



*Celebrating
175 Years*



May 9, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
May 9, 2021
Christian Family Sunday/Mother's Day

Presiding today - Rev. Marion Loree

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.

Welcome

Happy Mother's Day to all mothers and mothering type persons! My name is Marion Loree and I am the minister here at Melville United Church in Fergus, Ontario. We gather in community today - May 9, 2021, the sixth Sunday of the Easter Season and also a day marked as Christian Family Sunday and Mother's Day.

We are meeting virtually because of Covid-19 restrictions. There will be no in-person worship services until restrictions have been lifted and we can ensure the safety of all who might attend.

So, I invite you to sit back and relax and let your heart and mind be open to whatever message Spirit may have for you today as we talk about mothers and families.

Announcements:

We recently sent out a link to a video published by the Mission & Service Fund of the United Church of Canada which provides an opportunity to honour someone special in your life with a monetary donation.

Video: Gifts for Families This Mother's Day. <http://melvilleunited.com/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.

Call to Worship:

We gather to worship as God's people.
We come with glad hearts, eager to love and serve.
We come to celebrate the maker of heaven and earth
whose love encompasses all of creation.
Come, let us worship our God together.

Hymn: Come In, Come In and Sit Down **VU 395**

Come in, come in and sit down,
 you are a part of the family.
 We are lost and we are found,
 and we are a part of the family.

- 1 You know the reason why you came,
 yet no reason can explain;
 so share in the laughter and cry in the pain,
 for we are a part of the family. R
- 2 God is with us in this place,
 like a mother's warm embrace.
 We're all forgiven by God's grace,
 for we are a part of the family. R
- 3 There's life to be shared in the bread and the wine;
 we are the branches, Christ is the vine.
 This is God's temple, it's not yours or mine,
 but we are a part of the family. R
- 4 There's rest for the weary and health for us all;
 there's a yoke that is easy, and a burden that's small.
 So come in and worship and answer the call,
 for we are a part of the family. R

Words of Wisdom: On mothers and mothering people.

A mother is not a person to lean on but a person to make leaning unnecessary.

- Dorothy C. Fisher

The loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the heart of a mother.

- St. Therese of Lisieux.

Opening Prayer:

Holy Presence, in Jesus we see your love at work in new and wonderful ways.

Open our mouths to praise and our spirits to receive.

Open our minds to learn of your ways of love and give us the will to live in those ways. Open our hearts to love as we are commanded to do

and open our beings to the Great Mystery that is your presence.

We ask forgiveness for the times we do not always love
 as Jesus commanded us to.

We fret. We doubt.

We become absorbed in ourselves
 and forget the needs of our neighbours,
 the needs of other creatures
 and the needs of this planet we call home.

Our desire is to do right and to love as you love
 but we are only human and it can be difficult for us.

Forgive us, guide us, and show us the way. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Our God of unwavering love is faithful and just.
 Holy Presence knows our hearts and offers peace.
 Open your heart and receive it - it is that simple.
 Thanks be to God.

Ministry of Music: "As a Family, We Thank You" by Ruth Elaine Schram**Scripture:** John 13:34-35 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation)

(Jesus commands us to love one another)

Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another. And you are to love one another the way I have loved you. This is how all will know that you are my disciples: that you truly love one another.

Scripture: Hosea 11:1-11 (The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation)

(God will not abandon us)

God speaks: "When Israel was a youth, I loved it dearly, and out of Egypt I called my child. But the more I called them, the further they turned from me, making sacrifices to the Baals and burning incense to carved images.

I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arm - but they don't acknowledge that I was the one who made them whole. I led them with cords of human kindness - with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks and bent down to them and fed them. Now they will return to Egypt and Assyria will rule over them because they refuse to return to me. Swords will flash in their villages, destroying their gates and devouring them because of their plans. My people are determined to turn away from me! Even though they cry out to the heights, they will not be lifted up.

How can I abandon you, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is aching within me; I am burning with compassion! No, I can't do it! I cannot act on my righteous anger! I will not turn around and destroy Ephraim! For I am God - no mere mortal - the Holy One who walks among you! They will follow YHWH, who will roar like a lion! When they hear that great roar, the children of God will return from the west trembling. They will come out of Egypt trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, like doves. I will resettle them in their own homes," says YHWH.

Message: A Loving Parent

Hosea 11:1-11, John 13:34-35

When I first read the passage from Hosea, my reaction was very emotional. A roller coaster of emotions, in fact. The first two verses speak of disappointment. A parent talks of how a beloved child has turned away from their teachings and keeps doing things that go against what the parent knows to be a better way. The next few verses express a feeling of loving tenderness that can't be missed by any of us who have been in close relationship with a young child, whether as parent, friend or relative. Most of us can identify with phrases like "I taught Ephraim to walk" and "I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks, I bent down and fed them".

I remember myself doing just those kinds of things when my three children were small and I remember the sense of love flowing freely back and forth between myself and my offspring and the joy I felt as I watched them learn and grow during those times and I smile to myself.

As we read on, we hear anger and frustration voiced by the parent as the children refuse to listen and continue to turn away from the love offered. These verses remind me of my kids when they were teenagers. I can certainly identify with the feeling that no matter what I provided and no matter what I tried to teach them and no matter what I said, they were determined to go their own way. Doesn't this sound familiar? I was delighted when they finally showed signs of maturing and am happy to say they all grew up fine and now have families of their own. Now they are learning what it is like!

What goes around, comes around, as my mother used to say. I am sure -no, I know - that my parents were just as exasperated with me and now my kids are experiencing the same things with their offspring. It is the way of families I think.

It is sad to think that there are many who have never had any of those family experiences. It is sad to know that many have never known the love of a parent or care-giver or a 'normal' upbringing within a family setting. Many people find it difficult to love themselves or anyone else because they never learned how. And now they don't have that compass to guide them. A life like that can be filled with pain and many try to fill the void that is left within them with other things - substance abuse, violence, accumulating material goods and other, often destructive, behaviours.

So, thus far in our exploration of this reading we have encountered feelings of love, disappointment, frustration, anger and sadness. So many human emotions in such a short reading. And we are not done yet. The next is related to the anger part - revenge.

We prepare our children to be independent individuals but when they reach that stage in between when they are not ready to fly from the nest but they want to test their wings it can be difficult for all concerned. I know first hand the kind of frustration and anger one can feel at such times. You know - those times when one's patience is tried to the limit. And I can even understand the feeling of wanting to teach them a lesson by saying "OK! You think you know it all, then go ahead, learn for yourself the hard way what life is all about." How many of you, who are parents, know that feeling? Or how many remember saying those words or hearing them yourself when you were younger? Revenge is the word.

But, in the end we usually relented, didn't we? The anguish we felt over our errant children turned into compassion as we remembered nurturing them when they were little, and when we realized that, yes, we really did love them dearly. So we did what we could to try to be there for them when they needed us. We tried not to show our anger about their choices but tried, instead, to let them know how much they were loved even if they made mistakes. The feeling of resignation moves in at this point - and compassion and hope - hope that some of what we tried to teach them has seeped through.

See what I mean about a roller coaster of emotions? But I guess that is a big part of what raising children is all about. Parents go from feeling exasperation to amazement and delight as we watch our children grow to maturity - a true gamut of emotions. Most of us can identify with the parent in this story. And, I suspect, most of us can identify with the wayward children too. I think we have all been there as well. I certainly know I have and even now I have to sometimes remind myself that I am not alone in dealing with life. I have family to turn to for support and I know that there is a strong presence over and above all things human that I can lean on and draw strength from. And that is the Holy Presence, the Great Mystery, the Source of All That Is, the Ground of Being, Ultimate Love or - God - if you prefer.

The imagery presented in Hosea of God as a loving parent is a comforting one but we must remember that the Holy Presence is far greater than any image the Bible presents, and there are many throughout both the Old and New Testaments. For many years in the church the main image has been of God as a father, but to think of Ultimate Wisdom as only a father (or any other image for that matter) is to limit God or to put God in a box so to speak.

My God is far beyond anything that can be contained in any one image or person. My God is the ground of being itself without which we would not exist. God/Spirit is the connecting essence or spiritual energy that is in, around, through and part of every one of us and of all that is. Each of us came from that source of love and every one of us will return to it when our time here on this earth is done. Being the Source of all that is means that Spirit or the Source is our parent, and that makes us family.

Today is Christian Family Sunday in the church and Mother's Day in the wider society. It is a day set aside to honour those who have played a mothering or nurturing role in our lives and, in our Christian tradition, it is a day to remind us that we are part of a faith community or church family. I would take it further and say that our connection through Spirit relates us on many levels. We are family - to each other, to other creatures, to Mother Earth; to the universe itself. A good thing to remember on this day and any day.

On Christian Family Sunday we are invited to reflect on families; our own family, the one we grew up in; the one we live in now; the family of faith that may have been part of our growing up; this family of faith that we call Melville United Church; families of all shapes and sizes. But we must be aware that reflecting on families is not always easy or happy or desired. There are many wonderful, touching stories of families but there are also many sad and painful stories as well. Thinking about family raises a mixture of emotions - guilt, anger, sadness along with joy, longing and gladness.

You know, before the popular TV sitcoms of the 1950's which depicted 'perfect' families there was no image of the 'ideal' family. That 'ideal' being Mom, Dad and 2.4 children all living together in the same house, sharing the same experiences and values. The reality is that many children do not live in a house with a Mom and Dad. There are households which have only one parent. There are households where children spend half their time at "Mom's house," and half their time, or part of their time, at "Dad's house". There are families with two moms or two dads. There are blended families with step-parents and step-siblings. There are households

with only grandparents and grandchildren. While some families do resemble the 'ideal,' we need to acknowledge and accept that the traditional definition of family no longer applies if it ever did.

Mother's Day invites us to reflect on mothers and motherhood, which also conjures up some 'ideal' or perfect images. Images that card companies and flower shops like to encourage but we must be aware that Mother's Day is not an easy day for many. We think of those who never knew a loving mother; those whose mother was abusive or cruel; those whose desire to be a mother never came to fruition; those who are grieving the loss of their mother; or those mothers who have lost children. The list goes on. There may be longing, grief, emptiness or pain associated with this day.

My mother is gone now. I loved her very much and I am thankful for the things she taught me but I know that she was not 'perfect'. I also know that she did her best with what she had and what she knew. And, in the end, that is all any of us can do and that is all God expects any of us to do - to do the best we can, with what we have, where we are.

If you want to set any ideal for yourself whether you are a mother or father, sister or brother, grandparent or whatever you might use the teachings of Jesus as a great place to start. You might start with the commandment he gave us and which we heard again today from John's gospel - "Love one another as I have loved you."

In the meantime, know that you are loved just the way you are, just for being you, by the ever present, life giving force of the universe, our wonderful, Loving Parent - God.

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:

Hymn: Mother and God

VU 280

Mother and God, to you we sing:
wide is your womb, warm is your wing.
In you we live, move and are fed
sweet, flowing milk, life giving bread.
Mother and God, to you we bring
all broken hearts, all broken wings.

Prayers:

Mother God, we come today as your children knowing that in you we find all the attributes and qualities that we look for in the nurturing people in our lives - compassion, understanding, faithfulness, support, love and care. We come also knowing that no one is perfect and whether we had a good relationship with our mother or a relationship that was difficult or no relationship at all, that your love holds and cherishes us. You love us with a love that carries no strings, no requirements, no demands other than to receive it and pass it on.

Today we celebrate those extraordinary people in our lives we call Mom along with all those who are like mothers to us. We celebrate those of all genders who offer mothering care. And we celebrate and remember the mothers who have passed through the veil of death to abide in your closer presence.

Help us to remember and support mothers who have lost children, children who have lost mothers, women who long to be mothers, and those who choose not to be mothers.

Help us be more open to those who don't fit the traditional model of family and who feel left out of the ideal pictures that promote an image of what families are 'supposed' to be.

We remember single moms, new moms, and those looking after their moms especially during this challenging pandemic time when people are without the social supports that are usually in place.

We remember those whose mothering responsibilities stretch across decades to span a lifetime as they now care for grandchildren.

We remember those who want to draw closer to their mother and those whose healing means they need to keep a distance.

Mothering is not confined to women, Holy Presence. Many of us have been mothered by others who are not child-bearing people. We cherish and appreciate them this day also.

We pray today for our brothers and sisters of Dublin Street United Church, Guelph and for all those who work to bring your nurturing love to other parts of our country and the world. And we pray for ourselves as we dig deep to share with you the prayers of our hearts.... (silence).... Today we pray for our Mother Earth - our home and nurturing sustainer; for Mother Church that gathers and feeds our souls, in different ways, through our family of faith.

Infinite Wisdom, you are the source of love which created us and to which we will return. Like a loving mother you invite us into relationship with each other to know one another as siblings and cousins, and as family committed to care for each other. To day we celebrate belonging to all these mothers' families - one earth, one people, one love.

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, who lived love, taught love and died loving us and who stands among us now as we pray the prayer of our family of faith saying...

Lord's Prayer:

Our Mother, 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:

Mothering God, now we offer the fruits of our hands, the toil of our hearts and the very essence of our lives to your service. Bless us, bless our gifts and bless all mothering people everywhere. Amen.

Hymn: Would You Bless Our Homes and Families VU 556

- 1 Would you bless our homes and families,
 Source of life who calls us here;
 in our world of stress and tension
 teach us love that conquers fear.
 Help us learn to love each other
 with a love that constant stays;
 teach us when we face our troubles,
 love's expressed in many ways.

- 2 When our way is undemanding,
 let us use the time that's ours
 to delight in simple pleasures,
 sharing joys in gentle hours.
 When our way is anxious walking
 and a heavy path we plod,

teach us trust in one another
and in you, our gracious God.

3 From the homes in which we're nurtured,
with the love that shapes us there,
teach us, God, to claim as family
every one whose life we share.
And through all that life may offer,
may we in your love remain;
may the love we share in families
be alive to praise your name.

4 Let us reach beyond the boundaries
of our daily thought and care
till the family you have chosen
spills its love out everywhere.
Help us learn to love each other
with a love that constant stays;
teach us when we face our troubles
love's expressed in many ways.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

Go now into the rest of this Christian Family/Mother's Day
to celebrate and remember those people, past and present,
who have nurtured and mothered you throughout your life.
Go, knowing that you have a parent who loves you beyond imagining.
Go, knowing that the love of God,
the peace of the Christ
and the companionship of the Holy Spirit is with you now and always.
Amen.

Postlude:

Prayer of the Week:

God who does marvelous things, we offer our praise. We lift our voices in a joyful noise, joining our song to that of creation. We give thanks for your goodness, your steadfast love, your faithfulness, your justice. Amen.