



April 11, 2021

Melville United Church
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Melville United Church
Sunday, April 11, 2021
Easter 2

** Congregation please stand as you are able.*

Bold print invites congregational response.

Presiding today: Ruth Cooke

Welcome & Announcements

Sharing the Light

Prelude/Centering Time

Call to Worship:

We are called to walk from the darkened hill
to the light-filled empty tomb.

We come seeking surprise and wonder
in the dawning light of this Easter season.

Let us greet the Risen Christ

who is here among us.

Amen and Amen!

Opening Prayer:

God, alive and among us this day, to you no door is closed, to you no heart is locked; draw us
beyond our doubts and fears, till we see the risen Christ and say in our hearts, "We believe."

Amen.

***Hymn: "Now the Green Blade Rises"**

VU 186

- 1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
love lives again, that with the dead has been:
love is come again, like wheat arising green.

- 2 In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain,
thinking that he would never wake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen;
love is come again, like wheat arising green.

- 3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for three days in the grave had lain;
raised from the dead, my living Lord is seen;
love is come again, like wheat arising green.

- 4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been;
love is come again, like wheat arising green.

Prayer of Confession:

We doubt, God. We lock our doors and our hearts in fear, refusing to share lest we be ridiculed or worse. We keep the Good News of your resurrection to ourselves, and fail to show by our living that you are alive. Help us believe. Help us live that belief with joy and generosity...

(We reflect silently on those places in our lives where we need God's light)

Words of Assurance:

The God who greeted the women at the tomb, the God who showed Thomas what he needed to believe, the God who was with Peter in his preaching and imprisonment—that God is around us and within us each hour of every day, upholding us, prodding us on to better lives, and forgiving us when we fall short.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

New Testament Reading: Acts 4:32-45 (NRSV)

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Gospel Reading: John 20:19-31 (NRSV)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to

him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Meditation: “Easter for Everyone”

Would you pray with me and for me please...

One of the symbols that we often use in children’s sermons for Easter is that of a butterfly.

Many of us have read the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle to our children and grandchildren. If you haven’t already done so, search out a copy or watch it on YouTube. It’s kind of cute, although it’s inaccurate in the sense that caterpillars don’t eat fruit, or sausages, or ice cream, or almost all of the things that the Very Hungry Caterpillar ate.

But after eating a lot, the caterpillar does form a cocoon, and turns into a butterfly. And that part is accurate, as far as it goes.

But what’s left out of the story, and out of most children’s science lessons, is what happens inside the cocoon.

It does not, as I once imagined, transform bit by bit from a caterpillar to a butterfly, legs dissolving one by one until there are only four, the fat body transforming bit by bit into a much narrower body with four beautiful wings.

No. After caterpillars form the cocoon or chrysalis, the body of the caterpillar actually dissolves itself, becoming “caterpillar soup.” Only a few small groups of organized cells remain. These cell groups, called “imagining cells” have existed for the whole of the caterpillar’s life, but have remained dormant until the pupae stage. There are groups for the eyes, wings, legs, body—every part of the mature butterfly. These small groups of cells begin to divide and grow, using the soup of the former caterpillar as nourishment. It’s actually as if a different insect is now growing, using the former body as fuel for its growth.

That, to me, sums up the difference between change and transformation. Change happens incrementally. Change uses the existing form as a base, and at the end of the process, the existing form is still there, sometimes better for the change, sometimes worse, but still recognizable.

Transformation creates an entirely different organism.

We see this in the scriptures we read today. In the days following the Resurrection, the disciples are hiding in fear. They’re debating which course to follow. They doubt. They quarrel.

A few weeks or months later, we have the reading from Acts. The believers are no longer doubting. They're no longer quarreling. They share everything they have, and no one lacks for anything, and no one has too much.

It all seems a bit too good to be true, doesn't it? I mean, did they really sell their houses? What happened when the money ran out? And how could this apply to us today?

What happened in the Christian community in those first few days and weeks post Resurrection was transformation. Up until then, the disciples and Jesus had been working towards change. The basic laws were sound, but the ways in which Judaism in the first century had come to be expressed had left out a lot of people.

The poor. The sick. The widow and the orphan. The very young and the very old. Those with mental or physical health issues. The alien. Samaritans and Gentiles.

The other.

It kind of sounds a lot like some churches today, doesn't it?

Then Jesus rises from the dead and breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples. And what was before begins to dissolve, turning to soup to nourish the few cells that will then grow and become the early Christian church.

We can see this later on in Acts, where some of the basics of Jewish culture—the dietary laws, the temple rituals, circumcision—these fall away and eventually disappear, leaving the “imagining cells” that were present from the beginning. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and your neighbour as yourself.

That led the early Christians to live a lifestyle that was radically different from those in the surrounding culture of the time.

Sharing everything you have, not just the excess. Not for glory or earthly recognition, or even the inner glow we get from helping someone less fortunate than ourselves, but because earthly possessions are here to sustain us, not the other way around, and if we have more than we need, and someone else does not have enough, that is something to be ashamed of.

A radical transformation in thought, leading to an entirely different type of community.

Over time, of course, things decay. The butterfly is also one of the most fragile and ephemeral of nature's creatures. Their lives are short and fraught with peril.

But an egg is laid, another caterpillar is born, and within the new caterpillar is held the imagining cells of yet another butterfly.

And so we come to 2021.

We've had quite a nasty shock in the last year and a half. We thought modern medicine and our social and economic systems were up to the challenge of a worldwide pandemic.

139 million cases, 2.9 million deaths, and at least three variants later, and we have learned the truth. Our social and economic and health systems are not only not up to the challenge, but they leave out the very people who were left out in Jesus' time.

The poor. The sick. The very young and the very old. Those with mental or physical health issues. People of colour, indigenous peoples, undocumented migrants.

The other.

In the last year and a half, the rich have gotten a lot richer, and the poor and even the middle classes have suffered. Big business is booming, small business are going broke at record rates. Workers in Ontario still don't have mandatory paid sick days, despite skyrocketing cases in the kinds of workplaces least likely to have company benefits in place.

It's time for radical transformation, not incremental change.

We need to get rid of a societal mindset that values private property over an individual's right to simply exist. We need to stop making heroes of the rich and famous, and start seeing the everyday heroes who love and care for others every day.

We need, as a society, to stop counting the worth of people by their so-called contributions to society, and see the image of the divine in each and every person, whether they look like us and act in ways we deem appropriate or not.

We need to reimagine our legal system so that reconciliation of transgressors with the community, and not punishment, becomes the goal.

Churchwise, we need to take a look at our attachment to our properties and buildings, and ask ourselves who could benefit if we sold or redeveloped the property?

This last is actually happening in the United Church in some places. One of the churches in Guelph is being asked to consider a plan where the property would be redeveloped to include affordable housing, and the worship space would be made smaller to better reflect the actual size of the community and allow for space for other purposes.

True transformation requires that we actually die to what we were and become something entirely new. It's a scary, difficult process.

Just ask Jesus, the man who died, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

The Resurrection is the model of transformation for Christians and Christian communities everywhere.

We have the imaginings for our new communities and societies embedded within the cells of our current communities and societies. They are the same as they have always been—love for God, and love for one another. The rest is just fuel for their growth.

Amen.

***Hymn: "Joy Comes with the Dawn" VU 166**

Joy comes with the dawn;
 joy comes with the morning sun;
 joy springs from the tomb
 and scatters the night with her song,
 joy comes with the dawn.

1 Weeping may come;
 weeping may come in the night,
 when dark shadows cloud our sight. R

2 Sorrow will turn,
 sorrow will turn into song,
 and God's laughter make us strong. R

3 We will rejoice,
 we will rejoice, and give praise,
 to the One who brings us grace. R

Prayers of the People:

Merciful and loving God, we come into your presence today hoping in some way to touch you, to see for ourselves the truth of your resurrection. Gather up our lingering fears and confusion, meet our doubts with compassion and understanding. Open our eyes to your love and grace surrounding us. Open our ears to hear you calling us to new challenges. Open our imaginations to new possibilities. Come anew to all who have been unable to believe; come anew to all who have known you but turned away from you.

Help us to experience you standing in our midst, saying, "Peace, peace." May our broken world and our broken lives be transformed in your image. We offer woundedness and turn to you for healing and newness of life, for you, O God, are our strength, our hope, and our salvation. We pray this in the name of the one who taught us when we pray to say...

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.

***Hymn: "Come, We That Love" VU 714**

- 1 Come, we that love the Lord,
 and let our joys be known,
 join in a song with sweet accord,
 join in a song with sweet accord
 and thus surround the throne,
 and thus surround the throne.
 We're marching to Zion,
 beautiful, beautiful Zion;
 we're marching upward to Zion,
 the beautiful city of God.
- 2 Let those refuse to sing
 who never knew our God;
 but children of the heavenly King,
 but children of the heavenly King
 may speak their joys abroad,
 may speak their joys abroad. R
- 3 The hill of Zion yields
 a thousand sacred sweets
 before we reach the heavenly fields,
 before we reach the heavenly fields
 or walk the golden streets,
 or walk the golden streets. R
- 4 Then let our songs abound,
 and every tear be dry;
 we're marching through Emmanuel's ground,
 we're marching through Emmanuel's ground
 to fairer worlds on high,
 to fairer worlds on high. R

Blessing/Sending Forth:

God of Easter, send us forth to live the power of resurrection, that we and all creation might be one with the living Christ;
 To who with you and the Spirit, one holy God, be honour and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Parting Song "Don't Be Afraid" MV 90*Postlude**