



July 26, 2020

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church, Fergus Ontario
Sunday July 26, 2020

Worship prepared today by
Rev. Tom Watson

Words of Welcome and Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to online worship, coming to you from historic Melville United Church in downtown Fergus, Ontario. This year is a very special year for Melville as it is the 175th anniversary of this church.

My name is Tom Watson and I am pleased to be with you on this July 26 Sunday. A sincere thanks to Suzanne Flewelling, Joanne and Bob Mitchell, René Crespo and Barry Rawn for their musical leadership. Thanks to Barry for also being our sound technician for the service.

So, again, welcome to everyone and I hope you enjoy being part of this time.

Acknowledgment of Indigenous Territory

I will begin in the way Melville folks have become accustomed.

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.

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.

Call to Worship:

As the workman gathers tools for the job...

As the writer gathers stories for the book...

As the poet gathers the imagery for the poem...

As the conductor gathers the band for the performance...

As the teacher gathers her students...

So God gathers us for worship.

Let us worship together!

Hymn - Come, Let Us Sing (Voices United 222)

Come, let us sing to the Lord our song,

We have stood silently too long;

Surely the Lord deserves our praise,

So joyfully thank God for our days.

O thirsty soul, come drink at the well,

God's living waters will never fail.
Surely the Lord will help you to stand,
Strengthened and comforted by God's hand.

You dwell among us and cause us to pray,
And walk with each other following your way;
Our precious brothers and sisters will grow
In the fulfilling love they know.

Deserts shall bloom and mountains shall sing
To the desire of all living things.
Come, all you creatures, high and low,
Let your praises endlessly flow.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious Spirit of Life, you have called us together. Be with us in our worship, bless us through this day, and help us to live in faith and hope all the days of our lives. Amen.

Ministry of Music: Whatever You're Doing (Something Heavenly) performed by *Spirit Sings*

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:25-34 (selected verses)

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly God feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?"

And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"

Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Message: "LIFE IN OUR TOWN...MILDRED'S GARAGE SALE or DEALING WITH THE UNEXPECTED"

Today's sermon will be in a different form, and I want to say something about that. By the mid 1990s—after being in ministry for some 20 years—I had come to realize that everything, including a sermon, has a best-before date...which means that many sermons expire before

they hit the church parking lot...so I was looking for something that lasted at least until lunch time.

So I began writing "Life in Our Town" story-sermons as a different approach. For whatever reason, those story-sermons caught on, and I kept doing them periodically ever since.

The sermons start with things taking place in the lives of the rather quirky, but very real, characters who live in Our Town, and include some conversation based on the sermon thought for the day. For those who haven't heard any of my Our Town stories, today's sermon will give you an idea as to how they go.

Well, it's been a busy week in our town. Not as busy as some other times of the year, I suppose...but in the heat of summer folks don't need a lot to make it seem busy. So it's just the routine things like keeping the grass cut and the garden free of weeds, trimming the hedge...stuff like that.

At least, that's what the women have been doing. The men have had a more important project on the go.

You see, they're used to gathering every morning at Al's Café for morning coffee, and settling the affairs of the world. But that's been a problem since the Covid-19 pandemic hit. They did appeal to the health authorities to have Al's Café declared an essential service, but that didn't get much traction, so they had to take a different route, and apply their male ingenuity.

There's a bit of public property over by the old slough on the edge of town, so they went to work and erected a temporary shelter out there. It has a roof but it's open on the sides. To keep socially distanced, they drove stakes into the ground at six feet intervals, then each old guy brought a lawn chair from home and chained it to a stake.

Al cut a drive-by window in the café. So every morning, you'll see a steady stream of old guys pull their cars up to Al's, grab a coffee and head out to the slough. It's quite a sight, actually, seeing a bunch of old guys sitting around out there at the edge of the slough. On the other hand, it works...because the world's affairs still get solved just like they're supposed to.

Now, I need to tell you about recent happenings with Hank and Mildred Vickers. Mildred decided it was time to get rid of some stuff that she and Hank weren't using anymore so she decided hold a yard sale. She thought mid-July would be the perfect time for it, so Saturday, July 18 would be the day.

That set Hank Vickers' mind to work about how he could make his wife's yard sale go better. Hank did some research into effective sales techniques, and figured what he'd learned would be really helpful in Mildred's enterprise. Besides, Mildred's birthday was coming up, and Hank figured that giving his expert assistance would be the best birthday gift he could possibly give to his dear wife.

Mildred was up late Friday evening, getting everything set up in the yard, but then, first thing Saturday morning, Hank swung in to action.

On the lawn, at the edge of the driveway, Hank taped a perfume dispenser to the end of a leaf blower, and then had a timer set to turn on the leaf blower every 3 1/2 minutes, and expel a small shot of Just For Men After Shave to make the air smell nice. Hank explained that's something department stores do, because a good fragrance in the air when you enter the store helps establish a pleasant mood for shopping.

Then he repositioned things so that the most likely to sell items were at the back of the lawn closest to the garage. This way buyers would have to pass by everything else first. It's the same strategy that grocery stores use when they put milk at the very far back corner of the store. Next he applied the 3 foot marketing rule. He put some miscellaneous items—small trinkets and figurines—on a 4 shelf rack just beside where Mildred had her cash table...right by the garage door. Before he left for morning coffee, he explained to Mildred that the last 3 feet before people pay for things is just the right place to put items people will buy on impulse. Its why, Hank said, stores put batteries and gum and cough drops right by the cash register. He also explained to Mildred that she should go slow cashing people out, to give people additional time to look over those impulse items.

Last of all, came Hank's piece-de-resistance. Mildred had hauled an old vinyl record player out of their crawl space in the basement. Hank figured it would sell better if there was a record handy that could be played on it. So he ran a 50 foot extension cord and plugged it into an electric outlet in the garage. Then he took a vintage Roy Orbison record from his collection, laid it beside the player, and put a sticker on it that said \$400 FIRM.

Then Hank—tremendously satisfied with the application of his sales methods research—went for Saturday morning coffee with the old guys down at the slough. "Mildred will be amazed as to just how successful this is," Hank explained to the other guys.

Hank stayed only about 30 minutes for coffee that Saturday morning because he was anxious to see how things were going. When he arrived back home, he was surprised to see Mildred sitting there beside the cash table, and all that was left was the 4 shelf rack with the trinkets and figurines. Everything else was gone. Needless to say, he was impressed.

Hank jumped out of the car. He said to Mildred, "You must really have been busy."

"No, not really," replied Mildred. "One man came by right after I opened up. Bought the whole works. With the exception of this rack of trinkets and figurines. A few other cars slowed down as they drove by, but when they saw this was all that was left, they kept going."

Hank said, "Great! And this one buyer...how much did he pay for the stuff?"

"Two hundred dollars!" replied Mildred. "Isn't that something! He had a pickup truck and he just loaded all of it in, and left. Can you imagine, Hank—two hundred bucks for that bunch of junk! Not only that, his taking the whole works saved me a whole bunch of time and effort."

Hank started to say, "Wow, that's..." and then it hit him. "Mildred, the Roy Orbison record...?"

"I don't know anything about a Roy Orbison record, Hank, but I guess if one was there he must have taken that too," replied Mildred.

"But I put a price of 400 FIRM on it!" said Hank. "I put it there so people could hear the player, but then figured if I could get 400 for it I'd let it go!"

"Uhhh, Hank, you didn't tell me you had put a record there."

"Maybe I forgot to say anything, but listen Mildred, that record is a collector's item. At The Rock House. 1961. It included a re-take of the first song Roy Orbison ever recorded for Sun Records—a song called Ooby Dooby from 1956. Just recently on EBay, some collector was offering 400 bucks for a copy. There's probably not more than a half dozen of those left anywhere. And this one was in mint condition. Now you've let it go with all the other stuff for a mere two hundred!"

"Well, how in the world was I supposed to know that?" asked Mildred.

Hank went into a serious thinking mode. "Mildred, I've got to get that record back. Did you happen to get the man's name and address? Or a phone number? Anything?"

"Nope," said Mildred. "He gave me \$200 cash, loaded up and left."

"You get his license number?"

"Negative again, Hank," replied Mildred.

With that, Hank, still deep in thought, went into the house to ponder this unexpected turn of events.

Naturally, word of this soon spread around town, and became the topic of conversation at Al's when the old guys gathered last Monday morning. When Frank Birstead went home from coffee on Monday, he told Myrtle all about it.

Myrtle Birstead rocked back and forth in her chair, chuckling to herself, and then said, "You ever wonder, Franklin, why Hank always seems to end up on the short end of the stick?"

Frank said, "Does seem that way, doesn't it Myrt. Even though he considers that he has been blessed with the gift of being a genius."

Myrtle, still chuckling, continued, "He's a genius alright, Franklin. Even though he has a misguided idea of what being a genius is."

"You've got me there, Myrt. What do you mean?"

"Well," replied Myrtle, "to paraphrase something the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre once said, 'Genius is not necessarily what you do, but the way you react when something unexpected

happens.' So it will be interesting to see how Hank works through this in the end."

"Ah, now I see what you mean, Myrt," said Frank Birstead.

Myrtle Birstead got up from her chair. "Time to heat up some wieners and beans for lunch, Franklin." As Myrtle went off to the kitchen, she was still chuckling.

Well, that's all the news from our town for this week. At least, from the stories that I've heard.

Let's think, for a few moments, about what Myrtle Birstead said: "Genius is not necessarily what you do but the way you react when something unexpected happens."

Hank Vickers certainly didn't foresee his valuable Roy Orbison record being scooped up with most of the rest of the garage sale items. And, yes, he could have avoided that had he mentioned to Mildred he put it there for demo purposes...to be sold only if someone was willing to pay \$400 for it. But now...along with Myrtle Birstead, I wonder just how Hank will react to this unexpected turn of events?

The point of the story is pretty obvious: You and I know, perhaps all too well, that we're frequently placed in circumstances we hadn't expected. Life has a habit of throwing curves, and how we deal with those curves is often the true test of our mettle.

That was certainly the case with Jesus' disciples. They had counted so strongly on him. Here was the hope of the world. And look what happened. All the forces of power marshaled together and he was crucified on an ugly little cross on an insignificant little knoll of a hill just outside Jerusalem.

They were shaken to the core. They ran away. They huddled behind locked doors in little closet rooms. Or they plodded along dusty trails, heads down, little enthusiasm for life, muttering to each other.

It's not a fun place to be. If we've been there, we know it's not a fun place to be. Our lives suddenly turned topsy-turvy. When we're there, getting life back to some kind of normal just seems so distant. How long will it take to get back to normal...whatever normal is?

Isn't that the way we've felt since the Covid-19 pandemic shut things down in mid-March, with hardly a moment's notice? When will we get back to normal...whatever normal is?

On the other hand, I have noticed that a spirit of togetherness has emerged. People are picking up groceries for each other...and baking bread and taking it to neighbours...and keeping in touch by phone.

I'm a member of the Guelph Wellington Men's Club. Until March 10, we had 200 men meet every Tuesday morning at the Italian Canadian Club in Guelph. But suddenly no more meetings. Until the end of May when we decided to try and meet by Zoom. And I've been amazed at how our members have responded. A couple of weeks ago, we had 141 on a Zoom meeting.

We could have all sat on our hands and worried that the Club was going to disintegrate...and worried that there wouldn't be many pieces left to pick up when life went back to normal.

But where would that worrying have got us? Nowhere, that's where.

Will Hank Vickers' worrying about his \$400 Roy Orbison record bring it back? No.

As Jesus said, "Can any of you add even one cubit to the span of your life by worrying about what is?"

In the Life in Our Town story, Myrtle Birstead reminded Frank that unexpected things happen all the time, and the genius of life is reacting in a positive way to whatever happens.

And with God's grace, and by working together, we'll get there. We will.
Amen.

Offering

I'm sure that even though you're not able to come here to Melville in person, you still care about the church, and still support it financially. That way it will still be here for you when you can get back together.

Hymn — Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Thomas A. Dorsey—not to be confused with the Big Band trombone player Tommy Dorsey—was born in Villa Rica, Georgia. His father was a minister and his mother a piano teacher. Dorsey learned to play blues piano as a young man and, in due course, began composing. The early 1900s were not favourable to African-American musicians such as Dorsey. Finding it hard to get his music published, he founded the first black gospel music publishing company, Dorsey House of Music. All told, he is credited with more than 400 blues, jazz and gospel songs, eventually becoming known as "the father of gospel music."

In 1931 Dorsey's wife, Nettie, died giving birth to their first child. The little baby died a day later. While he was grieving the deaths of both his wife and infant son, Dorsey wrote his most famous composition.

(Sung) Precious Lord, take my hand love
Lead me on, let me stand
I'm tired, I'm weak, I am worn
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light

Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Instrumental

(Spoken) When the darkness appears
And the night draws near
And the day is past and gone
At the river I stand
Guide my feet, hold my hand,
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

Instrumental

Prayers

Antiphonal Lord's Prayer

This morning, I am going to do The Lord's Prayer in an antiphonal way again. What happens is that I will break The Lord's Prayer up into short phrases, and each time you will repeat the phrase that I have just sung. Suzanne and I will work together on this. She will sing your part—the repeated phrases.

Closing Hymn - One More Step Along the World I Go

(Voices United 639)

One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me traveling along with you:
Refrain: And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me traveling along with you.

Round the corner of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me: (refrain)

As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me traveling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know: (refrain)

Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me traveling along with you: (refrain)

You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me traveling along with you: (refrain)

Departing Prayer

As we leave this place and time, may the creative power of God,
The caring, compassionate love of Jesus,
The driving force of the Spirit,
Go with us and remain with us always,
As we fulfill our calling as people of God in our world.
We go in peace.
Amen.