



*Celebrating
175 Years*



April 4, 2021

Melville United Church
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Melville United Church
April 4, 2021
Easter Sunday

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 - April 4, 2021. We were going to be in person but Covid-19 restrictions have changed again so we are once again limiting worship to on-line only - no in-person worship until further notice.

So today is Easter Sunday. The day on our church calendar when we celebrate the Risen Christ.

So I invite you to join us now for this time of worship. Perhaps in our sharing you will glean something that might help you in your spiritual journey.

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: *(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 into 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:

She stood at the empty tomb dumbfounded.

Is it possible that: Christ is risen?

They heard it from Mary later that morning,

but was it really true that: Christ is risen?

We stand beside the empty tombs of our broken dreams,

our shattered plans, and our frayed hopes,

and we wonder if it can really happen again that: Christ is risen.

Yes, it is not only possible, it is true:

Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Come, let us worship together the God of new life.

Hymn: Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (spoken) (vs 1,2,4) VU 157

- 1 Jesus Christ is risen today, hallelujah!
our triumphant holy day, hallelujah!
who did once, upon the cross, hallelujah!
suffer to redeem our loss. Hallelujah!
- 2 Hymns of praise then let us sing hallelujah!
unto Christ, our heavenly King, hallelujah!
who endured the cross and grave, hallelujah!
sinners to redeem and save. Hallelujah!
- 4 Sing we to our God above, hallelujah!
praise eternal as God's love; hallelujah!
praise our God, ye heavenly host, hallelujah!
praise the Son and Holy Ghost. Hallelujah!

Words of Wisdom: Symbol -David Morton

My faith is all a doubtful thing,
Wove on a doubtful loom -
until there comes, each showery spring,
a cheery tree in bloom.

And Christ who died upon the tree
That death had stricken bare,
Comes beautifully back to me,
In blossoms, everywhere.

Opening Prayer:

God of amazing grace, on this joyful Easter morning we come to be given new life.

Some of us need new life in our aching bodies;
some of us need new life in our skeptical minds;
some of us need new life in our fearful hearts.

Renew us; resurrect us, O God, as Jesus was resurrected.

We want to be an Easter people with an Alleluia for our song. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Light pierces the shadows, the tomb is empty,
and Christ is alive and among us.

A new beginning is taking shape.

The shadows of pain, violence,
injustice, and death are being replaced.

Too often, God, we stand silent
in the face of great change.

We are afraid to believe it is possible or true.

We prefer to cling to our pain
because we understand it.

We don't understand resurrection.

Forgive our unbelief and stand beside us
as we learn to shout:

Christ is alive! Alleluia! Amen.

Words of Assurance:

God is not afraid of celebration or new beginnings.
 And we are offered new beginnings everyday.
 New beginnings of forgiveness, joy, grace, new life.
 Accept God's gifts and live as freed people.
 Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Ministry of Music: Crown Him with Many Crowns -organ solo

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 (James Taylor, Everyday Psalms pg 147)
 (The growth of Confidence)

God, you are good to us;
 your love bursts the bounds of time.
 You renew our confidence in you.
 With you beside us, we can face anything.
 We have no fears when you stand among us.
 A whisper races through your opponents' thoughts:
 "God has chosen a cause; no one can conquer God."

Winning or losing, living or dying, I want to be with God;
 I want to celebrate God's goodness to me.
 God has tested me. I have been through hell.
 But God never abandoned me.
 Now I have the confidence to go anywhere,
 to try anything.
 Whatever it takes, I know I'm worth it.

Once, I had no confidence in myself,
 and I had no confidence in God.
 I quivered with insecurities;
 I was a raw wound, flinching from everything.
 Now the fluff that drifted in the wind
 has become a mighty cottonwood,
 reaching high towards your smile.
 Only you could do this.
 A new day has dawned for me, a new life has begun.
 Is it any wonder that I'm happy?

Scripture: John 20:1-18 (Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Edition)
 (The resurrected Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene)

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance, so she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple - the one Jesus loved - and told them, "The Rabbi has been taken from the tomb! We don't know where they have put Jesus!"

At that, Peter and the other disciple started out toward the tomb. They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He didn't enter, but bent down to peer in and saw the linen wrappings lying on the ground. Then Simon Peter arrived and entered the tomb. He observed the linen wrappings on the ground, and saw

the piece of cloth that had covered Jesus' head lying not with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed. As yet, they didn't understand the scripture that Jesus was to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.

Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus' body had lain.

They asked her, "Why are you weeping?"

She answered them, "Because they have taken away my Rabbi, and I don't know where they have put the body."

No sooner had she said this than she turned around and caught sight of Jesus standing there, but she didn't know it was Jesus. He asked her, "Why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?"

She supposed it was the gardener, so she said, "Please, if you're the one who carried Jesus away, tell me where you've laid the body and I will take it away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned to him and said, "Rabboni!" - which means "Teacher."

Jesus then said, "Don't hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to Abba God. Rather, go to the sisters and brothers and tell them, 'I'm ascending to my Abba and to your Abba, my God and your God!'"

Message: Resurrection Stories

John 20:1-18

Well here we are - Easter Sunday! Easter is the foundational story of our Christian faith. Without the resurrection story, some have said, our faith would be pointless. It is pivotal because up until the followers of Jesus experienced him in a new and different way the movement was destined to go the way that a good many others had, fading away into oblivion. But there was something different about this movement. There was something different about this man they called Jesus. There was something different in his teaching, in his healing, in his life and in his death.

As Christians the resurrection story is part of us. It is our story. It is, or should be, more important than the Christmas story. The Christmas story tells of the love which comes to us in the form of the baby Jesus. The Easter story tells us the meaning of that life. The Easter story tells that the love of God has no end - not even death can overcome or destroy the love that God has for us.

So the Easter story, the story of resurrection, is foundational for us. It is also the most difficult to understand. Now everyone knows, although some would argue the point, that this story is not about a resuscitated corpse. At least, it isn't for me. I cannot believe that a human body, once dead, can come alive again three days later. So that means that I have to find other ways of understanding it.

It is obvious to me that something happened to inspire those disciples and followers to take up where Jesus' had left off. But what it was exactly we don't know. Perhaps they had a spiritual experience of their beloved leader. I have had those kinds of experiences myself. Perhaps it was that they got to talking amongst themselves and realized that the importance of what Jesus taught them mustn't be lost. Perhaps it was a combination of both. Who

knows? All we do know for certain is that something monumental happened that set them on a course that still continues today. And it had to be monumental because in those days to continue to preach the radical message that Jesus did meant persecution and possibly death just like it had for Jesus.

For me the important thing is to realize the deeper meaning of resurrection - that out of death comes life; that even when we think the worst has happened and that the end has come, there can still be life. In fact, it is said that without death nothing new can be born. We see that lived all around us everyday in the world of nature. And, I would dare to say, we see it happen in and throughout our lives all the time. We just have to learn to recognize it.

This first story is part of the United Church's Mission & Service's recent appeal. This story demonstrates how easy it is for each of us to be part of someone else's resurrection story.

When he was 12 years old, Jesse had a traumatic brain injury. His mother took care of him until she died of cancer three years ago. Without his mom, Jesse's life spiraled out of control. Two years ago, he survived a painfully cold winter sleeping in a storage unit. Then, he reached out to Stella's Circle, a Mission & Service partner, for help. Now Jesse is completing a greenhouse technician college program and leads a new social enterprise that grows produce for sale.

This next story was shared by former Moderator of the United Church, Gary Paterson on a blog a few years ago. It is entitled "A Resurrection Story" and it talks about a situation that is difficult for many of us to understand or accept. As you listen, though, I want you to try to put your own opinions aside and just try to listen with an open heart and mind. He writes:

Like everyone, I have my blind spots and stereotypes—like, my assumption that small towns aren't all that accepting of differences, and if, just for instance, you're an LGBT [that's lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or trans-gendered in case anyone is wondering] person you should probably head for the big city as soon as you can. Well, let me tell you an Easter story that blows a hole in my stereotypes!

Up in northern Ontario—north as in you have to turn the map over to take a look at the other half of the province—way up there, was a young boy named Isaac. Except he didn't feel like a boy. Rather, he felt like a girl who was stuck inside the wrong body. His family knew Isaac was different, and they visited doctors, psychologists, and a whole bunch of experts. Now here, I guess, is the first miracle: nobody told Isaac he was crazy. Instead, they agreed with him—he was a girl in a boy's body. Which was going to make life very difficult, but it was his truth.

And here's the second miracle: Isaac's family said, with no reservations or conditions, "We love you!" And when Isaac slowly began to appear as Crystal, they said, "Welcome!"

Now, Crystal's family are United Church folk—members and worshipers at a little church in a small town in the north. Not the larger, liberal, affirming congregation in town but the little church that some think of as more conservative. Holy Week was fast approaching, and everyone was excited about Easter Sunday worship. Only trouble was,

when it came to church, it was always Isaac who had shown up. But this year was going to be different.

On Easter Sunday, as Crystal got ready for church, she put on fancy shoes, her hair band, and a beautiful dress. And off the family went. At Children's Time, when all the kids came forward, Crystal was part of the crowd. Well, not actually a crowd—remember, this was a small church, where everybody pretty much knew everyone else. People were staring, whispering, and surreptitiously pointing at the little girl sitting on the steps at the front of the church. The minister took a good long look at this new person who had arrived for worship, and she said, "Well, hello. You must be Crystal. You're very beautiful. I'm happy to meet you. Welcome to church!" And then she proceeded to tell the Easter story just like always.

And that was that. Except, of course, it wasn't. It's never that simple. There were phone calls—lots of them—and much upset in the congregation. So the minister called folk together and said, "We're surprised; we don't understand. Of course it feels strange. Isaac isn't Isaac anymore but now is Crystal. But she's a member of our church; this is where she belongs. She has trusted us enough to let us see who she really is. She needs us. This isn't easy for her. We have to help her. We're called to accept Crystal, to love her for the person she is, the person she is becoming, the person she was brave enough and trusting enough to share with us. We need to say, "Welcome to the church, Crystal."

And they did. I don't know all the details, and I'm sure it wasn't always easy. But I believe the church's welcome will be one of the reasons Crystal will thrive in adolescence, unlike so many other young transgendered people who try to kill themselves. Crystal will have known a place of acceptance in her family and her church.

Which sounds to me like resurrection occurred that Easter in a little church in a small northern Ontario town, where followers of Jesus discovered and proclaimed that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" for there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free...male or female; for all of [us]...are one in Christ Jesus. And here's how Easter keeps moving in our midst: Crystal's family writes:

We are also willing to communicate with others, if...the Moderator pass[es] contact information to us, we would be willing to talk, share resources, and be supportive.

Easter - resurrection - new life rises out of death. Are we brave enough to help it happen?

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 Planet B - Bruce Sanguin, If Darwin Prayed, pg 73)

O Holy One,
 we come this morning,
 like the women on the first Easter morning
 prepared to sweep up after death and
 to bring as much dignity as we can to the task:
 we come to the tomb to make peace with "reality" -
 a bruised and broken body,
 emblem of the world, our planet, our dreams,
 and the triumph of ignorance and violence.

Then word comes to us of an empty tomb,
 of strange men, brighter than the morning sun,
 announcing a new beginning,
 a plan B,
 a new creation - Planet B -
 and that you, O Easter God, are doing a new thing.
 We hear word that Christ has gone on ahead of us,
 and now beckons us
 from the rubble and ruin of our lives,
 to put away our oils and ointments,
 and to let the dead bury the dead.

We hear word of a future,
 a future that we are called to create with you.
 Christ is risen?
 Christ is risen, indeed!

Our prayers continue as we pray for our brothers and sisters of Walter's Falls UC and for all those who work to bring new life and love to other parts of our country and the world.

And we pray for ourselves, our friends, families and loved ones on this day that promises new life. Hear the prayers of our hearts... (silence)...

After a year of Covid-19 restrictions, Great Mystery, we are so ready for signs of new life. We look with eagerness at buds pushing up through the soil, we listen with delight to birds singing and revel in all the signs of spring budding around us. May we ever open to feeling the hope that is in the air.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of the risen One, Jesus the Christ, as we share together in the prayer he taught us, 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:

Ever-surprising God, the gathering of gifts reminds us of your eternal grace and creativity. May these resources be used wisely and abundantly to renew this world and its people. In the holy name of the risen Christ, Amen.

Hymn: Christ is Alive (spoken) (vs 1,2,3,5)

VU 158

- 1 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
 The cross stands empty to the sky.
 Let streets and homes with praises ring.
 Love, drowned in death, shall never die.
- 2 Christ is alive! No longer bound
 to distant years in Palestine,
 but saving, healing, here and now,
 and touching every place and time.
- 3 In every insult, rift, and war,
 where colour, scorn, or wealth divide,
 Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
 and lives, where even hope has died.

- 5 Christ is alive, and comes to bring good news to this and every age, till earth and sky and ocean ring with joy, with justice, love and praise.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

May the love of the risen Christ nourish and sustain you.
May the eternal light of the world renew and inspire you
to lives of care and compassion.

May you go forward and be the body of the risen Christ.

Christ is risen! Hallelujah!

He is Risen indeed! Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week:

Christ is risen! Hope is alive and moves among us! Help us to proclaim this, Holy One. May we remember that despair is not the end of your story. Help us to live as an Easter people, who believe that God's love has no restrictions. Amen.

