



Celebrating
175 Years



March 7, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
February 7, 2021
5th 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 - February 7, 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.

And here we are - February already! The winter is passing quickly. Groundhog day is behind us and we are in the final stretch toward spring - an early one according to Wiarton Willy and Shubenakety Sam. Spring is a hopeful time and especially so this year as we wait for Covid-19 infections to subside and restrictions to be lifted so we can, once again, be together in more 'normal' ways. In the mean time we gather with hope on the horizon.

I invite you to join me in this time of worship and contemplation today. Perhaps something I say or share will offer you a word of comfort, hope or insight as you continue your 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:

We come today seeking security in an uncertain world.
We come today to find refreshment for our sagging spirits.
We come today to re-connect with our community of faith.
We come to be reassured that God is with us, even now.
So come, people of God, let us worship together.

Hymn: Let My Spirit Always Sing (spoken)**MV 83**

Let my spirit always sing,
 though my heart be wintering,
 though the season of despair
 give no sign that you are there,
 God to whom my days belong,
 let there always be a song.

Though my body be confined,
 let your word engage my mind,
 let the inner eye discern
 how much more there is to learn,
 see the world becoming whole
 through the window of the soul.

Let your wisdom grace my years,
 choose my words and chase my fears,
 give me wit to welcome change,
 to accept, and not estrange,
 let my joy be full and deep
 in the knowledge that I keep.

Let my spirit always sing,
 to your Spirit answering,
 through the silence, through the pain
 know my hope is not in vain,
 like a feather on your breath
 trust your love, through life and death.

Words of Wisdom: Isaiah 40:28-31 (from p.74 of *Responsive Prayers, Year B* by David Sparks)

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

God is the origin of creation; the skies, the earth, and all living creatures are God's.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The powerful and those who rule cruelly will not last; their influence will be reduced to nothing.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

God never grows tired or weary; God strengthens those who are downhearted.

In time and beyond time, those who trust in God will find their strength renewed.

They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak. God be praised.

Opening Prayer: -by Thomas a Kempis, 15th century

Grant to us, O God,
to know that which is worth knowing,
to love that which I worth loving,
to praise that which pleases you most,
to respect that which is most precious to you,
and to dislike whatever is evil in your eyes.
Grant us the judgement to distinguish things that differ
and above all to search out and do
the things that are most pleasing to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

We confess to you, O God,
the moments when we do not trust your presence
or our own sense of it.
We confess, too,
those moments when we pretend we know all things
and are in control of everything.
And we confess
those moments when we think we can hide
our thoughts and our actions from you.
Forgive us, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

The good news is that those who wait upon God
renew their strength day after day.
We can soar with the eagles and run and not be weary.
The good news is that if it is God who fills our cup,
it can never run dry.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

Ministry of Music: Sicilienne by Gabriel Faure (Colleen and Mercedes Weber)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

Although I am not bound to anyone, I put myself into the service of all so as to win over as many as possible.

To the Jews I become even more Jewish, to win over the Jewish people; even though I am not subject to the Law, I made myself subject to the Law, to win those who are subject to the Law. To those who have no law, I was free of the Law, too - though not free from God's Law, being subject to the Law of Christ - to win those who have no law. To the weak I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might save at least some of them. In fact, I do all that I do for the sake of the Gospel in the hope of having a share in its blessings.

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)

Upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered Simon's and Andrew's house with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told Jesus about her.

Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand and helped her up, and the fever left her. Then she went about her work.

After sunset, as evening drew on, they brought to Jesus all who were ill and possessed by demons. Everyone in the town crowded around the door. Jesus healed many who were sick with different diseases, and cast out many demons. But Jesus would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew who he was.

Rising early the next morning, Jesus went off to a lonely place in the desert and prayed there. Simon and some companions managed to find Jesus and said to him, "Everybody is looking for you!"

Jesus said to them, "Let us move on to the neighbouring villages so that I may proclaim the Good News there also. That is what I have come to do." So Jesus went into their synagogues proclaiming the Good News and expelling demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Message: The Touch of Love

Mark 1:29-39 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

I want to share with you some words written by Bruce and Katherine Epperly in a publication called *Reiki Healing Touch and The Way of Jesus*. In case you don't know, Reiki is a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation that also promotes healing. It is administered by "laying on hands" and is based on the idea that an unseen "life force energy" flows through us and is what causes us to be alive. If one's "life force energy" is low, then we are more likely to get sick or feel stress, and if it is high, we are more capable of being happy and healthy.

The word Reiki is made up of two Japanese words - Rei which means "God's Wisdom or the Higher Power" and Ki which is "life force energy". So Reiki actually means "spiritually guided life force energy."

While Reiki is spiritual in nature, it is not a religion. It has no dogma, and there is nothing you must believe in order to learn and use Reiki. In fact, Reiki is not dependent on belief at all and will work whether you believe in it or not. Because Reiki comes from God, many people find that using Reiki puts them more in touch with the experience of their religion rather than having only an intellectual concept of it. That being said, I want to share the thoughts of Bruce and Katherine Epperly with you.

Jesus' Healing Ministry

Jesus was a pulsing centre of divine power and energy. Like an electrical transformer, the energy of love flowed from Jesus toward persons in need of physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual healing. The power that emanated from his touch and presence was akin to the power of the big birth and the first light of creation, the primal energy that penetrates the darkness and brings forth life from God's womb of creativity. Grounded in his unity with God, Jesus was the connective 'vine' through whom God's life-giving energy flowed abundantly to everyone he touched.

Jesus' healing was profoundly personal and intimate in nature. It embraced the whole of a person's life and not merely her or his physical symptoms. Even those who were troubled by painful physical ailments knew that a physical cure or alleviation of symptoms was not enough to bring them wholeness. Many came to Jesus in search of transformation of their minds as well as their bodies.

In addition, it is helpful to know that Jesus used a variety of healing methods - touch, the spoken word, prayer and distant healing, spittle and mud, exorcism, and personal challenge. Recognizing the uniqueness of each person and the multidimensional nature of health and illness, Jesus used whatever means would be most helpful to the one who stood before him. He did not compel persons to become well but invited them to claim the healing that was God's will for their lives as reflected in their deepest spiritual desires. Jesus asked questions of persons in need of wholeness, such as "What do you want me to do for you?" Or "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus recognized that wholeness cannot be coerced, but must be accepted and embraced, consciously or unconsciously, at the right time and place.

We are fortunate that Jesus did *not* practice, teach, or recommend only *one* method of healing. Jesus' many-faceted style of healing gives us the freedom to seek healing and wholeness by whatever means are appropriate, convenient, and requested by the person in need. As we stated before, wherever there is healing and truth, God is its ultimate source. God, whose creativity and love is manifest in every cell of our bodies and in every loving thought, can use any method to bring wholeness to ourselves or another. Accordingly, followers of Jesus' way of healing can employ surgery, medication, and chemotherapy, but they can also utilize acupuncture, chiropractic, massage, therapeutic touch, and Reiki.

Still we can gain much by reflecting on the gospel accounts of Jesus' healing, even though we recognize that the gospels only give a glimpse of the fullness of Jesus' ministry of wholeness and love. As John's gospel notes, "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose the world itself could not contain all the books that would be written" (John 21:25). In meditating on Jesus' healing ministry, we find the inspiration to become vehicles of divine healing in the 21st century.

Wise words from the Epperly's.

I resonate with their thoughts and it all fits in with today's readings. In his letter to the people at Corinth, Paul spells it out. The gospel is offered free of charge, he says, to one and all. "I have become all things to all people." he says. In other words, I am for them what they need me to be so they can know the presence of God's love for them. This sounds similar to what we just heard about Jesus.

The Isaiah reading that were our words of wisdom today is another way of saying that God is in and part of everything good. I love the way it begins "Did you not know? Have you not heard?" These are statements of excitement just like we might use when passing along some particularly good or exciting news. And it *is* exciting news to know that God/Spirit is with us always, that the Holy Presence is our source of strength and inspiration, that we are never alone in our struggles. It is wonderful news and should fill us with joy and enthusiasm and

gratitude.

The reading from Mark's gospel is, of course, one of the many stories in the gospels of Jesus ministering to and healing all who were brought to him. He turned no one away. He also never put conditions on someone being given what they needed. He never said I will do such and such for you if you will do certain things or believe certain things - there were no strings attached to the love he offered. He assessed the deepest need, one could say spiritual need, of the one in front of him and acted accordingly.

Another thing to note about many of the healing stories of Jesus is that he also ministered to himself. He would take himself off to a quiet place to pray. The reading from Mark tells us "Rising early the next morning, Jesus went off to a lonely place in the desert and prayed there." And when his followers found him and told him how everyone was looking for him he did not succumb to the temptation of fame and attention that could have been his but simply said it was time to move on and take the touch of love to other places. And that, to me, is what he was all about - the touch of love. The touch of love that was meant for all and everyone with no strings attached. Jesus confounds us on many levels. He confounds because he teaches responding with love to every situation and every person. Often a difficult thing for us to do.

He confounds us because he did not conform to his culture's expectations no matter where he was or who was challenging him. He moves from sacred space to the domestic sphere to public forums. He affirms that his 'religion' is one that is not only beyond institutional belief systems but is meant for personal practice. He frees people by "casting out" whatever unhealthy patterns of being or unbalanced bodily system is binding them. His was a touch of love.

Last week was marked as Mental Health Week in our country, a week meant to draw attention to the needs of those suffering with mental health issues. Most of us have heard of the "Let's Talk" campaign started by Bell Canada a few years ago. It is a campaign whose goal is to get people talking about mental illness and it appears to be working. Mental illness has for so long been a subject that no one wanted to talk about, let alone admit to suffering from themselves. Partly because it wasn't very well understood and partly because of the stigma attached to it. So many people have suffered in silence, feeling alone. And there is no need for that. What more effective way to share the touch of love can there be than to offer the gift of a listening ear.

During this very unusual time of a global pandemic it is more urgent than ever that we listen to each other. Humans are social beings and the continued restrictions that keep us physically isolated from one another are wreaking havoc on the mental health of many individuals. Drug and alcohol abuse is up along with suicide rates and domestic abuse. You, yourself may be struggling or you may know someone close to you who is. If so reach out and connect with someone, anyone who can offer a sympathetic ear and maybe a helping hand.

Thank God for all the technology that we have available to us. What would we do without email and video calls and the many social media platforms that enable to at least see people, not to mention the good old telephone to hear another's voice? Things would be so much harder, I think, without these aids.

But all that doesn't take away the fact that we cannot be together to feel the physical touch of our family, our friends, our loved ones through hugs and handshakes. And so much love can be communicated by a gentle touch at the right time. All we can do right now is save up all our hugs and handshakes until we can be together again. In the mean time don't forget to add prayer to your phone calls, e-mails and other electronic ways of connecting. Sending love and good vibes and life force energy as our Reiki masters called it, is another touch of love that is easy and which can be oh so helpful even from a distance.

Jesus healed with the touch of love and the touch of love is ours to share, too, in so many ways.

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, Source of Love which created us as one, we come knowing there is nothing in all the world that can separate us from your love. We may refuse to acknowledge your love. We may block the flow of your love with our selfish desires. We may not feel your love through our pain and despair but your love is there nevertheless. You are there, waiting in our hearts, with so much love to give. Open us to it. Help us to still the chatter of our mind that keeps us from hearing the voice of love within.

We pray today for all those who need to feel the touch of love in their lives - the hungry who need to feel the love of a belly filled with good food; the homeless who need to know the love of a space of their own; the sick who need to feel the love of a healing hand; the confused who need to feel the love of guidance; the oppressed who need to feel the love of liberation; the abused who need to feel the love of escape. So many needs and places that are starving for the touch of love, Holy Presence.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters of McIntosh-Mildmay Pastoral Charge and for all those who work on our behalf to bring your love to other parts of our country and the world. And we pray for ourselves, because we so need to feel loved, too. Hear us now, as in a time of silence we offer the prayers of our hearts... (silence)...

We may know in our heads that your love encompasses all and is offered to all but sometimes it is hard to get that message to the deepest places within us where we can absorb it and know in our very beings that we are yours and you will never desert us. You are infinite love and we are the recipients of that love. May we take this knowledge to heart.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of one who came in love, taught love and lived love unto death, Jesus the Christ, and the one 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 ourselves and our resources to the care of community in this place and around the world. As St. Paul taught - may what we give fill whatever is needed for whomever needs it. May our gifts and offerings carry with them the loving touch of our hearts. Amen.

Hymn: We are Pilgrims (The Servant Song) (sung) VU 595

- 1 We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

- 2 Sister, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

- 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

- 4 I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

- 5 When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

My God who calls you into stillness sustain you.
May Jesus who shows you a way of balance and peace travel with you.
May the Spirit give you rest, and refresh you for the journey.
Go in peace knowing you never go alone. Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week:

Holy One, who makes all things possible, lift us when we are weary, be our strength and fill us with hope as we seek to serve you and our neighbour each day. Amen.