



*Celebrating
175 Years*



September 6, 2020

Melville United Church

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Worship prepared today by
Ruth Cooke

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, and we acknowledge our responsibilities as treaty members.

The Christ Candle Is Lit

Call to Worship/Prayer of Approach

Loving God,

Help us

to focus on what we have
not on what is removed or changed.

Strengthen us

when we feel discouraged
or overwhelmed.

Embrace us

so that us we know your loving presence
within us and among us.

Walk with us

as we bring your love,
and carry your light,
into our world.

Amen.

- Sandra Lucas, MDiv., BCC

Hymn: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling **VU 333**

Gospel Reading: Luke 8:26-39

The Madman and the Pigs

They sailed on to the country of the Gerasenes, directly opposite Galilee. As he stepped out onto land, a madman from town met him; he was a victim of demons. He hadn't worn clothes for a long time, nor lived at home; he lived in the cemetery. When he saw Jesus he screamed, fell before him, and bellowed, "What business do you have messing with me? You're Jesus, Son

of the High God, but don't give me a hard time!" (The man said this because Jesus had started to order the unclean spirit out of him.) Time after time the demon threw the man into convulsions. He had been placed under constant guard and tied with chains and shackles, but crazed and driven wild by the demon, he would shatter the bonds.

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"Mob. My name is Mob," he said, because many demons afflicted him. And they begged Jesus desperately not to order them to the bottomless pit.

A large herd of pigs was browsing and rooting on a nearby hill. The demons begged Jesus to order them into the pigs. He gave the order. It was even worse for the pigs than for the man. Crazed, they stampeded over a cliff into the lake and drowned.

Those tending the pigs, scared to death, bolted and told their story in town and country. People went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had been sent, sitting there at Jesus' feet, wearing decent clothes and making sense. It was a holy moment, and for a short time they were more reverent than curious. Then those who had seen it happen told how the demoniac had been saved.

Later, a great many people from the Gerasene countryside got together and asked Jesus to leave—too much change, too fast, and they were scared. So Jesus got back in the boat and set off. The man whom he had delivered from the demons asked to go with him, but he sent him back, saying, "Go home and tell everything God did in you." So he went back and preached all over town everything Jesus had done in him.

Ministry of Music:

Meditation:

Would you pray with me and for me, please...

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all of our hearts, and the actions of all of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God.

On Facebook, I'm a member of a group called "Clergy with Cats." Normally, we simply post pictures of our cats going about their daily lives, but recently, a member posted about a dilemma she had. She lives in one of the states that was due to be pounded by a hurricane, and she had noticed that her neighbour's cats were outside and vulnerable to the rain.

"Do I let them ride out the storm in my garage?" she asked. "After all, I can't save all of the cats that need help."

It may sound, on the surface, like a bit of a non-issue. *Of course* you should do what you can for those poor, soon to be very wet kitties!

But if we dig a bit deeper, we might see to the heart of a very human longing—the longing for fairness.

We *can't* help every cat in need. And what about the dogs and the possums and the wild animals? If we open our garage to two scared kitties, how can we refuse to help those other animals? And then we spend all of our time rounding up all the homeless animals and putting them in our garage until the storm passes, and we go broke buying food and litter, and we

don't take enough care of ourselves and *we're* the ones who end up getting caught in the storm, and the animals ruin our garage, and our house, and we end up on an episode of *Animal Hoarders*...

And that scenario might sound a bit far fetched to you, but I've watched a lot episodes of *Hoarders* and enough animal rescue videos, and I can assure you that it really does happen. A lot.

But more often, folks just harden their hearts and close their doors to the one or two who come meowing or barking or knocking at their doors.

I chose this week's reading because it tells of Jesus healing one single human being—a man who had been living in the tombs, naked and chained up so he wouldn't do any harm to himself or others.

I could have chosen any number of Gospel passages for this sermon. Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. Or Jesus coming down from the mountain after preaching the Sermon on the Mount and being followed by the crowds and healing one leper. Or the story of Jesus healing the servant of the centurion. Or the paralyzed man. The synagogue leader's daughter. The daughter of the Canaanite woman. The blind beggar Bartimaeus.

Story after story of just one person begging Jesus for help, and Jesus responding, not by setting up a social program or a hospital, but by healing the single person or small group of people who came to him and asked for his help.

This is not to say that starting up a rescue organization or donating to a hospital is wrong or not needed. Jesus tells us that the poor will always be with us, and some among us will always need more help than any individual can give.

But the importance of responding to the need of those right in front of us can not be overstated.

Did you know, that there is one single thing that some individual Christians can do that would reduce the number of homeless youth on the streets today by between twenty-five and forty percent?

Did you know that it wouldn't cost those Christians a single penny more than they should have spent in the first place?

What is that single thing, you ask?

All they need to do is love the children that God gave them, and accept them as they are.

Because it's estimated that between twenty-five and forty percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ, and that they're on the street either because their parents kicked them out or because their parents made living at home so intolerable that they had to leave in order to keep on living.

If those parents, or grandparents, or aunts and uncles, or next-door-neighbours, stepped up to the plate and loved the children that God has placed in their care, we'd still need resources for homeless youth, but we'd need far fewer of them.

Seeing the need that is right in front of our face is the main point of Christian living. Jesus himself lambastes hypocrites who give so much to the temple that they are unable to support their elderly parents.

We are called, first and foremost, to care for those who are right in front of our faces.

I recently became aware of a couple of beautiful and true stories that illustrate this calling.

Alex Archbold is an antiques dealer from Edmonton, Alberta. His shop is a hundred year old general store that I gather isn't in the best part of town.

One day a homeless man came into his shop wanting to sell some stuff he had rescued from a dumpster. Instead of shooing him away as so many people do to the homeless, Alex decided to buy some things from him for \$20. One of those things was a little picture of Bambi. As you can imagine, it wasn't in the best condition.

Alex did some research, and found out the "picture" was actually an original animation cel actually used in the movie, and that it was worth about \$3500!

Legally, Alex could have kept that money once he sold it. But Alex decided that he would share the profit fifty-fifty. The only problem was, all he had was a first name. Adam.

Adam was homeless, and slept in different places on different nights.

Alex drove around town, looking for Adam. Eventually he found some homeless folks who knew Adam, and he asked them to pass on a message asking Adam to come visit the shop.

His efforts paid off, and he met up with Adam in the store. He spent some time getting to know Adam, who had been a construction worker until he was laid off. He'd been on the streets for three years. He has three children, but they were in the process of being sent to live with his mother in London, Ontario, and he'd lost contact with them.

After he'd spent some time getting to know Adam, Alex explained that the real reason he'd asked to meet up was to give him half the profits from the sale of the animation cel, and handed Adam an envelope with \$1600.35 in it.

Now we all know just how far \$1600 will go. A month, maybe two, and it's gone.

But Alex has a fairly large YouTube audience, and *they* were also interested in Adam and how he was doing. Alex started a fundraiser, with a goal of raising enough money to get Adam back with his family, and settled into a decent home.

I'm happy to tell you that because of Alex's care for that one single human being, Adam is back in London. He has a home. He works in construction as a drywaller, and he sees his children regularly.

Then there was Hans.

Hans is Alex's handyman—the guy who comes in to fix whatever Alex needs fixing.

Alex found out, quite by accident, I think, that Hans' house had burnt down, and he was now living in a trailer with no heat. And this is Edmonton, and winter was coming on.

Once again, Alex mobilized his viewers to care for this one single person. He was hoping to raise enough money to get him some heat.

He raised enough money to buy Hans a small house. Viewers offered donations of household items, and one viewer sent in a \$2000 gift card, which allowed Hans to buy some new things for his home, including a new refrigerator.

Alex could have donated all of that money to organizations that help the homeless. Perhaps more people could have had winter coats, and food, and shelter for a night or two. But if he'd done that, Adam and Hans would still be homeless, and so would all of the others who are helped by those organizations.

Donations to organizations that help large groups of people are important. I DO NOT want you to stop giving to them. Sometimes, maybe even often, those slow, steady gifts DO help change lives, if only in a small way.

But please, let us open our eyes to the individuals who are right in front of our eyes asking for our help. Our brothers and sisters. Our mothers and fathers. Our own children.

Reach out your healing touch, and give love in the name of Jesus.

I told you about my Facebook friend and her dilemma at the beginning of the sermon. My reply was this:

You can't save EVERY cat, but you can save the one(s) God sends you.

Amen.

Hymn: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love **VU 593**

Litany of Solidarity and Hope During a Pandemic *(Joseph P. Shadl)*

For those who are sick.
For those with chronic illnesses and underlying health concerns.
For all those who are suffering.

For those who are lonely.
For those who have no one to check on them.
For families that are separated.

For those who are unemployed.
For those suffering financial hardships.
For those who face an uncertain future.

For those who are suffering from physical or emotional abuse.
For those who are disproportionately suffering because of societal structures and unjust policies.
For those who are struggling with physical or mental disabilities.
For those who are overwhelmed by anxiety and stress.

For those who are dying.
For those who have died while saving the lives of others.
For all who have lost their lives.

For those who have survived.
For those who have lost their spouses.
For children who have been orphaned.
For all those who mourn and those who comfort them.

For firefighters, police, and emergency medical workers.
For doctors, nurses, and all health care professionals.
For those who serve in the armed forces.

For public officials.
For business leaders.
For educators.
For innovators and inventors who provide new solutions.

For peace in our city and in our world.
For renewed friendships among neighbors.
For solidarity and unity among all peoples.
For a greater appreciation and love of all humanity.

For patience and perseverance.
For calm in the midst of fear.
For the grace to overcome adversity.

For generosity of spirit.
For hope in times of despair.
For light in the darkness.

Gracious and Loving God,
You are our comforter and our hope.
Hear our prayers as we come before you.
Strengthen us in this time of need.
Inspire us to acts of solidarity and generosity
and give us hope of a brighter future.

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.

Commissioning:

burn brighter

ignatius calls us
to go forth
and set
the world on fire

we embrace this metaphor
because we believe
our purpose
is inextricably linked
to helping others
clarify and attain theirs

but how do we
set our world on fire
in this age of sickness,
uncertainty,
and fear

how do we
serve and lead
when we
are disconnected
from each other
and the physical space
that unifies our team

who will show us
how to press on

lives perish
while the flames
of leaders
around us
dance erratically
in the blistering
winds of change
their lights
flicker
to near extinction
their sparks
barely visible
struggle
to light the way

we cannot wait
for them

to lead

let us turn
to our God
and
to the sacred light
of the Holy Spirit
that burns
in
each of us

let our spirits
draw closer
to each other
in spite of
the distance
between us
and march boldly
into tomorrow

maybe it helps
to imagine
this time
as a dousing
of gasoline
tossed onto our
already steady
burning flames
of
purpose and love

let this accelerant
consume and quicken us
for the greater good

shine on
my friends
may the bright flames
of our spirits
burning in unison
create a bonfire
that
sparks hope
ignites faith
illuminates love
and lights the way

in this uncertain age
a time when
our brothers and sisters

yearn for
peace and light
we are called
and stand ready
to do magis
to do more
than we did
before

to
burn
brighter

- by Ray Angle, Assistant Vice President, Career and Professional Development, Gonzaga University

Musical Blessing: When You Walk From Here

VU 298