



July 5, 2020

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church, Fergus Ontario
Sunday July 5th, 2020
5th Sunday after Pentecost

Worship prepared today by
Rev. Ruth Brown

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 Ruth Brown. I am a retired United Church minister living in Fergus. I am grateful to be offering these words of worship and pray they will lead you and all of us together in Spirit; gathering us deeper into the common-union we share in Jesus' name, strengthening us in hope for the day that is at hand, and inspiring us with love to live faithfully and with hope.

As Christians we are now keeping time with the **Season after Pentecost**. Sometimes known as the Season of Ordinary Time. Though nothing feels ordinary about time these days. This Season begins with the great feast of Pentecost, celebrated recently throughout the church. At Pentecost the church remembers God's gracious gift of the Spirit abundantly blessing the gathered community.

I have chosen a sung response for this morning's worship; VU#382 Breathe on me, Breath of God. One of our beloved heritage hymns.

May God's Spirit-ed Blessing be upon us as we begin.

Sharing the Light *Take a moment to light a candle and centre yourself for this time of worship. As you light the candle offer 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.

Words to Ponder

If you are searching, you must not stop until you find.
When you find, however, you will become troubled.
Your confusion will give way to wonder.
In wonder you will reign over all things.
Your sovereignty will be your rest. ~*Gospel of Thomas*

Call to Gather with God

I pray to you, O God, you hear my voice in the morning: at sunrise I offer my prayer and wait for your answer.

Prayer

Sustaining God, in the midst of our day, and embraced by your world, we call upon your wisdom, we draw upon your strength, we rely upon your grace. Help us to continue faithfully in your way, by the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Sung Refrain:

VU#382 Breathe on me, Breath of God.
Breathe on me breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

The Scripture Texts are printed from the New Revised Standard Version. If you have your own family bible or confirmation bible, whatever version, feel free to read it as well. It can be interesting to consider the different words that are chosen by each translator as they interpret from the ancient Hebrew and Greek texts.

Before reading offer the following prayer:

Prayer

May your Spirit of wisdom and love guide the reading and hearing of these words. May they settle deep into my heart and mind, body and soul, your Word of Healing and New Life. Amen

Psalm Reading Psalm 36:5-9

Divine Goodness

⁵Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light

Gospel Reading: Matthew 11: 16-19, 28-30

Jesus speaks to the crowds about John the Baptist

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁰Then Jesus began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in

sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."

²⁸ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Gift of Music

Reflection Psalm 36:5-9 Matthew 11:16-19, 28-30
The Wisdom Jesus

For years I have avoided this passage in Matthew's gospel with its odd centerpiece verse: "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." I thought it was strange. It just didn't seem to make sense to me. "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds"

And yet this week, as I read through the whole of chapter 11 in Matthew's gospel and as I thought about what is happening in our world, I found myself drawn in by these very words.

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

The concept of Wisdom is described in the Hebrew scriptures in various ways. In Proverbs, wisdom is the guiding presence of God in daily life. Wisdom is personified as a Wise Woman, who invites followers onto the path of wisdom that leads to new life. Wisdom is depicted as having been present with God at creation, creating and delighting in God's handiwork. Wisdom is partner, wife, and muse to God. She is source of guidance, the one who offers the "way" of insight and nourishment. She is fountain of life, light and secure dwelling place. And like a prophet she cries out on the streets for justice, yet no one hears her cry or heeds her call.

For our ancestors in faith Wisdom was sent by God to call both Israel and all humankind into the Way of Harmony and Shalom. Some listened to her, but some did not. Yet she persisted with her call. Though many rejected her, Wisdom lived on dwelling with God and in the hearts and minds of the righteous.

In these descriptions of Wisdom, you may indeed hear hints of the early Christian stories about Jesus and his purpose among us. Indeed, Hebrew scripture verses were inserted into Jesus speeches and teachings by early Christian writers to make a point; beyond a shadow of a doubt, Jesus was Son of Man, Good Shepherd, Prophet, Rabbi, Prince of Peace, Healer, Friend and lady Wisdom herself.

The gospel passage today begins with Jesus saying, "But to what will I compare this generation?" "This generation" refers to the contemporaries of both Jesus of Nazareth and John the Baptist. As Jesus continues speaking, we start to get a sense of what's going on with this generation that has got Jesus so frustrated.

We know that John the Baptist was a preacher of judgement, repentance and liberation for Israel, and that he was austere in nature. He did not join the parties. And so, the people said of him, he had a demon. The people wailed but John would not mourn with them. He was that loner out in the wilderness calling Israel to faithfulness. Hardly approachable. Showed little compassion. Was astute at calling out the hypocrisies of Rome, but not a shoulder to cry upon. And so, he was put to death.

We know that Jesus of Nazareth was also a preacher of judgement and repentance. But Jesus was also and more so a preacher of God's unconventional grace and forgiveness, and God's unexpected abundance and compassion. Jesus healed on the Sabbath and ate with sinners. He listened to women. He affirmed their faith. He befriended tax collectors and pharisees. When the people played their flutes, Jesus danced. He joined them at their parties. But then the people said he was a drunkard and a glutton. When the people wept over the death of loved ones, Jesus wept with them. He resurrected the dead. But like John, Jesus was also put to death.

The people it seemed were fickle. Easily swayed it seemed. There was no pleasing the people, really.

Nevertheless.....

The early Christian communities believed that both John and Jesus were Wisdom's messengers sent by God to guide the people so that in their light the people would see God's light.

But this was the people's choice. There could be no coercion in God's Way. Some people chose to see. Some people chose not to see.

"Yet," says Jesus, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds"

Wisdom is vindicated, meaning wisdom is cleared of all charges. Wisdom is cleared of all suspicion and blame. Wisdom, despite the evidence of failure in death, is proven justified by her deeds even after death...by John's faithfulness to the truth and by the all life and work of Jesus. Wisdom is vindicated, freed, justified. Her deeds were not in vain and the gospel community of Matthew is proof of that.

In 70 AD there had been a horrific war in Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed. Many Jews of Jerusalem and Galilee were slaughtered by the Roman military. Those that managed to escape went underground or ran for the hills as they tried to survive. Food, water, clothing, was scarce. Many were imprisoned to stop further uprisings. Families were divided in allegiances to Caesar or to God, to the Pharisees or to Jesus. Life was in ruins; the house of Israel was in darkness once more. The overall charge on all who sought alternative life in God's name, in Jesus name, was sedition and therefore death.

Yet despite the fears and the dangers, the early followers of Matthew's gospel community preached a message of hope. They healed the sick and visited the imprisoned and fed the hungry. The Jews among them abided by the laws of God, but when the circumstance demanded it, they abided by the only law that mattered; Love your neighbour as yourself.

Life was clearly in ruins, yet Wisdom was vindicated by her deeds.

Both the image of Jesus as God's wisdom in flesh and the tension in Matthew's gospel spoke to me this week. I hear the call of faith upon us amidst the serious tensions of our day. As I am sure you do too.

On the radio, in the news, on social media we see it, the political and social tensions under the strain of the pandemic we are still trying to manage. The challenge of neighbourly conversations. There is tension in the conversation that will not be easily resolved by right thought or wrong thought. By one political party or another. One philosophy or another. Families are divided on opinion. Members speak with care around the dinner table. We tip toe so as not to disturb the fragile reconnection we are experiencing . Black Lives Matter. Climate Crisis. Me Too. Donald Trump. Justin Trudeau. Vladimir Putin.

Yet we cannot look away or pretend the troubling hate and violence and social disintegration is not on our city streets. Yes, there is a certain tension in the air we breathe these days. Our masks are really not the problem!

And maybe you like I wonder what or who could possibly move us forward for the sake of everyone's wellbeing? When clearly many have waited too long for God's heavenly kingdom come on earth!

Who else but, lady Wisdom, in all her glory? Perhaps She who is and will be and has been since the beginning of time. Perhaps Wisdom will guide us into tomorrow. Indeed, the very same Wisdom who is for us made flesh in our believed Jesus. Wisdom who is by no means confined to Jesus or Christianity, yet who is nevertheless vindicated by her deeds of compassion, generosity, forgiveness, grace, insight, abundance, ingenuity, judgement, new life.

Wisdom vindicated by her deeds as the generations rise and fall away.

Deeds that take on shape and form in this community of faith, and in countless others throughout the world. Deeds of wisdom that lighten the burden of needless suffering carried by so many throughout our world.

May God help us desire such light, that in her we may see light for the living of our day. Amen.

Sung Response

VU#382 Breath on me Breath of God
Breathe on my breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until thy will is one with thine,
to do and to endure.

Preparation for Prayer *As we prepare our hearts and minds to enter a time of prayer, I invite you to sit comfortable and quietly for a moment. Breathe deeply a few times paying attention to your breath as it moves in through your nose and as it fills your lungs. Picture your breath as a light entering your body and filling it with love and relaxation. Then when you exhale through your mouth 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 into the prayer time.*

Prayers

We give you thanks and praise O Holy God, for all the gifts of love we have received from you, and for your light and goodness revealed for us in Jesus. We bless you for the wonders of creation and the delights of human companionship and the assurance of our faith. Especially today we give thanks for..... (take a moment to name those things for which you feel gratitude.) In your Spirit we are given to each other in this community of Melville United, where we rejoice with one another in times of joy, and where we weep with one another in times of sorrow, hear us as we pray also for the concerns and troubles of our hearts. (take a moment to name those things for which you feel concern, fear, or sorrow.)

O God of all compassion, we remember the suffering of humanity, and the brokenness of our world. We remember our blessed planet earth and pray that a just stewardship would prevail among us, as we share this globe of blue with all your creatures.

God of all wisdom guide us all our days, that we may walk in your ways, that in your light we may see light, remembering Jesus we pray,

Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Sung Response:

VU # 382 Breath on me breath of God

Breathe on me breath of God,

Till I am wholly thine,

Until this earthly part of me

Glows with thy fire divine.

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

Sung Response:

VU #382 Breathe on me Breath of God

Breathe on me breath of God

So shall I never die,

But live with thee the perfect life

Of thine eternity.

Blessing

Wisdom is the breath of God and the pure emanation of the glory of God. Wisdom is the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the working of God and the image of God's goodness.

So, may we know the fullness of God's wisdom blessing us through the week, as we seek to live by faith, hope and love, in Jesus' name. Amen

Prayer of the Week

God of Holy Wisdom guide us through this new week, as we follow in your ways, holding on to each other, reaching out to your beloved world. When we are lost or overwhelmed this week, seek us out, find us, and set our feet on the path again. We pray in the light of Jesus, our companion and our guide, our healer and our Wise One. Amen.