



*Celebrating
175 Years*



December 6, 2020

Melville United Church
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**Melville United Church
December 6, 2020
2nd Sunday of Advent**

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 6, 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
Christmas Appeal - CWFB

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 prepare to embrace the contrasts of light and of dark,
Creating balance of life lived in diversity.

We prepare to strengthen all our relations as we listen for bonds of peace.

We prepare to share our story and come to know one another.

We prepare for the arrival of the Prince of Peace.

We light the first candle reminding us of the way of HOPE. *(The 1st candle is lit)*

We light the second candle to signify the way of PEACE. *(The 2nd candle is lit.)*

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

Song: Hope Is a Star VU 7 - verse 2

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,
giving a promise of safety and worth.

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:

-Mahatma Gandhi

The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace.

Call to Worship:

People of God, come,

for the light of peace beckons us.

Come, let us follow this new light -

let us listen to the voice calling us

to participate in the journey of this Advent season.

We can become the lights of hope and peace.

So come, let us worship together.

Hymn: There's a Voice in the Wilderness (spoken) VU 18

1 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,
a call from the ways untrod:
prepare in the desert a highway,
a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted,
the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places
where God, our God, may go!

2 O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
get thee up to the heights and sing!
Proclaim to a desolate people
the coming of their King.
Like the flowers of the field they perish,
like grass our works decay;
the power and pomp of nations
shall pass, like a dream, away.

3 But the word of our God endureth,
whose arm is ever strong;
God stands in the midst of nations,
and soon will right the wrong.
God shall feed the flock like a shepherd,
the lambs so gently hold;
to pastures of peace will lead them,
and bring them safe to fold.

4 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,
 a call from the ways untrod:
 prepare in the desert a highway,
 a highway for our God!
 The valleys shall be exalted,
 the lofty hills brought low;
 make straight all the crooked places
 where God, our God, may go!

Opening Prayer:

We want to be ready for the coming of your love in Jesus, Holy One. Encourage us to take time for our spiritual health. Remind us to look to the needs of those around us. Show us what we can best give to the world right now. May this time of worship open our hearts to prepare us to act in ways that bring your peace. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Great Mystery, too often we descend into the deep valleys of this life and find ourselves stuck in their shadows.

We find it easy to convince ourselves that there is no way out.

Forgive us when our fears tell us to hunker down and turn inwards.

Remind us that even in the depths, you are with us.

Compassionate Presence, too often we find ourselves balancing in the heights with a solitary perspective that leaves us feeling trapped and afraid of falling.

We convince ourselves that there is no way down.

Forgive us when our fears keep us paralyzed and afraid to move forward.

Remind us that even if we should fall, you are with us.

From all the places of fear in our lives, speak comfort to us and call us back.

Open our eyes and open our hearts that the path to you might be revealed before us, guiding us in compassion and love to your holy and everlasting peace. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

The words and deeds of humans are fleeting, here today and gone tomorrow.

But the grace and love of God endures forever, filling all that has been, all that is, and all that is to come. In all our seasons, we are called to prepare a place in our hearts for the love of God to enter.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

Ministry of Music: We Are the Reason

-David Meece

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

(Comfort my people)

“Console my people, give them comfort,” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem’s heart, and tell it that its time of service is ended, that its iniquity is atoned for, that it has received from YHWH’s hand double punishment for all its sins.”

A voice cries out, “Clear a path through the wilderness for YHWH! Make a straight road

through the desert for our God! Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low; let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges become a valley! Then the glory of YHWH will be revealed, and all humankind will see it.” The mouth of God has spoken!

A voice commands, “Cry out!” And I answer, “What will I say?” - “All flesh is grass and its beauty is like the wildflowers: the grass withers and the flower wilts when the breath of God blows on them. How the people are like grass! Grass withers, and flowers wilt, but the promise of our God will stand forever.”

Go up on a high mountain, you who bring good news to Zion! Shout with a loud voice, you who bring good news to Jerusalem! Shout without fear and say to the towns of Judah “Here is your God!” YHWH, O Sovereign One, you come with power, and rule with a strong arm! You bring your reward with you, and your reparation comes before you. Like a shepherd you feed your flock, gathering the lambs, and holding them close, and leading mother ewes with gentleness.

Message: Isaiah 40:1-11 Peace

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

‘Peace’ - definition - 1. A state of mental or physical quiet or tranquillity; calm. 2. The absence or cessation of war. 3. Public order and tranquillity. 4. A state of reconciliation after strife or enmity. 5. Freedom from mental agitation or anxiety.

This week marks the second Sunday of Advent, a time leading up to Christmas, a time of preparation while we wait and a time to think about each of the themes given to help us to prepare. This week the word is ‘peace’. As you can tell by the definitions I just read, the word peace can mean different things. I was glad to see the order in which my dictionary listed the various definitions because, to my mind, if we were all to achieve the first the rest would follow naturally.

The first one was ‘a state of mental or physical quiet or tranquillity; calm.’ Imagine what the world could look like if every person on the planet could achieve that state. Imagine what life would be like if we did not get overly stressed out or anxious or fearful. Imagine what relationships would be like if we were never to become jealous, or envious of others. I don’t know if we can imagine such a world.

War and violence happen when people are afraid - afraid of someone else taking what is theirs, perhaps land or territory, wealth or goods. It might be the fear of losing power or control or of not having the necessities to live the way we want. Regardless of what fear that underlies the violence, if the perpetrators were to focus on attaining a state of physical quiet or tranquillity their need to control and destroy would disappear.

This in turn would bring about public order and tranquillity - the next definition. All people could live in harmony without the fear of violence and war. They could focus on ensuring that everyone was provided for in the best way possible. And we all know that when we care for one another and provide for the least among us we are all better for it.

The next definition - a state of reconciliation after strife or enmity - would follow on the heels of the public order and tranquillity. Old wounds would be healed and old fears alleviated leading to happy reunions and the end of animosities among neighbours and between family

members. For any of us who have experienced disagreements and conflicts with our significant other we will remember the joy of making up and the feeling that, once again, we are on the same wave length of understanding. Reconciliation can feel so good.

And that leads us to the fifth definition - Freedom from mental agitation or anxiety. For me this one seems very similar to the first because to be free from mental agitation or anxiety means one is enjoying a state of mental or physical quiet or tranquillity. One is feeling calm if one is not agitated or anxious. And a calm state comes from a lack of conflict, violence, chaos, anxiety and agitation. It is a circle completed.

And that is the kind of peace that Jesus is talking about. The kind of peace that makes life feel easier. The kind of peace that levels the playing field, that makes the mountains low and the valleys filled as the writer of Isaiah describes it. It doesn't mean that there will never be hardship or pain or challenges but it does mean that when those things come at us we can cope with them and deal with them in an intelligent way without the kind of fear that brings all that other stuff with it. Peace of mind and heart allows strength and courage and wisdom to shine through.

You have heard me talk before about the teachings of Eckhard Tolle and part of my sabbatical this year was studying his writings and listening to some of his sessions on-line. He talks about living in the now and dealing with the present moment and what is happening right now rather than letting our minds and spirit live in anticipation of what may or may not happen in the future whether that future means this afternoon or next year. Deal with what is happening right now and let the future look after itself.

The other part of what Tolle teaches is not to live in the past. Yes, we may have experienced hardships and pain, possibly even abuse, but that is over now and if we want to live in peace we need to let it go. Holding on to the pain of the past only allows it to continue to hurt us. And living with resentments and grievances means that past events are still governing our lives. Let it go - this moment is really all we have - live in it.

Much of what Tolle teaches reminds me so much of what Jesus says. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not worry about tomorrow. Forgive those who wrong you. Let tomorrow take care of itself. Love your enemies. Do unto others what you would have them do to you. I hear all of these sentiments repeated over and over again in the teaching of many of today's gurus, spiritual leaders and self-help advocates. This is not new thinking. We have just lost sight of what is really important - peace. Peace of mind and heart and soul. And that kind of peace comes only from an inward journey to the heart of who we are as individuals, to the heart of each of us discovering our true, inner, beloved self.

So, what does peace look like? What does it feel like? And what is it like to live in peace? Peace looks like a child playing safely in a place where battle tanks once rumbled and bombs fell. Peace looks like a Palestinian farmer tending his olive grove without worrying that the trees will be bulldozed to make room for another illegal settlement. Peace looks like an aged veteran who paid the price to spare us the horrors of war. Peace looks like a family gathering for the first time after years of infighting, trying to repair the ties that bind. Peace looks like all of us following Health Department restrictions so the most vulnerable among us will be safe from illness. Peace looks like people living their lives doing their jobs, walking their paths and

allowing others to do the same..

What does peace feel like? For most of us white, North Americans the feeling of peace is something we haven't had to think about much. We may take peace for granted, but we can imagine. We can imagine that peace feels like experiencing a flower-filled field after you've been locked in a dirty, damp basement. We can imagine peace feels like being able and allowed to be who we are without being judged or targeted. We can imagine peace feels like a pleasant holiday meal where everyone gets along. We can imagine peace feels like a black or indigenous mother not having to worry every time her children go out the door if they will return home safe and alive.

What is it like to live in peace? Peace looks for the common ground. Peace believes that we humans are more alike than we are different. Peace refuses to rush to judgement but will try to see beyond the rumours and the lies. Peace will not compromise with evil. Peace always seeks justice and fairness and the dignity of all people. Without this, there can be no real peace. And it starts with us - right here - if each of us does not have peace in our own hearts we can never expect to find it out there in the world. It begins with us.

"Peace I leave with you;" Jesus said. "my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

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:

"Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart."

I invite you to reflect silently on this quote for a moment. And ask yourself Does this feel like a word of comfort? What does it reveal, or reinforce, about your understanding of God's movement in this world? *(Repeat quote) ... (silence)...*

God of all, grant us peace.

When obstacles stand in our path, may we not despair.

When we feel like we're in free-fall, may we trust.

When life feels chaotic, may we remember to breathe.

When everything is going well, may we pause to savour.

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of Underwood-Wesley Pastoral Charge and for all those who work to bring peace to other parts of our country and the world.

And we pray for ourselves as we offer, in a moment of silence, the prayers of our hearts...
(silence)... Today we remember _____

God of Peace, it is so hard to find peace, in our hearts, in our communities, and in our world. We ache for it. We know this is not how you would want us to be. May your will be done. May your peace prevail. May our longing for peace lead us on a new journey to your sacred peace.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of the one we call the Prince of Peace, 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

Offering Prayer:

We offer our gifts, both physical and spiritual, to level the ground and make smooth the way ahead. We prepare, not just for our individual relationships with you, God, but for the wider community to find comfort and nurture. We offer ourselves, our minds, and our hearts along with our physical resources. Amen.

Hymn: Holy Spirit, Truth Divine

VU 368 (vs 1,2,3 5)

1 Holy Spirit, truth divine,
 dawn upon this soul of mine.
 Voice of God and inward light,
 wake my Spirit, clear my sight.

- 2 Holy Spirit, love divine,
glow within this heart of mine.
Kindle every high desire,
purify me with your fire.
- 3 Holy Spirit, power divine,
fill and nerve this will of mine.
Boldly may I always live,
bravely serve, and gladly give.
- 5 Holy Spirit, peace divine,
still this restless heart of mine.
Speak to calm this tossing sea,
grant me your tranquility.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

Peace be with you.

Comfort be among you.

Faithfulness be around you.

Go out into the world

Reminded that God's ever present love
is revealed in you.

Redefine this season of waiting into preparation
for the dawn of God's holy light. Amen.

Postlude:**Prayer of the Week:**

Holy One, grant us a stillness to silence the chaos around us, to allow for self-examination. In our introspection may we find courage, that our courage would move us to action, and that our actions would reflect Love come into the world. Amen.