



*Celebrating
175 Years*



January 31, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
January 31, 2021
4th 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 31, 2021. Because our province is in a lock-down situation with Covid-19 restrictions 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 I am doing things a little differently. I want to take you on a bit of a spiritual journey. We will explore 5 stages of the Spiritual journey through the use of scripture, words, and music. I invite you to join me on this journey. Perhaps it will offer you some insight or a word of wisdom for your own spiritual journey.

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:

Take off your dress shoes,
for you may need to cross a rocky path.
Take off your head-covering.
God may wish to kiss your brow with a holy breeze.
Take off whatever protects you,
so you can feel the warm presence of the Holy Spirit.
God is in the air, and in the space between us.
God will make the emptiness into a holy place.
Come, let us worship and journey in Spirit together.

Hymn: Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom (sung) MV 10

Come and seek the ways of Wisdom,
she who danced when earth was new.
Follow closely what she teaches,
for her words are right and true.
Wisdom clears the path to justice,
showing us what love must do.

Listen to the voice of Wisdom,
crying in the marketplace.
Hear the Word made flesh among us,
full of glory, truth, and grace.
When the word takes root and ripens,
peace and righteousness embrace.

Sister Wisdom, come, assist us;
nurture all who seek rebirth.
Spirit-guide and close companion,
bring to light our sacred worth.
Free us to become your people,
holy friends of God and earth.

Words of Wisdom:

We all must take time to be silent and to contemplate, especially those of us who live in big cities... where everything moves so fast... I always begin my prayer in silence, for it is in the silence of the heart that God speaks. -Mother Teresa

Opening Prayer:

In the midst of the crowded lives we lead, we have set aside this time for worship, O God. Clear the chaos from our minds and hearts, clear our senses to discover your presence, and show us the things that really matter. Strengthen our faith as we share this time together focused on you and the Spirit that lives within us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Searching and seeking God, you alone are aware of the shadowed and secret places of our hearts. Those places that hold things we are afraid to share aloud. Hear them now as we take a moment to offer our silent confessions of mistakes and things that have caused us to turn away from you... (silence)... Attend to us, Holy One, and in your love answer, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Receive the good news. When we come to God just as we are, honest, broken, and afraid, we will be met with the open, loving arms of the Source of Love that is with us always - listening, forgiving and loving us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Ministry of Music: Organ pieces written by Cesar Franck

Message: The Spiritual Journey

Paul Teilard de Chardin, a well known French Jesuit priest, scientist, paleontologist and theologian, once said “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

And St. Augustine, one of the ancient church theologians, said “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

Spirituality can embrace a wide range of thoughts and experiences and, although religion can provide us with a means to express our spirituality it can sometimes prove limiting.

In the Vedas, the five-thousand-year old Hindu scriptures, it is recorded that we are constituted of two bodies - the corporal or physical and the spiritual - and that it is the spiritual that defines us, sustains us, and provides meaning and purpose to our existence. Christianity tells us the same thing as do many, if not all, other religious traditions. For people the world over the spiritual quest is a common denominator in the search for meaning and wholeness.

Spirituality is about being open to the different realities of existence, about being guided by our intuition, which is nothing less than the truth within us. With practice, we can learn to live our lives connected to spirit - a consciousness that unites the mind, the heart, and the soul.

We are all born with this hunger for wholeness but unfortunately, in our busy world of science, technology and activity we often lose sight of the need to stop and reflect and nurture our soul or spirit. Somewhere along the last few hundred years we lost the art of contemplation and the sense of the sacred in everyday life that the ancients took for granted. This loss contributes to a sense of struggle, of being without direction, as we search for ways of finding meaning and peace in our lives. The spiritual void needs to be filled and has been - with the gods of wealth and power.

So, I think, we need to reclaim our sense of the sacred. We need to re-learn how to connect with spirit and live in union with all parts of ourselves and so with the force we call God on a daily basis. Spiritual experience that brings peace to our individual lives is essential if we ever hope to bring peace to the world.

Spiritual experiences are unique to every individual, yet there is a familiar form of awakening and journeying that does not change. Today, through the use of readings and music, I would like to introduce you to some of the stages of a spiritual journey and so to give you some food for thought - something to contemplate, if you will, as part of your spiritual journey. Today's thoughts have a Christian base but spirituality does not necessarily need any religious associations at all.

In view of that fact, I have also asked our Administrator, Lynda, to include on our website a copy of an essay entitled “What is Spirituality: a personal exploration” written by Dr. Maya Spencer of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. She, of course, writes from a scientific viewpoint rather than a religious one and that can help to give us a different perspective.

1. Quest for Meaning

Isaiah 26:8-9 - "O God, we wait for you; your name and your renown are my heart's desire. My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you."

Many people feel dissatisfied with life as it is lived on a conscious level and begin to search for something that gives deeper meaning to their lives. We often begin our search for 'truth' with doubt, pain, and a lot of questions. You have probably heard the expression 'the dark night of the soul'. But God is in the dark, too. Even Jesus spent his 40 days in the wilderness wrestling with his own demons.

Listen to these words by Wendell Berry, a modern day American novelist, poet, essayist, environmental activist, cultural critic, and farmer.

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

When we seek we will find - even in the dark.

Hymn: **Seek Ye First the Kingdom** (Spoken) **VU 356**

- 1 Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and God's righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.
- 2 Ask and it shall be given unto you;
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.
- 3 We do not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Hallelu, hallelujah.

2. Finding God/Revelation

Jeremiah 29:13-14 - "when you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says God."

So how, or where do we find God? It is one thing to say seek and another to actually find what we are looking for, especially something so elusive as God.

I believe we find God when we open ourselves to receive and when we trust that the divine speaks to us through our intuition. In other words, from within ourselves. We can hear this inner voice only by giving up old, worn ways and behaviours that control our lives unconsciously. Then we open to seeing in new ways and we open ourselves to a new, spiritual way of being. We cannot find God with the mind alone. We find God by stilling the mind and opening our hearts.

Listen to the wisdom of Thomas Merton who was an American Trappist monk, writer, theologian, mystic, poet, social activist, and scholar.

God approaches our minds by receding from them.

We can never fully know God if we think of God as an object of capture, to be fenced in by the enclosure of our own ideas.

We know God better after our minds have let God go.

The Lord travels in all directions at once.

The Lord arrives from all directions at once.

Wherever we are, we find that God has just departed.

Wherever we go, we discover that God has just arrived before us.

You have heard me say ‘there is no place we can be where God is not’.

Hymn: In the Quiet Curve of Evening (sung)

VU 278

- 1 In the quiet curve of evening,
in the sinking of the days,
in the silky void of darkness, you are there.
 In the lapses of my breathing,
 in the space between my ways,
 in the crater carved by sadness, you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are there.

- 2 In the rests between the phrases,
in the cracks between the stars,
in the gaps between the meaning, you are there.
 In the melting down of endings,
 in the cooling of the sun,
 in the solstice of the winter, you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are there.

- 3 In the mystery of my hungers,
in the silence of my rooms,
in the cloud of my unknowing, you are there.
 In the empty cave of grieving,
 in the desert of my dreams,
 in the tunnel of my sorrow, you are there.
You are there, you are there, you are there.

3. Struggling with Life/Suffering

Romans 5:3-5 - “and not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us.”

We often hear the question “What is the purpose of suffering?” Or “Why is there so much pain and evil in the world?” Behind these questions is an assumption that we know the way

things should or should not be. A leap of faith would be to acknowledge that we do not understand the levels of God's lessons and that God's purpose is hardly ever revealed in straight clear lines.

One way I answer this type of question is - think about the experiences which taught you most about life and about yourself. Were they happy experiences or painful ones?

Listen to this poem written by Rumi who was a 13th-century Persian poet, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic whose poems have been widely translated into many of the world's languages.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning is a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

We never know what God may be leading us to but we do know that God will be with us through it all.

Hymn: Precious Lord, Take My Hand (spoken)

VU 670

- 1 Precious Lord, take my hand,
lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
through the storm, through the night,
lead me on to the light:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.
- 2 When my way grows drear,
precious Lord, linger near,
when my life is almost gone,
hear my cry, hear my call,
hold my hand lest I fall:
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

- 3 When the darkness appears,
 and the night draws near,
 and the day is past and gone,
 at the river I stand,
 guide my feet, hold my hand:
 take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

4. Surrender/Living for God

Jeremiah 17:7-8 - "Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit."

Knowing Spirit leads to an unfolding of the heart, a freeing of the soul from the many boundaries and restrictions that we have been taught.

When we surrender to our inner guidance, we begin to accept that all that happens in our lives has a purpose, it is God's will if you want to think of it that way. We begin to live with gratitude and compassion.

With our new-found feeling of freedom comes the desire to share our joy with others; to spread God's love around as I like to put it. We want to 'be' for God and we find we have courage we never realized we had to do what needs to be done.

Martin Israel, who was a British pathologist, Anglican priest, spiritual director and author writes:

"There is a type of faith quite essential in daily living. It is the courage and tenacity to proceed with the work in hand despite the discouraging wisdom of both the bystanders and our own critical mind."

Hymn: Take My Life and Let It Be (spoken) VU 506

- 1 Take my life, and let it be
 consecrated, all for thee;
 take my moments and my days;
 let them flow in ceaseless praise.
- 2 Take my hands, and let them move
 at the impulse of thy love;
 take my feet, and let them be
 swift and purposeful for thee.
- 3 Take my lips, and let them be
 filled with messages from thee;
 take my intellect, and use
 every power as thou shalt choose.
- 4 Take my will, and make it thine;
 it shall be no longer mine;

take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

- 5 Take my love: and I will pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

5. Union/Awe

Psalm 111:9b-10 - "Holy and awesome is God's name. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. Their praise endures forever."

Through awareness, expanded consciousness, and the wisdom that comes from pain and suffering and the trials of the journey, a vast land of eternal beauty unfolds before us. It's a place we recognize from deep within our souls, an awesome mystery of which we are a part. When we fully realize that we are one with the All and the All is one with us, all things bring us peace and the gifts of love, grace, creativity, mysticism, peace and joy remain with us.

At every level of discovery and experience in the search for God, however you perceive that to be, life becomes richer and more awesome as we step closer and closer to the infinite. We know we have arrived when, without fear, without question, our souls are at peace.

It is the journey of a lifetime, a journey of learning, of opening oneself and a journey of love - not always easy but well worth the effort.

Let me leave you with these words from the famous poet William Wordsworth

Enough of science and art,
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

Hymn: I Am the Dream (sung) MV 106

I am the dream and you the dreamer.
I am the song and you are the rhyme.
You are the tune sung in ev'ry silence.
You are the now in the endless stream of time.

I am the bell and you the silence.
You are the yearning I cannot curtail.
I am the blest and you the blessing.
You are the wilds in which I lose my trail.

You are the word and I the echo.
You are the leader and I am the led.
You are the joy and I the laughter.
You are the Rock on which I lay my head.

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:

Great Mystery, you are Infinite Wisdom and the ground of our being. Open our hearts to the awe and reverence that will begin our journey into wisdom. For knowing you, the essence of ourselves, is our ticket, our only true path to the peace that passes all understanding. Without knowledge of you we go through life with blinders on, not knowing the abundance that is our birthright.

We pray today for all those who wander through life wondering what it is all about and never knowing that what they seek lies right there inside them. We pray today for those who reach out for solace and comfort and support - may they find what they need. We pray for those who are battling illness of mind, body or spirit - may they find deep healing. We pray today for the homeless, the poor, the bereaved, the confused - may their needs be met in the best ways possible.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters of Eramosa Pastoral charge 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 open our hearts and offer our own individual concerns and thanksgivings. Hear the prayers of our hearts... (Silence).... Today we pray for_____

God of all, you gift us with voices to tell your story, with hands to extend in welcome and care, and hearts to love. May your calling grow deeper within us as your Spirit equips and inspires us with power to do what we are called to do.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, who stands among as we pray together saying... Our Father...

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:

Holy Presence, we bring all we have - our faith, our doubts, our hopes, our dreams, our lives in all their untidiness, and we offer them to you. As a token of our love and gratitude we also offer a portion of what we have been given. Bless these gifts, and bless us, we pray, for the good of your love at work in the world. Amen.

Hymn: Bless Now, O God, the Journey (spoken)

VU 633

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

May God, who is love, hold you.

May God, who is liberation, free you.

May God, who is healing, restore you to wholeness.

May we who have journeyed together,
go now to be a people who share by our living
God's reconciling love in the world. Amen.

Postlude:**Prayer of the Week:**

God of hearts and homes, when our spirits are troubled, bring us peace; when our spirits are hurting, bring us healing; when our spirits falter, give us strength to carry on; when we are alienated from others, bring reconciliation love and trust. Amen.