



*Celebrating  
175 Years*



**January 10, 2021**

Melville United Church

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Presiding today: Rev. Tom Watson

**Words of Welcome and Introduction**

Good morning! Welcome to morning worship at historic Melville United Church in downtown Fergus, Ontario. It's a pleasure to have you join us online.

My name is Tom Watson and I am pleased to be with you on this January 10 Sunday. A sincere thanks to Colleen Weber for her musical leadership during this service.

So, again, welcome to everyone and I hope you enjoy being part of this time this morning.

**Acknowledgment of Indigenous Territory**

I will begin in the way Melville folks have become accustomed.

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.

**Sharing the Light**

We now take a moment to centre ourselves for worship as I light the Christ candle.

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.

**Call to Worship:**

The lingering echoes of Christmas remind us that Jesus calls us to a particular task...

**The task of communicating God's love in a world hungry for new ways.**

May our worship help us to reflect on that task...

**And empower us for the journey to which we are called.**

**Hymn - Praise God for This Holy Ground (MV 42)**

Praise God for this holy ground, place and people, sight and sound.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God's goodness is eternal.

Praise God in whose word we find food for body, soul and mind.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God's goodness is eternal.

Praise God's Spirit who befriends, raises, humbles, breaks and mends.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God's goodness is eternal.

Praise God who through Christ makes known

All are loved and called God's own.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God's goodness is eternal.

Though praise ends, praise is begun where God's will is gladly done.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God's goodness is eternal.

**Opening Prayer:** Enabling God, you have invited us to be part of this circle of faith, and so we come once again. We come to receive your gift of love and grace. We come also with something to offer: our faith, our hope, our willingness to be partners with you in creating new ways and new life. Blend our giving with yours, that we might further help to shape the world you imagine. In the spirit of Christ. Amen.

**Ministry of Music - "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry"**  
by John Vlvisaker (Colleen Weber)

**Scripture Reading: Mark 1:4-11**

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**Message: "Called and Gifted For The Journey"**

When I was between the ages of 9 and 15, the minister at the United Church in Wheatley, Ontario—where my family attended—was a man by the name of William H. Smith. On the way out of church on Sunday, he would say to me, "Thomas, when you grow up, you should become a minister." Seemed to me he said that every Sunday.

Obviously, he didn't say it every Sunday, but no matter how often it was, it seemed to me to be far too often. I'd think to myself, "Foolish old man. Why's he keep saying that?"

The curious thing is that the voice of that old minister never left me. "Thomas, when you grow up, you should become a minister." It took me until I was 37 years old before I took what he said seriously, and went to University to begin six years of study to become a minister.

Why was it that for more than 25 years the voice of that old minister remained in my head?

Another story. In January of 1981 we were living in Manitoba. I had been sent there upon ordination in 1979. One night we received a phone call to tell us that my father had died very suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 73.

We, of course, flew home for the funeral, and stayed for about a week after. During that time my Uncle Harold—my all-time favourite uncle—came to my mother's house for a visit. At

some point he took me aside and said, "Well, Tom, with your Dad gone, the family mantle rests on your shoulders now."

Why is it that when people whom you respect say things like that to you they stick, never to be forgotten?

The voices that call us. Maybe it's a teacher, a parent, a friend, a mentor. Anyone who says something that beckons us to be our very best selves, gifts us with fresh encouragement. Perhaps, most of all, gives us a renewed sense of hope.

All of these are things we need as we embark on the unknown journey that is 2021. Especially, I think, hope.

How will it be in the new 365? To be sure, there will be things left from the dying embers of the past. The past...I was about to say the past 365, but the other day a friend reminded me that 2020 was a leap year, so there were 366 days. No wonder that year felt so long!

Anyway, as I said there will be things left from the past 365, but going into a new year there's new hope and promise on the horizon, and it's all left in our tender hands to give it shape and texture.

In a recent editorial, author and blogger Seth Godin reminded us of the way of our lives were disrupted in 2020. But in spite of that, Godin writes, "Seeds were planted, connections were established, doors were opened, babies were born and changes were made."

Godin continues:

I just installed new smoke detectors in the house and the batteries now last ten years. There's a little spot on the side of the detector to write the year you installed it.

I'm wondering what the person (maybe me) who changes the batteries a decade from now will think when they see "2020" written on the side.

What will matter more than what just happened is what we decide to do with where we are, daily, persistently, generously, for the next 3,650 days. Here's to betting on the future.

So...with the notion of betting on the future, off we go!

One thing that's important when we start on anything new is that we begin in the right direction. Have I ever told you that I have a horrible sense of direction? Spin me around twice in a parking lot and I won't have a clue how to get out of there.

When the Melville congregation isn't meeting in person, because of Covid-19, these services are recorded mid-week, uploaded to YouTube, then Church secretary Lynda Rivet works her magic and pulls everything together for broadcast.

Back last spring, I did several services here at Melville. One day Colleen and I had met and recorded the service for the following Sunday, and after we finished I turned and embarked on my journey home to Guelph.

En route, I decided to phone my Manitoba daughter Valerie. She lives on a beef farm there and, during our conversation, she was telling me about a calf that had been born a couple of days earlier and, as sometimes happens, that calf wouldn't suck. She called it "a hammerhead."

Just then, I looked at a sign on the road. I said to Valerie, "Well, you've got a hammerhead driving this car. I'm at a sign that says Welcome to Arthur."

Remember...I live in Guelph. I had turned the wrong way in Fergus and turned a 20 minute journey into an hour. Because I wasn't set in the right direction.

So with our direction clearly in mind, we're off to write the story of our lives that will be 2021—the story of our mission as people of God.

In popular culture, the best stories always include the theme of adventure.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's marvelous story *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo Baggins is given a mission: save the world from the Dark Lord, Sauron the Great.

Frodo is reluctant. Primarily because he wonders if he is equal to what is required of him. The notion of one little hobbit setting out to save the world seems quite absurd.

"I wish this had not come to pass in my time," he says to the wizard Gandalf.

"So do I," replies Gandalf. "And so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for us to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

Hear that sentence again: All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.

Another example from popular culture. At one poignant point in Andrew Lloyd Weber's delightful stage play *Cats*, the other cats appeal to Mr. Mistoffelees, the magical cat, to save Old Deuteronomy from the clutches of Macavity, the villain in the story.

But Mr. Mistoffelees has the same fears and doubts that Frodo had in *The Lord of the Rings*. Is he up to the challenge? After all, he's just a magician. He lives by card tricks and magic, where it's all a game, an illusion. But this is reality. And he's just one little guy. Can he do it?

His call: Decide what to do with the time that is given him.

That applies to you and me too. And to us collectively as a church. We do not decide our time, its complexities, its ambiguities, the things that weigh upon it and war against it. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.

Will we use our time productively, faithfully, creatively? And if some important cause or journey falls across our path, will we take it up? Even though we feel like Frodo and Mr. Mistoffelees. Can one little someone—me...or us—really make a difference?

You know what...we don't have to make this into some grand, earth-shaking journey. Just consider the little journeys that come our way on a regular basis.

- Will we, in the little choices we have to make, be faithful?
- Will we, by the choices we make, be a force for right and good?
- Will we do things that build up or tear down?
- Will we seek the kind, the gracious, the generous way?
- On a personal level, will we make the changes we said we would make? In our habits, our approach to each day?
- Will we exercise more? Read more?
- Will we take that trip we've planned for so long?
- Will we as a church do the things that we are called to do?

What will we do with the time that is given us?

In September of 2019, I went, with two friends, on the CN Tower EdgeWalk in Toronto. When people knew I was doing that the reactions ranged from, "You wouldn't catch me up there for a million dollars," to...the most common..."Are you nuts!"

But, turn that EdgeWalk into a metaphor for life and what can be learned from it. I learned that edges are not necessarily to be feared.

Life has a wide variety of edges. What if we didn't fear them just because they're there?

We're on one edge right now—the edge we call the future. We wonder: Can we do what the future demands of us? Are we up to the challenge?

Listen...can you hear that still unknown future calling us? Can you hear the voice that is calling us as individuals, and as a church, to step out on the edge of the unknown?

Another time, another place...

One day, Jesus stands at the door of his father's carpenter shop in Nazareth. And as he stands there, he hears a voice echoing from somewhere down the Jordan valley. A strange voice. A voice being carried on the very wings of time. And as he listens, he realizes that the voice is calling his name. Calling it in such a way that he feels compelled to put down his carpenter's tools and go discover what it's all about. In some strange way, it even sounds as if it might be the voice of God.

And when he gets there—to the banks of the Jordan River—he discovers that the voice he heard isn't really the voice of God at all. It's the voice of his cousin, John the Baptizer. A voice he knows all too well.

But there is still something...something from 'somewhere beyond' in the experience. And then, following his baptism, the voice once again: "This is my beloved son, one in whom I am well pleased."

And thus, the gospel writers tell us, begins Jesus' life-journey. And because he took it up, the world was changed. Changed by the life of this one man, Jesus of Nazareth.

In Jesus' time, people asked: "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" ... "After all, he's just a carpenter's son. One of Joseph and Mary's kids! How in the world can he make any difference?"

In the same way, how can Fred, or Helen, or Sally, or Joe, or you, or I—born in Fergus or Guelph, or anywhere else—make any real difference? What's our role—our journey, our mission—in this, our time?

My reading of history leads me to believe that there are very few 'naturally great' people. For the most part, there are just ordinary people who, in given moments of time, find the capacity to act in important ways. Ordinary people who put their shoes and coats on exactly as do you and I.

And yet, we're the ones God believes in. Hear that again: We are the ones God believes in.

I don't know what this coming year will be for you or me, but I do know that to each of us there comes some major moment, or maybe only a tiny moment, when life calls us to do something in particular. A moment when we hear—whispered on the winds from down the valley, or whispered from somewhere very close to us—"I have called you by name, you are mine—my beloved child. In you I am well pleased."

"I have called...you!" Not somebody else...you! And me.

In that moment when we are called, we are gifted for the journey...whatever it is. And we have to decide how we will respond...in such a way that the light of God shines through us.

May it be so.

Amen.

### **Hymn - To Show By Touch and Word (VU 427)**

To show by touch and word devotion to the earth,  
To hold in high regard all life that comes to birth,  
We need, O God, the will to find the good you had of old in mind.

Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most,  
Our hearts to long for truth till pride of self is lost.  
For every challenge that we face we need your guidance and your grace.

Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm,  
and let our lives portray your word in human form.  
Now come with us that we may have your wits about us where we live.

### **Offering**

I know that Melville members continue to support the church through PAR or electronic means. Your ongoing support is sincerely appreciated. Thank you for all that you do.

## Prayers

### The Lord's Prayer

#### **Closing Hymn - Bless Now, O God, The Journey (VU #633)**

Bless now, O God, the journey that all your people make,  
The path through noise and silence, the way of give and take.  
The trail is found in desert and winds the mountain round,  
Then leads beside still waters, the road where faith is found.

Bless sojourners and pilgrims who share this winding way;  
Whose hope burns through the terrors, whose love sustains the day.  
We yearn for holy freedom while often we are bound;  
Together we are seeking the road where faith is found.

Divine eternal lover, you meet us on the road.  
We wait for lands of promise where milk and honey flow,  
But waiting not for places, you meet us all around.  
Our covenant is written on roads, as faith is found.

*(I invite you to stay for a couple of minutes after the Departing Prayer, as Colleen and I have a musical piece to offer as encouragement for the coming time)*

#### **Departing Prayer**

Just when we think our journey has ended in the star-lit glow of Christmas...

**We discover that the end is only a new beginning!**

And so we embark upon a new time, a new year.

**A new time, a new year, a new opportunity.**

May God grant us wisdom and courage, faith and hope...

**As we renew our task of being the church in our time!**

**Amen**

#### **Postlude**

"When the Saints Go Marching In"