



*Celebrating  
175 Years*



**December 13, 2020**

Melville United Church  
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**Melville United Church**  
**December 13, 2020**  
**3rd Sunday of Advent - Joy**

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Presiding today - Rev. Marion Loree

*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 Marion Loree and I am the minister here at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario. We gather in community today - December 13, 2020 - some of us here in person and some of us on-line and some by the printed word.*

*Today we continue our journey through Advent - a journey which ends in a stable. A humble place that symbolizes the way God's love enters the darkness of our world. Advent is a time of waiting but it is also a time of preparation as we prepare our hearts and clear the way for love to enter.*

*So, I invite you to take some time to join us in this time of worship and inner contemplation - a time in which we search together for hope and meaning and ways to strengthen our faith. A time for recognizing and acknowledging the still small voice within each of our hearts.*

**Announcements:** Gifts with Vision [www.giftswithvision.ca](http://www.giftswithvision.ca)  
Christmas Appeal - CWFB  
Mission & Service Fund

**Joys, Concerns & Accomplishments:**

**Lighting of the Advent Candle** *(If you are watching this on-line or reading it from a page I invite you to take a moment to light a candle, centre yourself and prepare to enter in to a time of worship and prayer. As you light your candle repeat the following words)*

Our Advent journey continues  
as we wait and prepare ourselves.  
We come to dance joyfully in anticipation of new life,  
We come in joy, not to distract us from life's pain but  
to heal one another in the midst of all life's challenges.

We light the first candle reminding us of the way of HOPE. (1st candle is lit) .  
We light the second candle to reminding us of the path of PEACE. (2nd candle is lit)  
We light the third candle, which dances in joy even as it burns. (3<sup>rd</sup> candle is lit).

As the flame dances, may the Spirit dance within our hearts,  
drumming the rhythm of joy, connection, and interdependence.

**Song:** Hope Is a Star VU 7 - verse 2

Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,  
 telling the world that the Saviour is born.  
 When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
 The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
 and none shall be afraid.

**Words of Wisdom:**

“When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.”

Rumi

“If we can just let go and trust that things will work out the way they're supposed to, without trying to control the outcome, then we can begin to enjoy the moment more fully. The joy of the freedom it brings becomes more pleasurable than the experience itself.”

Goldie Hawn

**Call to Worship:**

As we gather, some of us are discouraged,  
 others are broken-hearted.

Some of us are joyful while others long for better circumstances.

Yet we all come to celebrate the good news that God is with us and for us.

Each of us is anointed to be bringers of comfort and good news.

Spirit is with us!

So, let us come and worship together.

**Hymn:** Joyful, Joyful We Adore You (spoken) **VU 232** (vs 1,2,3)

- 1 Joyful, joyful we adore you,  
     God of glory, life and love;  
 hearts unfold like flowers before you,  
     opening to the sun above.  
 Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,  
     drive the gloom of doubt away;  
 giver of immortal gladness,  
     fill us with the light of day.
  
- 2 All your works with joy surround you,  
     earth and heaven reflect your rays,  
 stars and angels sing around you,  
     centre of unbroken praise.  
 Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
     flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
 chanting bird and flowing fountain,  
     sound their praise eternally.

3 You are giving and forgiving,  
 ever blessing, ever blest,  
 wellspring of the joy of living,  
 ocean depth of happy rest!  
 Source of grace and fount of blessing,  
 let your light upon us shine;  
 teach us how to love each other,  
 lift us to the joy divine.

**Opening Prayer:**

Great Mystery, as we continue our journey through Advent open us to the joy of your presence. Open us to the possibilities that are ours when we let go of control and allow your Spirit and love to flow through our lives. Open our minds and hearts during this time of worship that we may be receptive to your good news, open us to joy. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession:**

Amid our boastful words, O God, let hopeful ones endure.  
 Amid our self-serving words, let self-less ones prevail.  
 Amid our uncaring words, let compassionate ones persist.  
 Amid our indifferent words, let loving ones be found.  
 Forgive us. Restore our faith and refocus our understanding  
 that we may rejoice in you always. Amen.

**Words of Assurance:**

We were created to grow in faith. We are beloved by the One who created us. We are cherished and forgiven always. God is good. An so are we.  
 Thanks be to God.

**Ministry of Music:** Gesù Bambino by Pietro A. Yon (flute/piano duet Mercedes/Colleen Weber)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)  
 (The Spirit of God is upon me)

“The Spirit of Exalted YHWH is upon me, for YHWH has anointed me: God has sent me to bring good news to those who are poor; to heal broken hearts; to proclaim release to those held captive and liberation to those in prison; to announce a year of favour from YHWH, and the day of God’s vindication; to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion - to give them a wreath of flowers instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of tears, a cloak of praise instead of despair.

They will be known as trees of integrity, planted by YHWH to display God’s glory. They will restore the ancient ruins, and rebuild sites long devastated; they will repair the ruined cities, neglected for generations.

‘For I, YHWH, love justice; I hate robbery and evil. So I will faithfully compensate you, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you. Your descendants will be renowned among the nations; and your offspring among the people; all who see you will acknowledge that you are a people blessed by YHWH.’

I will joyfully exult in YHWH, who is the joy of my soul! My God clothed me with a robe of deliverance and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, the way a bridegroom puts on a turban and a bride bedecks herself with jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, a garden brings its seeds to blossom, so Exalted YHWH makes justice sprout, and praise spring up before all nations.

**Message:** Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Joy

(based on What does it look like? By John Moses, Gathering ACE 2020 pp 68-70)

'Joy' - definition: 1. A strong feeling of happiness; gladness; delight. 2. A state of contentment or satisfaction. 3. Anything that causes delight or gladness.

Well, we are three quarters of the way through Advent. Are you feeling the joy yet? Christmas is less than two weeks away. Anticipation builds - or does it? Some people tell me they are all ready - shopping done and gifts wrapped. Other tell me they haven't started yet and still others tell me they are having a difficult time getting into it this year. They say the Covid-19 restrictions mean they won't be gathering in large family groups to share the joy of Christmas celebrations as in years past and that is disappointing. I understand that feeling. This year will be different for all of us.

But that doesn't mean we can't still experience the joy that Christmas represents. I want to share a story with you. It is entitled "'Tis Better to Give" and it is written by Jennifer Yardley Barney.

She begins with a quote by Tenneva Jordan which reads: *"A mother is a person who, seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie."*

I knew I was not supposed to be quite so excited. I was too old for that. At age eleven, the oldest and my mom's "grown up" girl, I had to keep my cool. I was in middle school after all. But every chance I got, when I was alone, I checked each present under the tree. I read every tag and felt every package, guessing at the contents within. I had examined each gift so often that I could tell which present went to which person without even looking at the tags.

It had been a tough year for my family. Whenever my mom looked over at the tree and scattered presents, she would sigh and warn us, "There won't be as much for Christmas this year. Try not to be disappointed." Christmas had traditionally been a time for my parents to spoil us. In years past, the presents would pile up and spill out from under the tree, taking over the living room. I had heard the phrase "giving is better than receiving," but thought that whoever had said that must have been out of their mind. Getting presents was the whole point! It was the reason I couldn't get to sleep on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas morning, we eagerly waited in the hallway until Dad told us everything was ready. We rushed into the living room and let the wrapping paper fly. We made weak attempts to wait and watch while other family members opened their presents, but as the time passed we lost our self-control.

“Here’s another one for you,” said Mom as she handed me a package. I looked at it, confused. Having spent so much time examining the presents before Christmas, I recognized this one. But it had not been mine. It was my mom’s. A new label had been put on it, with my name written in my mother’s handwriting.

“Mom, I can’t...”

I was stopped by my mother’s eager, joyful look—a look I could not really understand. “Let’s see what it is, honey. Hurry and open it.”

It was a blow dryer. Though this may seem but a simple gift, to me it was so much more. Being an eleven-year-old girl, I was stunned. In my world, where receiving outweighed giving by light years, my mom’s act of selflessness was incomprehensible. It was a huge act. Tears filled my eyes and I thought in disbelief about how much my mom must love me to give up her Christmas so I could have a few more presents.

I have always remembered that Christmas fondly. It had such an impact on me. As an adult with children in my life whom I adore, I can now understand my mom’s actions. I see how she was not “giving up her Christmas” as I had thought but was finding an even greater joy in her Christmas because giving truly is better than receiving. My mom’s simple act meant the world to me.

I love that story because it demonstrates a basic fact for me. Joy does not come from having our every wish or desire fulfilled. Joy does not come from a life of ease and pleasure. Joy comes from a place deep within us. Joy comes from a heart place, a place of love and care. Our deepest moments of joy will be found in doing something that brings happiness and joy to someone else.

I don’t believe any of us can live in a state of joyful happiness or delight all the time. Life, after all is made up of trials and tribulations as well as happy moments. But I do believe there is a deep joy that can undergird and support everything else. It is that state of contentment or satisfaction that one of the definitions lists. It is deep-seated and unshakable.

It may not be the happy, bubbly joy we experience in brief moments of pleasure but, rather, it can be a deep and abiding feeling that sustains us and gives us strength even when life is dishing out challenges. For me it is the deep joy that comes with knowing I am loved, no matter what. In church circles we call it faith and faith, for me, brings a deep sense of being loved and held and supported by a force that is beyond me - a spiritual force that we call God. It is a spiritual joy - the joy of knowing at the centre of my being that the Source of all that is loves me just because I am. And that brings me a great sense of peace and joy that I can access whenever I need it including during challenging or difficult times.

So, in keeping with the format for the last couple of weeks, I ask the rhetorical question: What does joy look like? Joy has many faces. You might notice it down at the community soup kitchen where people who don’t have the money for a decent meal sing Christmas carols while they wait for their lunch. Joy shines in the eyes of young children for whom the world is an adventure and a mystery and a promise. Sometimes joy shows up at the nursing home when

old, familiar hymns stir precious memories, or the beat of an old dance tune sets tired toes tapping. Joy can be there when a family gathers to say goodbye to one who has been much loved. It abides even when the heart is breaking for it is deeper than the troubles of the moment and it is stronger than grief. Joy is being in harmony with all that is. As scripture describes it in Job 38:7 “when the morning stars sang together, and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy.”

What does joy feel like? Joy does not feel like happiness, not exactly. We are happy when things are going our way and life is sweet. When things are not going our way and the taste of life is sour, we are unhappy. Joy is tougher than that. Joy can feel like a reason to get up in the morning, a purpose to guide us through our days. Joy feels like the sense that all is well, and that all will be well, and that all will be very well. Joy feels like the wonderful surprise that keeps us from sleepwalking through our lives and waits for us at the end of our days.

What is it like to live in joy? Joy is often very quiet. It doesn't demand attention. It doesn't force itself on anyone. Joy loves company but can thrive in solitude as well. Joy changes things. It makes ordinary things special and ordinary people remarkable. Joy will sing with angels and with the out-of-tune person sitting beside you. Joy lives in the heart when we know we are loved and accepted and valued. I love the way the writer of Isaiah puts it “I will joyfully exult in God, who is the joy of my soul!”

Joy is knowing God is with us - always.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Preparation for Prayer:**

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

**Prayers:** *(beginning with Psalm 126 - as translated by Nan C. Merrill in Psalms for Praying, pg 261-262)*

When the Divine Lover enters the  
     human heart,  
     all yearnings are fulfilled!  
 Then will our mouths ring forth  
     with laughter, and  
     our tongues with shouts of joy;  
 Then will we sing our songs of praise,  
     to you, O Beloved of all hearts.  
 For gladness will radiate out for  
     all to see;  
     so great is your Presence  
     among us.

Restore us to wholeness, O Healer,  
     like newborn babes who have  
         never strayed from You!  
 May all who sow in tears  
     reap with shouts of joy!  
 May all who go forth weeping tears  
     of repentance, bearing  
         seeds of Love,  
 Come home to You with shouts  
     of joy,  
     leaving sorrow behind.

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of Tavistock United Church and all those who work with joy on our behalf in other parts of our country and the world. And we pray for ourselves as we humbly offer all of our concerns, our worries, our thanksgivings and our joys through our individual prayers. Hear the prayers of our hearts... (silence)... Today we pray for

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Holy Presence, if we want to find true and lasting joy we need to find our way to you. If we want to fulfil our calling to be Christ's hands and feet in this world and so to bring hope and peace we need to find our way to you. Lead us. Guide us. Show us the way.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of the one who brings the joy of God's good news of love for all, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together saying...

**Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father who art in heaven,  
     hallowed be thy name,  
     thy kindom 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 kindom, 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 a number of 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 Lynda, to arrange Pre-Authorized Remittance payments (PAR).
4. E-transfer directly from your bank. E-mail to [secretary@melvilleunited.com](mailto:secretary@melvilleunited.com)

**Offering Prayer:**

The prayers we offer, the gifts we give, are like seeds sown in trust. May your love water these seeds, Infinite Wisdom, and bring new life, hope, and joy to those who weep. Amen.

**Hymn:** Never Ending Joy (sung) MV 40

Refrain:

Never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy,  
never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy!

God of every tribe, every language,  
God of every river and sea,  
God of every mountain and island,  
you bring joy to me.

Never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy,  
never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy!

God of every hill, every valley,  
God of every leaf, every tree,  
God of every cloud, every raindrop,  
you bring joy to me.

Never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy,  
never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy!

God of every song, every story,  
God of every captive set free,  
God of every dance, every footstep,  
you bring joy to me.

Never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy,  
never ending joy, never ending joy, never ending joy!

**Blessing/Sending Forth:**

Hope be within you.

Comfort be among you.

Love be around you.

Go out into the world

rejoicing in the presence of God's Spirit within you.

Go - remembering that you never go alone.

For God is with you - always. Amen.

**Postlude:****Prayer of the Week:**

God you are in the world as part of us always, providing a never-ending cascade of moments in which we may participate in the joy of you and your creation. Grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to know the true meaning of rejoicing in you. Amen.