



Celebrating
175 Years



January 24, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
January 24, 2021
3rd 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 24, 2021. Our province is in a lock-down situation because of Covid-19 so there are no worshippers here with me. On-line services will be the norm for the foreseeable future and those who don't have electronic access are offered a printed version of the service.

Today is the third Sunday after Epiphany, also known as the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time on the church liturgical calendar. During the next while 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 hear stories from both the Old and New Testaments and ponder their meaning for us.

Announcements:

Sharing the Light: 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:

Every second of every minute,
every minute of every hour,
every hour of every day - God is with us.
Every breath we take,
every heart that beats,
every laugh lived,
every tear dropped - is a gift of God.
And so we are joyful, grateful, thankful.
And so we are here to worship the Creator together.

Hymn: Jesus Calls Us (spoken)

VU 562

- 1 Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his clear voice sounding,
saying, 'Christian, follow me.'
- 2 Long ago apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for Jesus' sake.
- 3 Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, 'Christian, love me more.'
- 4 In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
'Christian, love me more than these.'
- 5 Jesus calls us: by your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Words of Wisdom::

The movement of God's Spirit is very gentle, very soft... that movement is also very persistent, strong and deep. Henri Nouwen

Opening Prayer:

God who calls, we gather today wondering what it sounds like, what it feels like, and what it means to be called. We have set aside this precious time to ponder the question of who you are and who we are with you. Call to us and awaken us to your invitation. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of all people, you call our name... and we don't listen.
You call our name... and we run in the opposite direction.
You call our name... and we don't want to change our plans.
Call us again, Infinite Wisdom,
push and pull us out of our comfort zone.
Make us bold, make us strong, make us yours.
Call our name, once again. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

In the deep of night, God calls to us.
 In the brightness of the day, God calls to us.
 God is there, in our heads and in our hearts,
 loving us, waiting for us to answer.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.

Ministry of Music: Prelude in C Major by J.S. Bach (Colleen Weber)**Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5, 10** (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

(Jonah calls Nineveh to repent)

The word of YHWH came a second time to Jonah: "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach to them as I told you to do."

Jonah set out and went to Nineveh in obedience to God. Nineveh was a city large beyond compare; it took three days to cross it. Jonah moved on into the city, making a day's journey. He proclaimed, "Only forty days more, and Nineveh is going to be destroyed!"

So the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth, from the greatest to the least.

God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behaviour. And God relented by not inflicting on them the disaster that threatened them.

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

(Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John)

After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God:

"This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Change your hearts and minds, and believe this Good News!"

While walking by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw the brothers Simon and Andrew casting their nets into the sea, since they fished by trade. Jesus said to them, "Follow me; I will make you fishers of people." They immediately abandoned their nets and followed Jesus.

Proceeding a little further along, Jesus saw the brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee. They too were in their boat, putting their nets in order. Immediately Jesus called them, and they left their father Zebedee standing in the boat with the hired help, and went off in the company of Jesus.

Message: Called

Mark 1:14-20, Jonah 3:1-5, 10

As I said last week - I love stories. I also said we would be exploring some of the stories of Jesus and others that we find in the Bible, which is pretty much what preachers are supposed to do. I try to present them in such a way that we can see how we can connect with these stories even though they were written hundreds of years ago. Many of them are stories of ordinary folks rising to do things they never imagined they could do.

Today's stories are both about being 'called'. Now, the Bible is full of stories of people being 'called.' In Exodus we read of Moses who was hiding out in Midian because he had killed a man back in Egypt. He is hiding out, working for his father-in-law minding sheep when suddenly, a bush bursts into flame and he hears a voice telling him he has been chosen to deliver his people from the clutches of slavery in Egypt. He immediately protests.

In the prophets we read of a young Isaiah who has a vision in which his lips are touched with a live coal. Then he heard a voice saying "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah feels the urge to volunteer for the job realizing he is the one who has been chosen. And he protests too.

There are many, many more stories similar to these in both the old and new Testaments. We think of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, David, Deborah, Joshua, Ruth, Mary, and the list goes on and on but one thing that is common in many of them is that those 'called' were 1) reluctant to accept and 2) they were ordinary people living their lives in ordinary ways when the 'call' came.

One of the other things which is similar in many of the call stories in the Bible is that a voice came dramatically or suddenly out of the blue but that is not always the way 'call' works. I suspect that some of those in the Bible may have had a much more gradual awakening to God's call but these sudden, dramatic encounters make for much more interesting stories, don't they?

So how do we explain what 'call' is? Well, I believe that each of us is put here on this earth with a task or purpose to fulfil. We are born for something specific but whether we choose to use our free will to follow up on it is up to us. Let me share a bit of my own sense of 'call' to help explain what I mean. I know some of you may have heard it before but bear with me.

My story begins when I was a small child running and playing free in the country fields around my family's home. I remember 'knowing' or sensing that there was a presence, or something greater than myself that I was part of and that something was part of me. I felt a sense of belonging and a feeling of oneness that is difficult to put into words.

But life went on and I enjoyed tasting and savouring many of the temptations that came my way. I went on to fill my life with all the things one is supposed to fill their lives with - relationships, socializing, business - and those things would work for awhile but I always had the feeling that I was missing something - that there was something more.

Just to be clear, my family was not a church-going family. My siblings and I were sent to Sunday School when very young to get the basics but that was about it. But, during my teens, I regularly attended the "Young Peoples" group at the local Presbyterian church with a friend and it was there that the idea of ministry first presented itself. Now, unlike Samuel in our story from last week, I did not have any religious mentors to guide or instruct me and I did not know what 'call' meant, if I had even heard of it. But the seed was planted - the little bit of Sunday School that I experienced and the influence of that youth group and, I realize now, that early childhood feeling of oneness, were the start of an ongoing search even though it was an unconscious search much of the time. And that 'search' was to last over 30 years!

Over time the pull to all things Spiritual became stronger and stronger until, one day, I 'knew' that I was being 'called' to be a minister in the church. Now, that doesn't mean that I embraced the idea with open arms. I remember going to visit the minister at the church where I had become involved and saying to him "I am being called, and I don't want to go." Like many of the people we read about in the Bible - I was a reluctant follower. But somehow I felt compelled to do it. There was no escaping that pull, that 'something' that drew me.

So when it comes to stories of the Bible, I have often said that my middle name should be Jonah. I identify with him because I attempted to do just what he did - I tried to run away from the 'call' - for over 30 years! But, you know, the decision to finally 'surrender' and do what I had really known all along I was meant to do, was the best one I ever made. It doesn't mean that to do it was easy. In fact, it was one of the hardest things I have ever done and it took me eleven long years of school and work to achieve my goal. But it felt like I had come home - like I was finally in line with my destiny. I was following my heart and doing what I felt I was born to do and not simply trying to fulfil the dictates of what society and other people thought I should be doing. And once I decided the universe (God) conspired to make the journey possible - not easy - but possible.

Next we have the story of Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James and John. It appears their call was much different. They just simply dropped everything on the spur of the moment to follow him. One has to wonder what prompted them to drop their lives immediately to go. What did they see in Jesus that would cause them to leave family, home and business to go with a man they had never seen before, a complete stranger?

Barbara Brown Taylor, a well-known preacher and author suggests that it was a miracle. The miracle not being that these men courageously left all that was familiar to follow a stranger but, rather, the miracle is whatever it was that happened to them that compelled them to decided to go. She sees it as a story about God's ability not only to call us but also to create us as people who are able to follow - able to follow because we cannot take our eyes off the one who calls us. Their hearts did not hold on to what was falling from their hands but to what they were reaching out to find, and in that God-drenched moment of their turning to follow, the miracle occurred: their lives flowed in the same direction as God's life. As Barbara Brown-Taylor puts it - the kingdom came and comes every time our own lives are brought into the same flow, so that we too allow ourselves to fall into alignment, and follow 'the call', because we can do no other.

To be called means to feel compelled to do something. We hear stories all the time about people who say they felt they could not not do something or they were only ever interested in one thing - it may be dancing (think of the story of Billy Elliot) it may be helping the poor (think of Mother Theresa), it may be science (think of Steven Hawking), it may be painting pictures (think of the story of Maudie Lewis). I could go on, but you get the idea. A 'call', to do whatever, comes from a place deep within us. It is like an irresistible voice that won't leave us alone. It is a pull that cannot be denied.

One thing I want to stress, because I believe it, is that each and every person is 'called' to something. We have all been blessed with gifts, talents and abilities that are meant to be used. We each have a responsibility to strive to be the best we can be and to fulfil the potential born in us. And for each it will be different because we each have different gifts and levels of ability. Our 'call' is to be the best we can be using the gifts we have been given. There are few, if any, exceptions - whether plumber or professor, janitor or lawyer, waitress or teacher, homemaker or politician, student or farmer - whatever brings us satisfaction or fulfillment is our 'calling'.

It is a miracle - as Taylor writes. It is a miracle that we are created as people who are able to follow. All we need to do is open up to the possibilities. It is a miracle that Simon, Matthew, James and John dropped everything to follow Jesus. It is also a miracle that God persisted in nudging and calling me to ministry for thirty years or more. It is a miracle that God is and will be there for each of us any time we are ready to turn around and be swept into the flow of abundant life.

Called - do what you love.

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:

Holy Presence, we come today knowing that we are not alone, that you are with us always. But sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we think we have been abandoned to our own devices. Sometimes we do feel alone, especially during times like we are experiencing now, times when we cannot physically be together, times when we have to stay home alone or with only our immediate family for company. It is hard for us.

Call to us in our loneliness. Prompt us to take advantage of quiet days at home to open our hearts to Spirit's presence. Inspire us to take the inward journey to find the strength, the perseverance and the peace that knowing you can bring.

We pray today for those who are working so hard to care for the sick, whether that be people who have Covid-19 or any illness. May they be given strength and whatever else they need to sustain them. We pray for all those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, the loss of jobs and income, the loss of support. May they be comforted, supported and befriended. We pray for the leaders who are trying to make good decisions to help us all. May they be guided by wisdom and fairness.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters of Paisley UC and for all those who work on our behalf in other parts of our country and the world. And we pray for ourselves as we take a moment to offer our individual prayers. (silence).... Today we pray for our American neighbours as they embark upon their journey with a new president. May he be guided by your wisdom.

Jesus calls us. You call us. The world calls us. We are called because we are needed, each in our own special way. Let us hear and do our part, whatever that may be.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, 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 several 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:

Gifts of money and of time,
 gifts of passion and of heart,
 gifts of our very selves -
 we present all of these to you, O God.
 Bless us and them, we pray,
 for your purposes in the world. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus Saw Them Fishing (sung) MV 113

Jesus saw them fishing by the shore of Galilee,
casting out their nets into the sea.

Simon Peter, Andrew and the sons of Zebedee,
waiting in their boats - so patiently.

And Jesus said, "Oh, come and follow me.

Oh, leave behind your nets. I call you.

Oh, come and fish with me,

and your life will never be the same again."

A rich young person came to Jesus looking for advice.

"How can I obtain eternal life?"

Jesus told him, "Honour the commandments of our God.

Then sell off all your riches - for the poor.”
And Jesus said, “Oh, come and follow me.
Oh, leave behind your nets. I call you.
Oh, come and fish with me,
and your life will never be the same again.”

“If you want to follow me, deny your very self.
Take up your cross and walk the walk with me.
This might seem a hardship, an impossibility,
but nothing is impossible - with God.”
And Jesus said, “Oh, come and follow me.
Oh, leave behind your nets. I call you.
Oh, come and fish with me,
and your life will never be the same again.”

Blessing/Sending Forth:

We may fail - God does not.
We may end - God does not.
Bless and be blessed.
And know that wherever you go,
whatever you do, you are never alone.
God is with you - always!
Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week: (Jan 18-24 is the week of Prayer for Christian Unity)
We pray for the visible unity of the Church.
Lead us to fulfil Jesus’ prayer that we may be one
and work together to manifest your Kindom.
Today we ask you: O God, hear our prayer and grant us passion for unity. Amen.