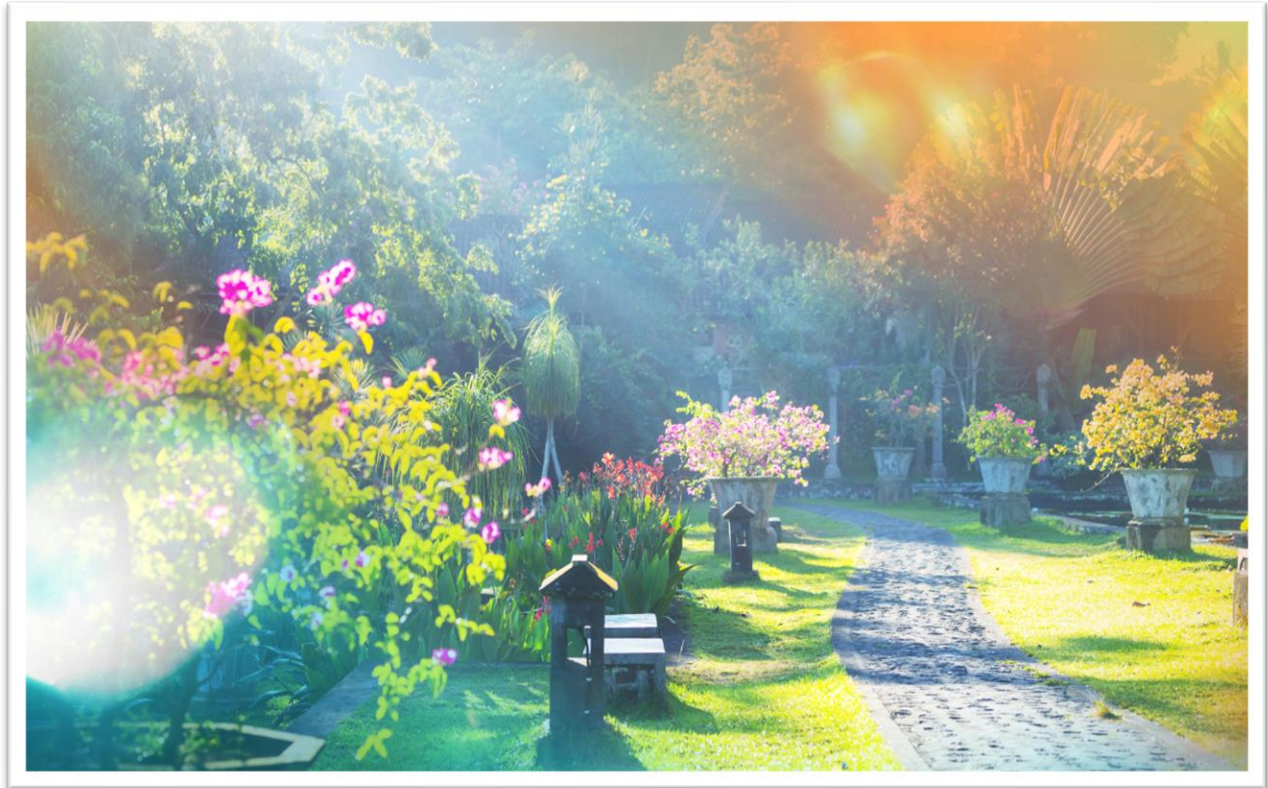




Celebrating 175 Years



July 18, 2021

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
July 18, 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 July 18 Sunday. A sincere thanks to Colleen Weber for her musical leadership during this service. And also to Barry Rawn, our video technician.

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

Acknowledgment of Indigenous Territory

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.

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:

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We are an integral part of Creation.

We are called to live with respect in Creation...

And to celebrate the glory of all that surrounds us.

Hymn - God of the Sparrow (VU 229)

1. God of the sparrow, God of the whale,
God of the swirling stars,
How does the creature say Awe?
How does the creature say Praise?

2. God of the earthquake, God of the storm,
God of the trumpet blast,
How does the creature cry Woe?
How does the creature cry Save?

3. God of the rainbow, God of the cross,
God of the empty grave,
How does the creature say Grace?

How does the creature say Thanks?

4. God of the hungry, God of the sick,
God of the prodigal,
How does the creature say Care?
How does the creature say Life?

5. God of the neighbour. God of the foe,
God of the pruning hook,
How does the creature say Love?
How does the creature say Peace?

6. God of the ages, God near at hand,
God of the loving heart,
How do your children say Joy?
How do your children say Home?

Opening Prayer: God of all places, people and things, we meet you in both the centre of life and at its edges. You journey with us, even when we're uncertain of the destination. You encourage us to travel on, courageously, faithfully, hopefully. Be with us now in this time of worship and grant us your grace. Amen.

Ministry of Music - "Count Your Blessings" by Edwin Excell (duet: Colleen Weber and Suzanne Flewelling)

Scripture Readings:

Mark 6:30—56 (selected verses)

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.

When it grew late, his disciples came to Jesus and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Proverbs 17:22

A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Message: "Necessary Virtues"

1. A Sense of Humour

I'm going to be here at Melville for two Sundays in a row, so I thought I would do a mini-series. It's broadly entitled "Necessary Virtues." By that I mean things that help us get through life. The necessary virtue I'm going to talk about this morning is "A sense of humour." Next Sunday, I will talk about the virtue of dreaming impossible dreams.

So... the virtue of a sense of humour. To talk about that, I'm drawing on the words from Proverbs: A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Near the beginning of Mark's gospel—I'm not sure but you may have heard this story read a few weeks ago—it's the story about Jesus going to see Peter's mother-in-law because she had been sick with a fever.

A woman had gone to church one Sunday morning and listened very intently to the sermon on that text but she didn't get much out of it. She left church, feeling quite unfulfilled, so decided to go to church again that afternoon—out at the old country church which she had attended as a child.

When she arrived, she was surprised to learn that her minister had been invited as guest preacher for that afternoon service, and again she heard him preach about Peter's mother-in-law, sick with a fever. And she didn't get much out of the sermon that time either.

She hurried home after church and, believing that there was still time to redeem the day, she decided to go over to the hospital chapel, where there was a service every Sunday evening at 7:30. Sure enough! There he was again—same minister—preaching in the hospital chapel. Same sermon again. It was not a good day for her.

The next morning, she was on the bus, riding downtown to work, and her minister got on the bus and came and sat down beside her. They were chatting away when, suddenly, an ambulance raced by—sirens blaring. The minister said, "I wonder who it is? Certainly hope it isn't anyone we know." To which the woman replied, "Could be Peter's mother-in-law! She was sick all day yesterday!"

Somebody sick all day yesterday. That's the feeling you're apt to get when you read about the early part of Jesus' ministry in Mark's gospel—somebody's always sick! Sick all day yesterday!

Take this morning's gospel reading. Jesus and his disciples had gone away to a deserted place so they could get some rest from it all. It says, "For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

But even at that deserted place the crowds come. And then there's the story about the feeding of the 5,000. Note that was 5,000 men. Women and children weren't counted in those days.

The passage ends with these words, "Wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed."

People were constantly bringing sick people to Jesus. I wonder how he coped with that. I'm going to suggest that the only way he could cope with it was with a good sense of humour.

I don't have any notion that Jesus was a stand-up comic, or anything like that. But I do think he was one who approached life with a twinkle in his eye. One who laughed a lot. One who took life seriously, but not so seriously that it got the best of him.

Can't you see him throwing his head back with a good, loud laugh, when he chided people over it being easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it was for someone who worshipped riches to go through the gates of heaven? "How foolish can you get! " I can hear Jesus chortling, "Get your priorities straight and then come back and we'll talk about it! "

We all know this: Life, being what life is, it is filled with some very rough spots, and we need a sense of humour to get through it. That's why I call a sense of humour a necessary virtue.

Lots of events, even wonderful events, are rife with tension. One such event is a wedding. For whatever reason, weddings create a lot of tension. I've seen my share of it. And..sometimes..I have longed for something to break the tension

In his book *Uh-Oh*, Robert Fulghum tells how the tension was broken at a wedding he was conducting. Here is his story.

It was a serious wedding. A by-the-book wedding that was beginning to get long and tedious. The time came for the vows, and the bride turned her pale face toward me.

"Please repeat after me: I, Mary, do take you, Jack, to be my husband. " And the bride responded. "I (hiccup), Mary, do take you (hiccup), Jack, to be my (hiccup)...

Somebody in the back of the church giggled. A couple of snickers were heard. I looked at the congregation and saw row after row of tight-upper-lip grins. A few had their hands locked over their mouths. Uh-oh!

I paused. Took a deep breath. Composed my face and mind. Waited for things to settle down. The congregation reached deep down inside for control. The bride repressed her spasms, subtly twitching from time to time as if receiving a slight electric shock near her navel.

Her life energy had shifted from the awesome experience of getting married to the simple matter of controlling her diaphragm and glottis.

A little voice in the back of my head warned me that we were sitting on a social time bomb here, and if the bride opened her mouth and laid one more hiccup on us, we were going over the falls.

Time stood still. I weighed my options. I could acknowledge her condition, call for some water, and ask everyone else to take a deep breath. People would smile, chuckle politely, relax, and the wedding could go on by the book.

Or, I could cover up the problem and simply say the vows myself and ask the bride and groom to say "yes" or just give me an affirmative nod.

I like to think that I surely must have considered these options before I decided to go ahead and "let 'er buck" as we used to say in the rodeo.

Looking straight at the bride, deadpan, I continued: "In good times, and in bad." The bride, bless her heart, went for it: "In good times (hiccup), and in (hiccup).

Somebody in the front row tried to suppress a giggle and failed. Someone else let out one of those expelled-air sounds diesel locomotives make when they release their brakes. And a guy about ten rows back lost it. No giggler, he, but a real belly laugher.

To his credit, he tried for the exit before he blew, but he never made it. Waves of laughter sloshed back and forth across the church. I laughed, the bride and groom laughed, and the attendants likewise.

Up in the choir loft the organist was hysterical. People rose out of their pews to breathe. People wept, snorted, brayed, hooted, howled, honked, and dabbed at their eyes with handkerchiefs. And every time some semblance of quiet and order seemed to be returning, the bride did it again. "Hiccup," and pandemonium would resume.

Finally, fifteen minutes later, when the last ounce of laughter had been squeezed from us and the congregation looked more like survivors of a shipwreck than a wedding party, I held up my hand for silence and said that if weddings were supposed to be joyful human events, then we had exceeded all hopes and expectations for an acceptable level of joy.

I said we all knew what the words were and what they meant, and in the spirit of those words I pronounced the couple husband and wife and blessed their marriage.

In response, the bride blurted out, "Oh (hiccup), thank you."

The guy in the back lost it again, and the bride and groom raced down the aisle with the laughter that was their recessional music, since the organist was no longer functional.

Thank goodness for these real-life accidents that keep us from the boredom of perfection. I will never forget when a similar thing happened at an inappropriately grim funeral I was conducting. An old uncle of the deceased got the hiccups; and when he tried to repress them, he managed to both hiccup and make some other noises at the same time. Try as you might, you really can't ignore these things, even under funeral conditions. Uncle Jack saved the day. Great funeral.

Laughter often saves the day. At least, it helps us keep things in perspective. It happened one time in connection with the wedding in my sister's family. Our niece was a bridesmaid in a wedding on a Saturday afternoon, and had a hair appointment for 9 am.

When she went to the hair shop, it was closed. She waited a while. But the hairdresser didn't show up.

So she went home, phoned a dozen or so other hair shops until she finally found one where she could get in on short notice. Got her hair done. Unfortunately, she didn't like the result. So by the time she got back to her home she was pretty upset. What was she to do?

Well, there's only one thing to do when you're upset. You phone your parents. Doesn't matter how old you are. That's the solution. Phone your parents. And throw in a few tears just to accentuate the current dilemma.

But, fortunately, her Dad was quick to understand the urgency of this kind of situation. His immediate response was, "Now, don't you be upset another minute! Just get on down here to our house and I'll fix your hair up for you."

Not the response she expected. But it did enable her to stop and laugh about things. And the laughter put things back in perspective.

And, after all, at that time of the day, with only 2 hours until the wedding was due to start, what else was there to do?

You see, regardless of how life is there's always a lighter side to it...if we're willing to see it.

This Covid time that we've been in haven't been easy, but a few things have kept me going. One is laughter. I love to laugh, and I love to hear others laugh. Without a sense of humour, I'm lost.

Back in mid-May, a friend called and said to meet him down in the front parking garage at my condo. He had some rhubarb from his garden patch for me.

When I got on the elevator to go back to my unit, a couple from the floor below me got on. Both were...well, let's just say riding the crest of a slump. They were grumpy. In the words of the Proverb, their spirits were downcast.

The wife was bothered by the weather, said it was way too cool for May. The husband said his left shoulder had been bothering him.

The wife looked at the rhubarb I had, and asked what I did with it. I said, "Well, I cut it up, cook it along with some hamburger, throw in some onions, a bit of nutmeg and paprika. Serve it over ice cream."

She looked at me and said, "Really?" And then she realized she'd been had, and broke out into peals of laughter at the thought of the ridiculous recipe. Her husband lightened up too. When they got off at their floor they were still laughing.

I'd like to think that that dollop of humour lightened up their day. I know it worked for me. Because I know, all too well, that a cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.

Ummm...by the way, I have no intention of trying that recipe!

Lighten up, folks! That helps get through whatever it is we're going through.
Amen.

Hymn - Give To Us Laughter (VU 624)

1. Give to us laughter, O Source of our life.
Laughter can banish so much of our strife.
Laughter and love give us wholeness and health.
Laughter and love are the coin of true wealth.

2. Give to us laughter as sign of deep joy;
Let us in laughing find Christian employ,
Joining with stars and with bright northern lights,
Laughing and praising and sharing delights.

3. Why do we worry that we will lose face?
Why act like king for the whole human race?
Often in family, and often with friend,
Laughing at pride causes anguish to end.

4. Even in sorrow and hours of grief,
Laughter with tears brings most healing relief.
God, give us laughter, and God, give us peace,
Joys of your presence among us increase.

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> Call Lynda, to arrange Pre-Authorized Remittance payments (PAR).*
3. *E-transfer directly from your bank. E-mail to secretary@melvilleunited.com*

Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

Reflection

Closing Hymn - Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

(chorus) Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home.

1. I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,

Comin' for to carry me home?

A band of angels comin' after me,

Comin' for to carry me home. (chorus)

2. If you get there before I do, comin' for to carry me home.

Tell all my friends that I'm a comin' too,

Comin' for to carry me home. (chorus)

3. I'm sometimes up, and sometimes down,

Comin' for to carry me home.

But still my soul feels heavenly bound,

Comin' for to carry me home. (chorus)

Departing Prayer

May our lives be filled with music and laughter,

And lead us to respond with joy!

May we celebrate with hope,

And receive each moment with gratitude!

Amen.