let us live that reality.

Musical Commissioning: Go Now in Peace, Guided by the Light **MV 211**

Offering

If you would like to do your part by making a monetary donation to Melville United Church, there are several 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