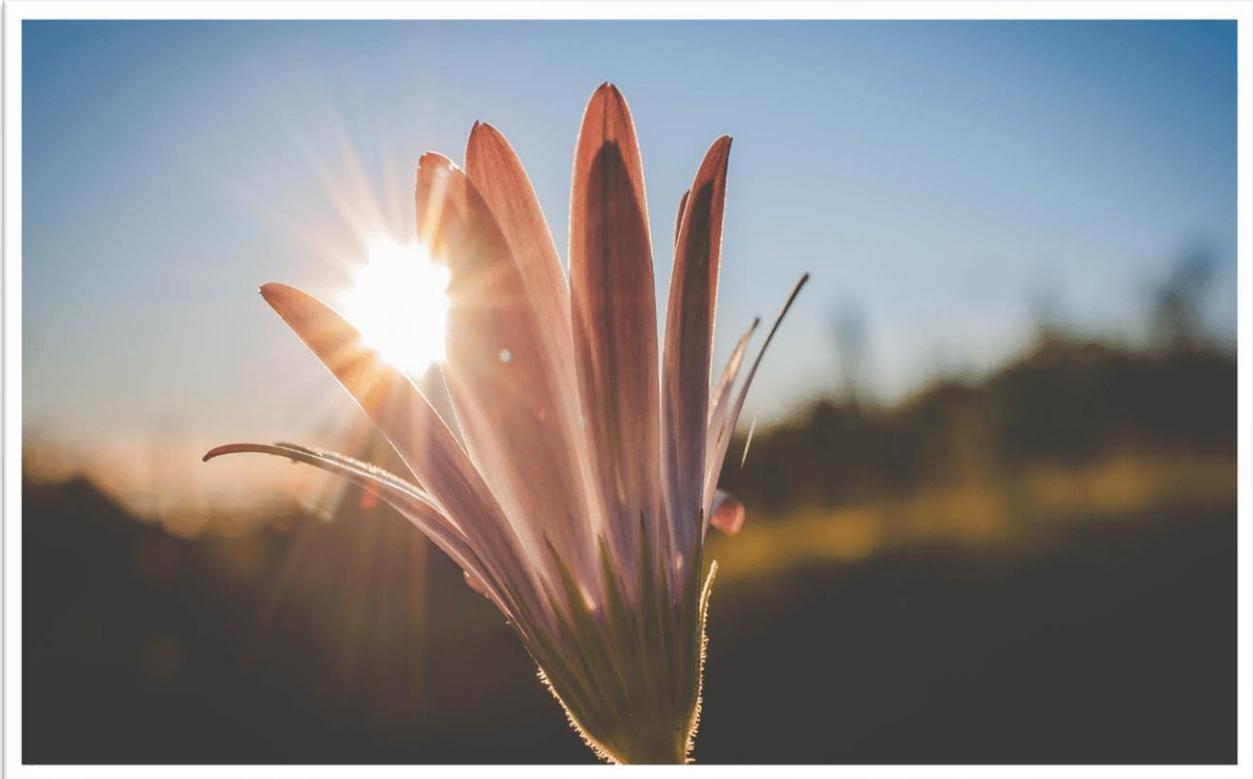




Celebrating
175 Years



May 16, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church

May 16, 2021

Presiding today Rev. Tom Watson

Words of Welcome and Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to morning worship at Melville United Church in downtown Fergus, Ontario.

My name is Tom Watson and I am pleased to be with you on this May 16 Sunday. A sincere thanks to Colleen Weber for her musical leadership during this service.

So, again, welcome to everyone and I hope you enjoy being part of this time.

Acknowledgment of Indigenous Territory

I will begin in the way Melville folks have become accustomed.

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

We now take a moment to centre ourselves for worship as I light the Christ candle.

I light a candle
in the name of the God who creates life,
in the name of the Christ Presence who loves life,
in the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.

Call to Worship:

Come, let us celebrate the wonders of life that surround us...

Celebrate the goodness that invades our lives each day...

Celebrate the beauty of nature now rekindling in springtime...

Celebrate that we have been called together as a community of faith...

Celebrate the presence of God among us and in us.

Hymn - Spirit of the Living God (VU 376)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, move among us all.

Make us one in heart and mind, make us one in love:

Humble, caring, selfless, sharing.

Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love.

Opening Prayer: Gracious, ever-present God, once again we gather as your people. As we do, help us to see all that surrounds us as holy, part of your wondrous creation. Help us to see that all of us are on the same human journey—called to live in faith, hope, and love. Be with us now in this time and place. We come in the spirit of the living Christ. Amen.

Ministry of Music - "The Joy of Spring" by Colin Mawby
(Colleen Weber on the organ)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-16

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.

Message: "Remember Who You Are!"

I am reminded, this morning, of the story about the minister who went to speak at other churches from time to time, and no matter where he went one member of his home congregation was always present. Sitting there in the crowd, listening attentively. He always wondered why this man followed him around like that.

One winter night he had to go about 75 miles away from home to preach. On the way there a dreadful snow storm came up. He wondered if he was going to make it, but he did. No one else from that congregation except the minister from that church. At the time of the service, only the two of them were present.

Just as they were thinking they might as well go home, the church door opened and in came that man from his home congregation. He, too, had made that 75 mile trip through a snow storm.

The minister said to him, "Look, I've been meaning to ask you why it is that no matter where I go to preach you are always there. Even on a terrible night like this, you drove all the way to get here."

The man replied, "Why, I wouldn't have missed this for all the world. My mother always told me that every minister has one good sermon, and I sure want to be around when you do yours!"

Well, we'll see. We'll see.

My sermon title for this morning is "Remember Who You Are!" So I invite you to think along with me about that. I'll also offer some words that I hope will encourage you to keep that thought in mind as you go about your daily life. Remember who you are.

Slightly paraphrasing, Jesus put it this way: You are the salt of the earth, so make sure that your salt keeps its flavour. You are the light of the world, so keep that light shining. Don't go hiding it under a bushel basket; let it shine for all to see.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit us a year ago in March, and knocked us for a loop, it's been easy, I think, to forget who we are. How do we keep our flavour as people of the church when we can't be together...when we can't go in the building and gather together as we did for years and years?

How do we keep from hiding our light under a bushel basket when we're under a stay-at-home order, and aren't supposed to go anywhere or do anything?

Well, no matter what our circumstances, we're still people of God, we're still people of the church...that's who we are...and as such we carry with us some things that define us, simply from being part of our faith tradition.

So who are we?

1. We're people with an identity.

Our identity defines us. Spells us out. It gives us special characteristics—akin, I suppose, to the role that genetics play in our make-up.

Now, if you ask any of my daughters, they may tell you that's not all that special. Because they have inherited some identifying characteristics from me that they'd rather not have—weak eyes, the funny Watson nose, ears that stick out too far, bad feet. And, over the years, I have had to keep reminding them, "Look, keep it in perspective! You have to take the bitter along with the sweet. In balance you really haven't done all that badly by me." And they reply, "Thank God for our mother!"

Our identity. Christian people. That's who we are.

I once heard a speech by the late Dr. Harrell Beck. He was, at the time, professor at Boston Theological College. Beck said that if he is ever reincarnated he wants to come back Italian—a hot-blooded, vivacious, life-loving Italian. And he would choose the name Giuseppe Verdi. In English, that's Joe Green. Take your pick! And then Beck told a story about Giuseppe Verdi—the first one, the real one.

Verdi was a great musician. In the city of Venice where he lived, the streets were full of organ-grinders. And whenever he would come upon an organ-grinder he would buy the organ, just to take it out of circulation. When Verdi died, they apparently found 300 organs in his basement.

One day he was out walking along, and he came upon this shabbily-dressed, dirty organ grinder. The monkey was dirty too, and all scabby. The tune was dreadful. Verdi stopped and said, "Come on! Pick it up! Pick it up!"

Two weeks later...back at the same spot. This time the organ grinder was all spiffed up. Suit and tie on. The monkey was all dressed up too. And what's more, the organ grinder was playing in tune. Then Verdi noticed his hat and there was a sign on it: "Master musician. Student of Verdi."

Sometimes it doesn't take much, you know. Just a word. An idea. Something that reminds us who we are. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. That's our identity.

2. We are people who are called to live creatively

Let me illustrate what living creatively means by a story.

A college student was taking a physics exam. One of the tasks on that exam was to describe how it is possible to determine the height of a tall building by using a barometer.

The student's answer was this: "Take the barometer to the top of the building, attach a long rope to the barometer and lower it to the street. Then bring it to the top of the building again and measure the length of the rope. The length of the rope will be the height of the building."

Now, although the professor couldn't deny the answer would work, it wasn't the answer he was looking for. So he decided to allow the student another try at the question, but warned the student that this time the answer must show some knowledge of physics.

After a reasonable amount of time, the professor noticed that the young man had not written anything so he asked if he wished to give up. The student replied, "No," but explained that there were so many possible answers that he was having trouble choosing which one to give.

With this the professor became quite furious. The answer he was seeking had to do with measuring the difference in atmospheric pressure on the ground versus that on the top of the building. So he defied the student to come up with any other answer that was directly related to physics.

Quite embarrassingly, the professor got 4 answers—all of which were correct.

No 1. "Take the barometer," the student said, "to the top of the building. Lean over the edge. Drop the barometer, and time its fall with a stopwatch. Then using the formula $D=1/2 AT^2$, calculate the height of the building."

No. 2: "Take the barometer out on a sunny day. Measure the height of the barometer and the length of its shadow. Then measure the length of the shadow of the building. And by the use of simple proportions, you can determine the height of the building."

No. 3: "If you wish a more sophisticated method, tie the barometer to the end of a string and swing it as a pendulum, both on the ground and on the roof. In so doing you can determine

the gravity at street level and at the top of the building, and from the difference in those two gravitational values you can determine the height of the building."

No. 4: "And," concluded the student, "if you weren't so bound and determined to limit the answers to physics solutions, my suggestion would be simply to go to the superintendent of the building and say to him, "Look, I'll give you this barometer if you'll just tell me the height of the building."

You see, the student never did give what was deemed to be the orthodox answer. But by his persistent refusal to be limited to accepted ways of doing things he was in touch with far more truth than the professor who presumed to examine him.

This has interesting implications for us who would be the church. For it invites us to ask what fresh answers God is prodding us to seek in our time. Also, what old ones are we being asked to discard? What ruts is God desperately trying to break us out of? What new life is God calling us toward?

Look, let's be clear...the church is in a complicated and complex time. A time of immense change. We're asking ourselves, "When this pandemic ends, what will the church be like? Will it be like it was up until March of 2020?"

Honestly, it's doubtful. We're going to need new answers, new solutions. That is going to require us to be creative. Every bit as creative as was the student taking that college exam.

But that's who we are. People who are called to think, and to live creatively.

So, can we do what's needed? Sure we can. Sure we can. As long as we believe we can.

3. And that's my third reminder as to who we are: We are people called to just be ourselves and use whatever gifts we have.

In Robert Fulghum's book "Uh—Oh — Observations From Both Sides Of The Refrigerator Door," he tells this story:

Ask a kindergarten class, "How many of you can draw?" and every hand in the room shoots up. Yes, of course we can draw! All of us!"

What can you draw? "Anything!"

How about a dog eating a fire truck in a Jungle? "Sure! How big you want it?"

How many of you can sing? All hands go up. "Of course we sing!"

What can you sing? "Anything!"

What if you don't know the words? "No problem, we make them up." Let's sing! Now? Why not!"

How many of you dance? Unanimous again.

What kind of music do you like to dance to? "Any kind! Let's dance!" Now? Sure, why not?

Do you like to act in plays? "Yes!"

Do you play musical instruments? "Yes!"

Do you write poetry? "Yes!"

Can you read and write and count? "Yes! We're learning that stuff now."

Their answer is Yes! Over and over again, Yes! The kindergarten children are confident in spirit, infinite in resources, and eager to learn. Everything is still possible.

Now, try those same questions on a college audience. A small percentage will raise their hands when asked if they draw or sing or paint or act or play an instrument. Not infrequently, those who do raise their hands will want to qualify their response with their limitations: "I only play piano. I only draw horses. I only dance to rock and roll. I only sing in the shower.

When asked why the limitations, college students answer they do not have talent, are not majoring in the subject, or have not done any of those things since about third grade; or worse, that they are too embarrassed for others to see them sing or dance or act.

What went wrong between kindergarten and college? What happened to "Yes! Of course I can!"?

I think I know. When they tried to sing, or act, or play some instrument, somebody told them they didn't do it right, or well enough, and it just killed their incentive.

Or maybe they went to church. And the church said, "You can't think that way! You can't believe that way! You can't do it that way!"

What if we did it differently? What if we said, "It doesn't matter how you draw, go ahead and draw your way. It doesn't matter how you sing, go ahead and sing your way. It doesn't matter how you dance, go ahead and dance your way.

"It doesn't matter how you think, go ahead and think your way. It doesn't matter whether or not you believe the same way everybody else does, believe your way. It doesn't matter whether or not you have had a particular faith experience, whatever faith experience you have had, it is special. Why? Because it's yours!"

If we go about it that way, we can improve each other's self-image, and we can improve our collective self-image...and we can set each other free to dream new dreams, and hope new hopes, and live new lives. And we can be stronger, and the church can be stronger, and our world will be better for it.

So...back to the sermon title...Remember who you are. You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world—that's who you are; that's your identity.

You are people called to live creatively. You are people called to just be ourselves and use whatever gifts we have.

So go...live...be!

Amen.

Hymn - Great Is Thy Faithfulness (VU 288)

Great is thy faithfulness, God our Creator;
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Wondrous the portion thy blessings provide.

Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Offering

I know that Melville members continue to support the church through PAR or electronic means. Your ongoing support is sincerely appreciated. Thank you for all that you do.

(go to lectern)

Poem — "Salt of the Earth" (written by Jim Clarke)

Jim Clarke is a retired judge living in Guelph, and a friend of mine. Not long ago, Jim wrote a poem entitled "Salt of the Earth."

This morning we have been thinking about remembering who we are. Jesus called us the salt of the earth. In his poem, Jim reminds us that others, whom we might tend to overlook, are also salt of the earth.

As a prelude to our Prayers, hear Jim's poem.

For years on cold-knuckled, dark
winter days, she'd rise in the small
morning hours, while husband and
son slumbered upstairs, to stack the
grate in the kitchen stove, rake
the ash pan to capture the dying
embers, polish her husband's shoes,

prepare lunch pails and breakfast
'til stars winked out and the white
fan of dawn appeared.

Now in the nursing home, bent,
wizened and crippled with pain—
husband and son dead—she still
goes about trying to lighten the
spirit of others with a kindly word
and cheery smile, listens to their
long stories or litanies of woe.
Grateful for her life, she rarely grumbles
or complains.

Who is this woman you ask, just
another survivor living out her last
days? What is her name? Perhaps,
you know her; she could be anybody—
one of those heroes whose invisible
labours of love make the world go
round. She is Legend, called
Salt of the Earth.

Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Hymn - Precious Lord, Take My Hand (VU 670)

On July 1, 1899, in Villa Rica, Georgia, a small town some 40 miles west of Atlanta, a boy was born, one of seven brothers and sisters. His name was Thomas Andrew Dorsey. His father was a Baptist minister. His mother was a church organist. When Thomas was 7 she started him taking lessons on the piano.

Thomas A. Dorsey would go on to be known as the father of black gospel music. He composed more than 1,000 gospel songs and 2,000 blues songs.

In 1932, while he was away singing at a revival meeting in St. Louis, he received a telegram. His wife had died while giving birth to their first child. He rushed home. That night, the infant son died too. They were both buried in the same casket.

A few days later, still completely despondent, he sat down at the piano to play. He found himself playing a tune he had never played before. It was to become the song for which he is best remembered ever since. The song describes the feelings he was having when he wrote it: Precious Lord, take my hand.

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.

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.

(spoken while Colleen plays)

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.

(repeat verse one, sung)

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.

Departing Prayer

May all the words that we speak

Be a blessing for all who hear them.

May all the things that we do

Be a blessing to all around us.

May all of our lives be a blessing to someone

Just as we have been blessed by others.

May it be so, this days and always.

Amen.