



*Celebrating
175 Years*



July 11, 2021

Melville United Church
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Melville United Church
July 11, 2021
7th Sunday after Pentecost

Presiding today - Rev. Steven Huntley

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.)*

Welcome & Announcements:

Acknowledgment:

We live on the traditional territories of the Attawandaron, Wyandot, Mississauga, and Haudenosaunee First Nations. These are treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit ("Between the Lakes Treaty"). They are also part of the crown grant to the Six Nations ("Haldemand grant"). Grateful for their stewardship of this land, we humbly seek to live together in pursuit of justice and right relations.

Call to Worship:

Opening Prayer:

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth **VU226**

- 1 For the beauty of the earth,
 for the glory of the skies,
 for the love which from our birth
 over and around us lies,
 God of all, to you we raise
 this our hymn of grateful praise.

- 2 For the beauty of each hour
 of the day and of the night,
 hill and vale, and tree and flower,
 sun and moon, and stars of light, R

- 3 For the joy of human love,
 brother, sister, parent, child,
 friends on earth, and friends above,
 for all gentle thoughts and mild, R

- 4 For each perfect gift sublime
 to our race so freely given,
 graces human and divine,
 flowers of earth and buds of heaven, R

Scripture: Luke 15, 11-32

The Prodigal Son

And He said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found.'"

Ministry of Music:

Prayer:

Message: The Outrage of Grace

Luke 15: 11-32

Today we look at a familiar story/parable, The Prodigal Son. Let us understand that Jesus used the literary tool of parable to teach about the Kingdom of God or Reign of God. A parable according to Webster's dictionary is, "usually short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle." When Jesus was asked about speaking in parables, he gave a different answer, "that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise, they might turn and be forgiven!" The two don't seem to have a whole lot in common! We've been parabled.

If you've sometimes found Jesus' parables hard to comprehend, you're not alone - Jesus wants you to look at the world and our place in it from God's perspective. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. Knock and the door will be open. You must be born again. Let's turn then to one of Jesus most famous parables.

Jesus' parables are not just cute stories about God, but explosive and revolutionary truths. In these stories we find what God is up to all this time; we discover deep truths, gracious love, a hope that never quits, life out of death, and the outrageousness of grace!

In preparing for today, I've leaned on the work of Robert Capon, an Episcopalian minister and author from New York. Capon wrote extensively on Jesus' use of parable. I borrow his word "outrage" in describing grace. I think his insight is bang on, anyway you look at it, grace is outrageous! Why?

Well, In two ways in my experience. The first reason is that in 30 years of ministry, I haven't found a single congregation where someone has whole- heartily expressed their disdain for Jesus' parables and in particular, The Prodigal Son. One couple once said to me, "If you talk about that parable in church, were going home!"

The outrage I found comes about from identification, do you identify with the Younger Son or the Elder Son? How we have lived our lives can fall in these two categories between Elder Son who worked hard, and stayed home while his brother left him holding the bag spending his entire inheritance on booze and partying, yet comes out squeaky clean. Second Is this any way for God to behave?! Maybe you are outraged too! If so, I respectfully propose that you've been parabled – Let's dig deeper and discover. I trust you will see the unfailing love and grace of God the central work of God in the world, death/resurrection. God has reconciled the world to himself, through Christ on the cross. With this key we unlock the mysteries of God and find hope and love for all. Let's start.

Luke 11: And He said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So, he divided his wealth between them. Let's stop right there! If we don't, you'll miss the central point of the story. It took me years to see that!!

The younger son's request represents a total disregard for his father and family, secondly, by making this request, he in effect is saying he wished his father was dead. Why do I say that? Because to split his estate/farm in two only can occur at death. When are estates settled? Upon the death of the owner. (it's not like he has the money in a bank somewhere! to split his estate means giving up the farm, his livelihood, his very life! In effect he dies! Death-Resurrection. (the life that he knew was over)

Obligingly, the father does just that: he gives the younger son his portion in cash, and to the elder brother, presumably, he gives the farm. Outrageous! It is the first occurrence of death in the story, not the last! Instead of living, the father chooses death. What does this say to you? What comes to mind?

Do you hear/comprehend what just happened? the father commits suicide - In other words the tells his father to put his will in to effect, to drop dead legally right there on the spot Back to the story. Next Jesus tells us, the younger son went to a faraway country where this rich boy's life turned rapidly into a lost cause --- where he "wasted his inheritance in riotous living." We are free to supply whatever details we want about the kind of life he lived...Las Vegas, French Riviera, party, party, party, whatever the details the denouement of the story is that he wakes up dead. Reduced to the indignity of slopping pigs (Gentiles), he realizes that whatever life he had is over.

It is worth noting at this point, that what the father gave away and what the Son wasted was their livelihood, their life. It wasn't just some stuff that belonged them; it was their entire existence, they're very being, their lives. (it's worth mentioning that the word "prodigal" means wasteful) has wasted his inheritance, his living. We move on...

Back to the story. The Son is in a pickle, he is no longer in control of his life or what passes for a life. Dejected and with his tail firmly between his legs, he heads home, he is faced with the reality of his existence. Whatever sympathy we may have had, or not have had for this young man, we now leave behind – he gets his just desserts! You reap what you sow! What the son doesn't know is that he is dead, so he keeps on keeping on in the only life he knows. Listen in! Luke next records that he came to his senses, "even my father's servants have it better than I do. 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

Time out!

I want you to go back into your youth to a time when you were disobedient – maybe even a prodigal son or daughter. A time when you sinned against your parents, a time when you were naughty and not nice, and in deep trouble. What did you do?

For times sake, I'll tell you what you did, you concocted a story that you thought your parents just might buy. "Mom Dad, I wasn't the one who started it, it was that Jimmy down the street who forced me." (Jimmy, of course, stands for that boy or girl who was always getting in trouble anyway and perhaps ol' Mom and Dad might be a little soft-headed and would buy the story and let me off the hook. That, my friends, is what the Prodigal Son did! Listen to verse 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' It is the Son's speech! He'd been rehearsing it on his trip back home!

Now I don't know and we'll never know, what your parents said to you after hearing your speeches, but listen to the outrageous words of the father says,

Verse 22 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

What just happened? What about the son's speech? He ignored it! He had more important fish to fry, and that fish was the grace of God by which we are all saved through the gracious and life-giving sacrifice of the Son. In fact, he never even gave his son a chance to give his speech, Luke records, "But when the son was yet a great way off (the father was looking for him – perhaps daily!) his father saw him, ran out to meet him, and had compassion, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

(Interesting that the symbol of fish used by Christians in the early church stood for Christ)

Outrageous, when did you ever see your father run...never? Embarrassed. Undignified! Imagine, too, what the locals were thinking when the story got around. Either the old man had gone squirrely or worse, this is no way to run a farm or a world!

Robert Capon: *Grace as portrayed here works only on the untouchable, the unpardonable and the unacceptable. It works, in short, by raising the dead, not rewarding the living.* (REPEAT!)

The Father has no immediate steps between forgiveness and the party. There's none of that. "Well, Arthur, you're forgiven but let's have some good behavior to make the deal stick." – none of that ungracious talk by which we make the house of forgiveness a penitentiary.

Long before John Newton, a slave trader-turned-abolitionist, wrote the words in the 1700s. Amazing Grace I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

The experience of grace is not that I never sinned, it was "like" I never sinned. Or you might like Isaiah 1:18 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.'

The story of the Prodigal Son is a dangerous one, it goes against convention – whose convention? – ours. Certainly not God's. In our convention it is the living who are rewarded – the rich, self-made, Or, that God-awful statement I've heard so often in churches...*I'm getting a little riled up now!* "God helps them who help themselves."

Do you see now how outrageous grace is, how some people can get so upset by it, who want nothing to do with a God like that...it threatens the way we understand how the world works.

Yet, for those who are least and lost, who are little, who are last and dead, it is life abundant – And that friends, is all of us! We just don't know it!

Oh, I hear an objection? surely God doesn't forgive murderers, thieves, swindlers, liars, adulterers. Sorry them too!

Whoops I almost forgot someone, right, the Older Son who stayed behind and worked hard every day (that's what he said) Who always did his father's bidding, who stayed close to home and didn't waste his inheritance. Your right, we left him out in the field, how could I!? Pardon me.

World's Oldest Profession – Bookkeeping... Started in the Garden of Eden. The woman made me do it. We keep records. I did this good thing, cancels out any sin/bad thing. I did this many good deeds, it must cancel out the grudge I have against my boss at work, or the ladies at the social last week. Let's listen in, you be the judge! Bookkeeping is not just the oldest, it's also makes us blind to the world around us. Listen to what happens next...

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' "And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'"

Are you the prodigal or the older brother? God works in mysterious ways, he has come to save the lost, not the found, and that is all of us. To you prodigals, know there is a God of forgives, if you are an Elder Son/daughter, look around to all that God has showered upon you. It is the outrageous grace of God. Grace the undeserved gift of God. Amen.

Hymn: Amazing Grace

Prayers:

Lord's Prayer:

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.

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:

Hymn: We Are One **VU402**

- 1 We are one as we come,
as we come, joyful to be here,
in the praise on our lips
there's a sense that God is near.
We are one as we sing,
as we seek, we are found;
and we come needful of God's grace
as we meet, together in this place.
- 2 We are one as we share,
as we share brokenness and fear,
in the touch of a hand
there's a sense that God is here.
We are one as we care,
as we heal, we are healed;
and we share warmth in God's embrace
as we pray together in this place.

3 We are one as we feast,
as we feast, peace becomes the sign;
in the bread and the wine
there's a sense of love divine.
We are one as we come,
as we feed, we are fed;
and we feel God's refreshing grace
as we meet at table in this place.

4 We are one as we hear,
as we hear, heart and hand unite;
in the word we receive
there's a sense that God is light.
We are one as we leave,
as we love, we are loved;
and we seek justice in God's ways
as we move together from this place.

Blessing/Sending Forth: