



*Celebrating
175 Years*



March 7, 2021

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Melville United Church
March 7, 2021
Third Sunday of Lent

Presiding today - Rev. Marion Loree

Welcome

My name is Marion Loree and I am the minister here at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario. We gather in community today - March 7, 2021 virtually. Because of Covid-19 restrictions in our area there are no worshipers here with me. We are in code red right now but as restrictions are lifted gradually we will keep you informed about when in-person worship might resume. Until then, on-line services will continue to be our normal mode of operation with printed copies being distributed to those without internet access.

So today is the third Sunday of Lent. Lent, of course is the few weeks leading up to Easter. During this time we focus on the activities and teachings of Jesus as he journeyed toward the city of Jerusalem where he would end up being executed on a cross. It is believed he was resurrected in some form and appeared to some of his followers three days later and that event is what we known as Easter.

I invite you to join us now for a time of worship and sharing. Today our focus is on the Ten Commandments and what they mean for us in today's world. I hope you will join us.

Announcements:

Acknowledgment:

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: 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: (based on Psalm 19)

The heavens are telling the presence of God,
we gather to acknowledge God's handiwork.
God's laws are perfect.
God's decrees are sure.
God's precepts are right.
God's commandments are clear.
God's ordinances are true.
God's awesomeness is pure.
Come, Let us worship our amazing God together.

Hymn: When Long Before Time VU 248 (vs 1-5)

- 1 When long before time and the worlds were begun,
when there was no earth and no sky and no sun,
and all was deep silence and night reigned supreme,
and even our Maker had only a dream...
- 2 ...the silence was broken when God sang the Song,
and light pierced the darkness and rhythm began,
and with its first birth-cries creation was born,
and creaturely voices sang praise to the morn.
- 3 The sounds of the creatures were one with their God's,
their harmonies sweet and befitting the Word;
the Singer was pleased as the earth sang the Song,
the choir of the creatures re-echoed it long.
- 4 Though, down through the ages, the Song disappeared,
its harmonies broken and almost unheard,
the Singer comes to us to sing it again,
our God-Is-with-Us in the world now as then.
- 5 The Light has returned as it came once before,
the Song of our God is our own song once more;
so let us all sing with one heart and one voice
the Song of the Singer in whom we rejoice.

Words of Wisdom: Psalm 19:1-6 (Everyday Psalms - James Taylor, pg 24)

Scientific study

“The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the firmament showeth his handiwork...”

The whole earth is God’s textbook.

From the edges of the atmosphere
to the core of the planet,
the wonders of the world expand our understanding.

Rocks have no words, nor do cells have syllables,
yet their message can be read anywhere.

Even the fiery stars, racing through space,
yield their secrets to those whose minds
are open to the mysteries of God’s universe.

Opening Prayer:

Wise and loving God, strengthen our willingness to listen to your words of wisdom and live by them. Strengthen our faith to live as children blessed by your promise of new life. In this time of worship may we be open to your presence and and know our life begins with you. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Creator God, the natural world declares your wondrous presence and the harmony of your natural laws. The world now is telling of the destruction of our ways. Our laws are imperfect, mis-guided and self-serving. Our intentions may be pure but we are often more foolish than wise, more harmful than helpful.

Help us to pay attention to the moans of creation and the cries of our neighbours, and motivate us to change our ways. Amen.

Words of Assurance: (based on 1 Corinthians 1:25)

Take heart for God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.
We are acceptable, accepted, and free to begin again.
Free to run our course with joy.
Thanks be to God!

Ministry of Music: Toccata by Johann Ernst Eberlin**Scripture:** Exodus 20:1-17 (*The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition*)

(The ten commandments)

Then God spoke all these words, and said, "I am YHWH who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"Do not worship any gods except me!

"Do not make for yourselves any carved image or likeness of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth, and do not bow down to them or serve them! For I, YHWH, am a jealous God, and for the parents' fault I punish the children, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of those who turn from me; but I show kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love me and heed my commandments.

"Do not utter the Name of YHWH to misuse it, for YHWH will not acquit anyone who utters God's Name to misuse it!

"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy! For six days you will labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath for YHWH. Do no work on that day, neither you nor your daughter nor your son, nor your workers - women or men - nor your animals, nor the foreigner who lives among you. For in the six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that they hold, but rested on the seventh day; this is why YHWH has blessed the Sabbath day and made it sacred.

"Honour your mother and your father, so that you may have a long life in the land that YHWH has given to you!

"No murdering!

"No adultery!

"No stealing!

"No giving false testimony against your neighbour!

"No desiring your neighbour's house! No desiring your neighbour's spouse, or worker - female or male - or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour!"

Scripture: Psalm 19 (*New Revised Standard Version*)

(The heavens declare the glory of God)

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun,

5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

7 The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of God are sure, making wise the simple;

8 the precepts of God are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of God is clear, enlightening the eyes;

9 the fear of God is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of God are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my redeemer.

Message: God's Sweet Law

Psalm 19 Exodus 20:1-17

Do you, or do you know anyone, who loves rules? Do you know anyone who loves rules so much that it gives them joy? Do you know anyone who derives their greatest happiness simply by following rules?

Or, do you know of any rules which you follow that fill your life with joy? A set of laws that, when followed or obeyed, can give you a feeling of peace and serenity and joy? Rules that, if you don't follow them make you miserable?

Sounds strange doesn't it? How can laws or rules bring joy to anyone? Laws and rules can make a difference to our living and they do, every day. Just think how chaotic life would be if there were no rules or laws to order our society. Just think what traffic would be like with no laws to organize the flow of vehicles on our roads and highways. Just think what living with millions of other people would be like with no laws to regulate how we conduct ourselves in public places or in respecting other people's property.

These kinds of laws or rules are some of the written laws with which we are familiar but there are also many unwritten rules which affect our lives each day. Rules of behaviour, for instance. We learn from our parents and people all around us how to behave in all of life's situations - from how to hold a spoon to how to behave in public to how to talk to people.

Rules can be a wonderful thing or they can be the bane of our existence - just try to

decipher all the rules around filling out your annual income tax return, for example.

Anyway, what I am getting at is that rules or laws govern our everyday lives as citizens of this community, this country and this world. Rules contribute order to our lives. Rules help us to live in reasonable harmony with our neighbours. The purpose of rules is to help us in our day-to-day living. They do so by giving us a structure or framework which everyone can follow and in this way life takes on a predictable nature. We know what to do next in a given situation and we also know what the person next to us will, or should, do in that same situation. Rules or laws not only govern our lives but they make life more livable for all of us.

God has a set of rules, too. We heard some of them this morning. That very famous set of laws that we call the Ten Commandments are known as God's rules for living. And many of the laws of the land are based on some of these. You shall not kill, steal, lie, etc. These laws have been written into the laws of our land and also into the laws of most places in the world.

The Psalm that I just read also talks of laws. Psalm 19 is one of a group of psalms known as "Torah psalms," songs in praise of God, the creator and lawgiver. The broader concept of the Jewish Torah (which literally means teaching or guidance) includes the whole content of God's revelation. Through the stories of Israel's ancestors in the faith and the writing of prophets and historians, God's nature and purposes are made known in Torah.

And it is through Torah that Israel learns how to live into the covenant relationship with God. The term 'Law' in this sense does not mean adhering to a set of principles but, rather, the living of life in an ongoing relationship. That is what is suggested by the term "teaching". Psalm 19 uses several terms for the Law - decrees, precepts, commandments, ordinances - to remind us that the Law is rich and varied. But it is not only in Torah, or Law that God is revealed.

Psalm 19 is made up of three distinct parts. It starts, in verses 1-6, with a proclamation of the glory of God by the testimony of the skies and the sun. It begins with a riddle - what tells of God's glory without saying a word?

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bride and groom from their wedding canopy, and like a strong person runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

The creation shows us who God is and what God wants us to be. The sun is not a god, as some religions of that day believed, but the sun points to God the creator. The order of creation is unchanging - the sun rises and sets reliably each day. The creation does speak to us. The heavens are telling, the firmament (the sky) proclaims. It tells us that God's law is certain and everlasting.

It tells us that just as there is nothing hidden from the sun, so the law illuminates and reveals. The law, God's law, is life-giving. One very revealing phrase in there is "their voice is not heard". Given the state of the environment today this statement couldn't be more true. It appears that humankind has definitely not heard the voice of creation singing God's praises.

The next verses tell us more about God's law. Listen again to verses 7-11

The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of God are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of God are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of God is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of God is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of God are

true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

The Psalmist is not thinking here of wealth and possessions, nor a life free from trouble. It is more a description of how, when a person honours God's law, he or she deepens and strengthens their relationship with God, who gives life and wholeness.

The concluding section gives personal testimony to relationship with God and a prayer for faithfulness.

...clear me from hidden faults...Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,...

When we fall short in honouring God's law, the psalmist reminds us to pray for God's forgiveness because God is our "rock" and "redeemer." The word redeemer is a kinship word - God is in close relationship with us and can help us work through the difficult circumstances that are the consequences of not following God's ways. Thus we are redeemed.

So what do these three sections have in common? What is this Psalm telling us? It is telling us that God/Spirit is revealed in multifaceted ways, and these three (creation, the Law, and our personal lives) are all ways in which God is revealed.

The wonderful created order that we see around us in the natural world is the body of God the Creator and contains the first laws ever and we are an integral part of it. Even scientists are discovering the amazing, intricate order that exists within even the smallest particles of matter. We are beginning to realize how inter-connected everything is. We are beginning to realize what the Psalmist knew thousands of years ago - that God's laws are sure and steady and unchanging and all we have to do is open our eyes and look around us. The creation knows this and we need to start listening.

The Ten Commandments are written laws that help us to live in harmony with each other. Each of them is based on love and if we follow them religiously we cannot help but live a good life. But beware - it is love that is most important - not the rules or laws themselves. Jesus repeatedly said this in his teaching. The laws are made for people not people for the laws. We must always keep in mind their purpose and their foundation in love.

And our personal lives are also a testament to God's presence. Open your heart and mind to the power of the Source of all life. Accept that you are a beloved child of the universe and that you are loved beyond measure by your Creator, the Source of Love, no matter what. Once that law of love is written on our hearts we do realize how sweet it is. We realize that the joy and peace that comes with knowing this IS worth more than the finest gold and the taste of it IS sweeter than honey. And we can't help but want to share it.

Open yourself to the natural world, study God's words of law as written in scripture and many other sacred books of the world, and live connected to Spirit, then you, too, will know the joy of God's sweet law.

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.

Silent Preparation:**Prayers:** (beginning with Psalm 19 - Psalms for Praying, Nan C. Merrill, pg 29-31)

The heavens declare the glory of the Creator;
 the firmament proclaims the handiwork of Love.

Day to day speech pours forth
 and night to night knowledge is revealed.

There is no speech, nor are there words;
 their voice is not heard;
 yet does their music resound through all the earth,
 and their words echo to the ends of the world.

In them a tent for the sun is set,
 which is like a bride and groom on their wedding night
 as they sing love's song and celebrate the dance of life.
 Its rising is in eternity, and its circuit to infinity;
 Nothing is hidden from the sunlight.

The law of Love is perfect, reviving the soul;
 The testimony of Love is sure, making wise the simple;
 The precepts of Love are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The authority of Love is pure, enlightening the eyes;
 The spirit of Love is glorious, enduring forever;
 The rites of Love are true, awakening compassion.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and dripping of the honeycomb,
 Moreover, by them are the loving guided;
 in keeping them there is great reward.
 But who can discern their own weaknesses?
 Cleanse me, O Love, from all my hidden faults.
 Keep me from boldly acting in error;
 let my fears and illusions not have dominion over me!
 Then shall I become a beneficial presence,
 freely and fully surrendered to your Love.

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of Georgian Shores 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 to you all the things we find there that we share with no other. Hear the prayers of our hearts.... (silence)...

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of all of our hearts find favour in your Heart, O Beloved, our strength and our joy!

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of the one who came in love to teach us how to love one another, our brother, Jesus the Christ, and 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 web-site*
<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

The ten commandments are given to us as precious gifts, just as worship, laughter, birds in flight, tears, music, and companionship are given to us. These gifts are not the goal, these gifts are tools that help us to draw closer to what we are truly seeking - true relationship with God and with each other.

Offering Prayer:

Giving God, bless our gifts and offerings and bless us, the givers. May our giving change us and may our givings help to change the world. Amen

Hymn: God Who Gives to Life Its Goodness VU 260

- 1 God who gives to life its goodness,
 God creator of all joy,
 God who gives to us our freedom,
 God who blesses tool and toy:
 teach us now to laugh and praise you,
 deep within your praises sing,
 till the whole creation dances
 for the goodness of its King.

- 2 God who fills the earth with beauty,
 God who binds each friend to friend,

God who names us co-creators
God who wills that chaos end:
grant us now creative spirits,
minds responsive to your mind,
hearts and wills your rule extending
all our acts by Love refined.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

Go into the world ready to be kind when others are unkind.
To be passionate when others are complacent.
And to speak up for justice when others are silent.
Be fearless,
for the grace of God, the love of Christ,
and the abiding friendship of the Holy Spirit
is with you now and always.
Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week:

Holy Wisdom, you have given us guidelines of how to live harmoniously together. Help us to follow your laws of love, to praise you more faithfully and live more justly. Lead us into deeper relationship with you. Amen.