



*Celebrating
175 Years*



January 17, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
January 17, 2021
2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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 - January 17, 2021. Because our province is in a lock-down situation because of Covid-19 there are no worshippers here with me. On-line services will be our norm for the foreseeable future and those who don't have electronic access are offered a printed version.

Today is the second Sunday after Epiphany, also known as the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time on the church liturgical calendar. During this next few months, we will hear the stories of Jesus' life and work leading up to the celebration of Easter which this year takes place on April 4th. I invite you to join me each week as we delve into the stories as presented in Mark's gospel.

Announcements:

Sharing the Light: *(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)*

We light a candle today to remind us
that there is a mysterious power or presence that connects us all -
we call it God.
that this mysterious presence dwells within each of us -
as it did in the person of Jesus whom we call the Christ.
that we *cannot* be separated from this presence that is
the Spirit of love which created us and that is part of us always.

Call to Worship:

God is constantly present in our lives and in the world.
God is revealed through us.
I invite you to come now
and let your hearts and minds
be open to the presence of love in our midst.
Let us worship our God together.

Hymn: Tell Me the Stories of Jesus (sung)

VU 357 (vs 1,2,3)

Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear,
things I would ask him to tell me if he were here:
scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea,
stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

First let me hear how the children stood round his knee,
and I shall fancy his blessing resting on me;
words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
all in the love-light of Jesus' face.

Tell me, in accents of wonder, how rolled the sea
tossing the boat in a tempest on Galilee!
And how the Master, ready and kind,
chided the billows and hushed the wind.

Words of Wisdom:

The stories we tell, whether human or divine, mythic or parabolic, order experience, construct meaning, and build community.

-Herbert Anderson, Edward Foley - *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*

Opening Prayer:

Here, in your presence, Great Mystery,
may we hear you call our names and willingly follow.
So call us again, O God,
for we come with a desire to know you better,
here and in every place you wait for us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of night-whispered wisdom,
forgive us for the times we fail to seek your will or heed your call.
Forgive us when we fail to act on the truth we know,
the knowledge we have, the possibility there is for change.
Forgive us when we let our love for family or friends or church or nation
blind us to their faults - and ours. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Know that you are forgiven and freed to forgive others.
Walk into a future shaped not by what you perceive as failures,
but by God's justice and love that are always filled with possibility. Amen.

Ministry of Music:

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (The New Revised Standard Version)

(God calls Samuel)

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to God under Eli. The word of God was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of God, where the ark of God was. Then God called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again."

So Samuel went and lay down. God called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know God, and the word of God had not yet been revealed to him. God called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that it was God calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if you are called again, you shall say, 'Speak, God, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And God called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Scripture: John 1:43-51 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

(Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael)

The next day after Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee he met Philip and said, "Follow me." Philip came from Bethsaida, the same town as Andrew and Peter.

Philip sought out Nathanael and said to him, "We've found the One that Moses spoke of in the Law, the One about whom the prophets wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph."

"From Nazareth?" Said Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

"Come and see." replied Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he remarked, "This one is a real Israelite. There is no guile in him."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked him.

Jesus answered, "Before Philip even went to call you, while you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you."

"Rabbi," said Nathanael, "you're God's Own; you're the ruler of Israel!"

Jesus said, "Do you believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You'll see much greater things than that."

Jesus went on to tell them, "The truth of the matter is, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Chosen One."

Message: Stories

Samuel 3:1-10, John 1:43-51

I love stories. I have always loved stories. Growing up I was a voracious reader. It didn't take me long to learn to read once I began school at the age of 6 and I was soon consuming everything I could get my hands on.

I remember during my teens keeping a list of every book I read, recording the title, the author's name and what I thought of the book. It was not unusual for my list to contain between 200 and 300 books a year. I was the quiet kid at school who would never get into trouble for causing a disturbance but was more likely to be scolded for having my head down reading a book under the desk instead of paying attention. I lived in the world of books. And I have lost more sleep over a good book than probably any other event in my life except, maybe newborn babies.

My reading was mainly fiction although, as I grew older, I branched out into non-fiction books on subjects that interested me, and many things interested me, because along with my love of

reading came a passion for learning. On my resume and job applications, under the heading 'Interests and Hobbies', one of the things I would always include along with 'reading' and a few other things was "learning anything new."

My interest in learning continues. And my preferred method of acquiring knowledge is still reading as is obvious if you were to see the number of books in my personal library. I think ahead to my retirement at the end of June with a bit of concern as to what I will do with my library which is currently occupying two places - my office at the church and my office at home. Fitting all into one place will be quite a challenge and it will involve some hard choices on my part.

Anyway, I digress. Whether it was the mystery solving of Nancy Drew or the romanticism of the gallant heroes of a Zane Grey novel I learned much about people from the fiction I read growing up. And those fictional stories led me to the non-fiction books that were to teach me so much about all areas of life including spirituality which became my chosen field in later life. I attribute much of my understanding about people and about life to what I learned through all those books and stories.

Stories are like that. Whether they are factually true or not, whether the events actually happened or not, stories have a way of teaching us things even when we aren't really aware we are learning. And, according to Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley in their book *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals* the most compelling reason why stories have such power to engage us is because human existence itself is structured in time and narrative - in story. We use story to construct meaning and to communicate ourselves to one another. Stories help us to organize and make sense of the experiences of life. We could say, we are our stories. In other words - stories are powerful things.

Some of the stories we tell are passed down to us in our families or in our culture or in our religious traditions. We assign meanings to particular life events through and because of the stories we have heard and which have been, even unconsciously, integrated into the way we look at and live in the world. All of this is to say that stories we hear, create and share are extremely important to who we are and to who we become as mature individuals and as a society.

And that brings me to the stories we hear in church. The stories which found our faith tradition. For us, those are the stories we find in the Bible. I believe, and the story I tell about our Holy Scriptures, is that the Bible in its entirety is the story of humanity's evolving relationship with the Divine Presence we call God. The Bible chronicles the story of our spiritual journey, our spiritual evolution, if you will.

Now one must realize and remember that our faith story - the one we find in the Bible - is not the only story of humanity's relationship to the Divine Presence. All the great world religions have their own stories and holy books. One is no better than the other, they are just different. They are all stories of a people trying to make sense of the divine spirit which has been encountered in one way or another. And, of course, we all know, don't we, that Spirit, however you perceive it, can never be completely contained within any one religion or person or in any one story.

I started the service today with the hymn “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus”. This old and beloved song is one I loved as a youngster. I love it because I love stories and because I love the stories of Jesus and his love. There is another old hymn with the line “I love to tell the story of Jesus and his love” and, I must confess, that I thought as a child that line referred to Jesus and his girlfriend. Who she was I never imagined, but my young, romantic mind just thought that was the way it was.

And our Christian tradition is based on stories - the stories of Jesus as related in the gospels along with the Old Testament stories that led up to his time and they are all wonderful stories that teach us so much. My belief is that these stories could teach many people a lot about love, inclusivity, acceptance, and generally how to live in a way that brings harmony and peace. But, unfortunately, the stories have become clouded and obscured with layer upon layer of interpretation and opinion about what they mean. Over the years the basic message of love that Jesus was trying to convey has become lost.

Perhaps it is time for us to get back to the basics. Perhaps it is time for us to get back to just reading the stories with the eyes of innocence to see what is really there without all the hype that has been piled on top. Perhaps it is time to let the stories speak to our minds and hearts as so many other stories in our lives do. Perhaps it is time to let the stories shape us and help us in our living without getting bogged down with someone else’s interpretation of what they mean.

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 -“Christ, Luminous in All Things” by Bruce Sanguin- *If Darwin Prayed*)

O Holy One,
we dwell in darkness
when we are away from you:
ignorant of our true nature,
unaware of life’s blessings,
disconnected and isolated
from the dance of the cosmos
and the blessing that we are.

We dwell in light
when we open to you:
aware that we are made in your image,
blessed by the opportunity of being alive,
at one with all that is,

enveloped by you,
 luminous in all creation,
 beyond all thought,
 yet present in our "yes" to life.

May the light of the Christ
 shine within us, among us,
 and from us,
 wherever darkness reigns.

Our prayers continue Gracious God, as we imagine your vision for all people.
 The lonely who need a friend,
 the hungry who need food,
 the homeless who need shelter,
 the sick and weary who need a bed,
 those who can't rest because there's too much to do,
 those who would like to feel useful, too.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters of Christ the King UC, Kitchener and for all those
 who work on our behalf, following your call, to other parts of our country and the world.

And we pray for ourselves as we share the concerns, joys, worries and gratitude that we share
 with no other. Hear the prayers of our hearts... (silence).... Today we pray for ____

We thank you, God, for calling us, for calling us into the future with you. May we hear,
 understand, imagine, and follow, living into your vision for all.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, the one who
 calls us to follow in his footsteps and the one who taught us to pray together saying...

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 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:

God, you know us inside and out. You created us to have different experiences of Spirit and taught us to respond with gifts of gratitude. We feel the weight of an unknown future but we come now in earnest hope and faith to offer what we have, to do what we can and to leave the rest up to you. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore (sung) (VU 563)

Jesus, you have come to the lakeshore
looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones;
you only asked me to follow humbly.
O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,
and while smiling, have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas.

You know so well my possessions;
my boat carries no gold and no weapons;
- you will find there my nets and labour.
O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,
and while smiling, have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas.

You need my hands, full of caring
through my labours to give others rest,
and constant love that keeps on loving.
O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,
and while smiling, have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas.

You, who have fished other oceans,
ever longed for by souls who are waiting,
my loving friend, as thus you call me.
O Jesus, with your eyes you have searched me,
and while smiling, have spoken my name;

now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by your side I will seek other seas.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

God is always with us.

We are never alone.

Wherever we go, God's love is there.

Whatever we experience, God's love is there.

And at the end of our days, God's love will be there.

Remember this - always!

Go in peace. Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week:

You call each of us, Infinite Wisdom. Help us to recognize your voice amidst the noise of our world. Help us to respond with courage and honesty so that we may show love for you and your people in whatever we do each day. Amen.