



*Celebrating
175 Years*



August 16, 2020

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church, Fergus Ontario
Sunday August 16th 2020
11th Sunday after Pentecost

Worship prepared today by
Ruth Brown

Welcome

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. We acknowledge our responsibilities to treaty people.

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, when we celebrate God's gracious gift of the Spirit abundantly blessing the gathered community. The Season after Pentecost focuses on the Spirit at work in Jesus of Nazareth through his life and teachings, and the Spirit at work in the church through the gifts of the Spirit, given for the sake of the world.

May God's Spirited 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

Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silence of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.
Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity.
It is right and duty.
~Oscar A. Romero

Call to Worship

God the Spirit has swept over the face of creation, from the beginning of all time, animating all energy and matter and moving in the human heart, urging us to celebrate the sacred not only in what is familiar, but also in that which seems strange. So, in these strange new days, we gather to worship in unfamiliar ways, open to God yet with us.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, you who breathe life into the most distant star and every atom of our being, in this time of worship we open ourselves to you asking that you fill us to overflowing with your presence. In stillness and silence, in story and song, envelop us with your peace, then blow through us urging us to life with renewed energy and to a goodness only your light can bestow. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn VU# 679 Let there Be Light vs 1 and 2

Let there be light, let there be understanding, let all the nations gather,
let them be face to face.

Open our lips, open our minds to ponder, open the door of concord,
opening into to grace.

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.*

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

Romans 12: 1-18

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of

David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.”²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.”²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”²⁶ He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

The Word of Love
Thanks be to God!

Reflection “Great is your Faith”
Romans 12: 1-18/ Matthew 15: 21-28

I love this verse in Paul’s epistle to the early church in Rome.

“In so far as it is possible live peaceably with all.”

This verse acknowledges that peace is not possible with all people or in all times. There are simply some behaviours or circumstances that are intolerable. In Paul’s day and time, despite the diversity and tolerance of varied cultures, there were certain situations and behaviours that were intolerable. No matter how you looked at it, from whatever perspective, some things could not be justified, like the exploitation of poor widows and children.

Paul could not tolerate the intolerable. And no doubt we too can appreciate this truth, in our democratic, tolerant, and diverse society, we too cannot tolerate the intolerable.

And yet Paul also knew very well that what was deemed intolerable could also be highly subjective and based on a very narrow understanding of the vast nature of God’s love. And so, the verse in Romans urges believers to go as far as possible in making peace with others, even those who may indeed seem intolerable.

The purity system of the ancient Jewish world had tremendous impact on Jesus’ ministry and on Paul’s mission in the Gentile world.

Purity as in pure, as in clean, as in godly or holy. The idea of purity structured Jewish communities into a set of guidelines and lifestyle behaviours. It took as its reference point the scripture text of ancient Israel, “speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Understand, “God is holy; therefore, Israel is holy.” Holiness required separating away from everything not designated holy or from everything designated unclean. Holiness was purity. “You, Israel shall be pure as God is pure.”

Purity systems are found in many cultures. They create social classifications with lines, and boundaries between people. Purity systems provide a cultural map which indicates a place for everything and everything in its place. Things that are okay in one place are impure in another place.

I remember in the early 1990’s when I was working down east, it was discovered that there was a by-law still on the municipal books of a nearby town. The by-law designated where it was ok for people to live. Darker skinned people could live on the edge of town. Lighter skinned people could live in the centre of town. These lines were not to be crossed.

Of course, on the edge of town was often where most municipal garbage dumps were located. Through such public laws, the unclean is ok in one place but not ok in the other. In the 90's obviously there was an outcry that such a by-law still existed on the books. In response to the public's outcry it was removed.

Purity systems operate in many cultures, times, and places. They can be subtle or written down in black and white.

While some cleanliness laws are designed to protect the health and well-being of all people, like the social conditions we are living with right now. We know that other cleanliness laws slippery slide their way, like ketchup, into all manner of things not holy and not good for the peace and wellbeing of all.

In the first century Jewish social world, the one in which Jesus lived, the purity system was well established. And it was the temple priests and religious leaders who kept tabs on your purity status. Like the way the elders used to keep track of who attended communion and who did not.

Of course, your purity status depended to some degree on birth. But it also depended on your behaviour. Those who could afford to be carefully observant of the cleanliness codes, could obtain or maintain a certain level of purity. Like if you could afford to buy the clean animals for sacrifices at the temple you could move toward a purer status.

But if you were not observant, due to your job, or your income or your birth family, you could be designated unclean and out cast. The tax collectors fell into this category and the shepherds. Outcast from the temple, the religious gatherings, sometimes even your household. The presence of an outcast defiled the whole community.

One bad apple and the whole bushel goes bad, right?

If you were able to achieve a certain level of purity, you were not just clean you were also considered righteous...a good and faithful man or woman.

The sinner in Jesus day was one who could not be observant. The shepherds therefore were sinners. Their work had to come first before religious observance. If they were out in the fields during the feast of Passover, they could not make it to Jerusalem and to the temple to offer sacrifice. The shepherds could not keep clean as the purity laws required.

So that fact is interesting because of course Luke's gospel story places them at the Birth of Jesus and not the temple priests....

Physical wholeness was associated with impurity. The maimed, the chronically ill, lepers, eunuchs, and so forth were on the impure side of the social system.

Economic class determined your purity status. To be sure being wealthy did not automatically designate you pure. But being abjectly poor almost certainly made you impure.

Gender played a part in determining the purity of someone. There was nothing about being a woman that automatically made you impure. But men in their natural state were thought to be purer than women.

And if you were not a Jew, as in a Gentile, you were unclean. Being Jewish did not guarantee your purity status. But according to the purity laws, all Gentiles were impure.

Enter the Canaanite woman in today's gospel story from Matthew. A Gentile woman, an unclean impure unrighteous sinner.

The absurdity of the scene is stunning, yet it makes visible the pure light of God.

Here she is, the unclean woman shouting at Jesus. She comes out...meaning, she basically comes out of her physical distancing. I do not know if it was 6 meters or not, but there was a socially acceptable physical distance to be kept between Jew and Gentile.

She comes out shouting at Jesus,

"Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David, my daughter is tormented by a demon."

Jesus does not answer her. I mean, how could he? He is an observant Jew. Matthew is quite clear about that. And naturally, as observant Jews, his disciples speak up, urging Jesus,

"Send the woman away, she keeps shouting after us."

But Jesus responds to her,

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The Canaanite woman comes out closer and kneels before Jesus, acknowledging his status as a Lord among his followers, but at the same time ignoring the purity laws and boundaries of his people,

"Lord, help me."

Jesus responds to her again,

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

This is rude, equating her need, her daughter's need to the dogs need for food. This is a side of Jesus we are not used to seeing. He compares her and her daughter to the dogs, which as unclean creatures I guess they were in first century eyes.

Yet Matthew wants us to see that despite all the purity laws and boundaries, Jesus speaks to her anyway. And in speaking to her he crosses the line. He tolerates the intolerable. We are meant to be offended or surprised or both by this encounter as Jesus continues to listen to what the Canaanite Woman has to say,

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

And Jesus says,

"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

The Canaanite Woman and Jesus reveal the true nature of God's pure light.

This is a stunning revelation gifted to us from Matthew. For Matthew was a particularly good and righteous and pure Jewish man. His community was no doubt full of observant Jews. Pure and clean yet Matthew dares to expose the fault line in the purity system.

Law must serve love. Always. Regardless of the system. Law must serve love.

There is a lot that truly defiles humanity and human relationships. Matthew is quite clear about that just 10 verses before the entrance of the Canaanite Woman.

Yet, he is clear, as Paul was clear, neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male or female, will separate us from the vast love of God we have come to know in Jesus.

Great is our faith, when we let our God given reason expose the fault line in our cultural norms.

Great is our faith when we have difficult conversations about our sense of what is tolerable and what is not.

Great is our faith when we allow God's pure light help us see the one who is not like us, there a brother, a sister, that we might, in so far as is possible, live peaceably with our neighbour, just as Jesus did.

May the Spirit at work in us and others, give us the courage, the insight, and the wisdom to make it so. Amen

Gift of Music

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

Spirit God, we find you in many places, especially in those of natural beauty and silence. Thank you for blazing comets, brilliant summer moon, northern lakes, shimmering birch trees and the calling out of loons. Thank you for moments of unexpected beauty in these strange days of ours, often among masked strangers. We grow trust without thinking as we present ourselves to one another in grocery store and gas station. Help us remember, so we can carry these moments forward into whatever will be. Your presence truly knows no bounds, though your ways are not without limits, for the sake of all the world you so love. Be near those in trouble of any kind. Be in the joys of our hearts. Be in the laughter we share at a safe distance, and in the tears we shed with family, friend, or neighbour. 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.

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 website
<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 VU# 679 Let there be Light vs 5 and 6

Your kingdom come, your spirit turn to language, your people speak together,
Your spirit never fade.

Let there be light, open our hearts to wonder, perish the way of terror
Hallow the world God made.

Blessing

Let us know this, with hearts and minds open to God the Spirit yet with us

We will be lead from death to life

From falsehood to truth

From despair to hope

From fear to trust

From hate to love

From war to peace.

As we end this time of worship, may the love of God, the grace of Christ and the power of the Spirit make it so in our lives, one day at a time. Amen.

Prayer of the Week

Holy one, through the days of this new week, lead me into your presence, accept me as I am, fill me with your spirit. Strengthen and guide me that I may be a messenger of your compassion. Create your home in my heart, that I may bring your love to this strange new world we now inhabit. Let me find my rest in the completion of your work. Remembering the Way of Jesus I pray, as I seek to live. Amen.