



**Celebrating**  
**175 Years**



**August 22, 2021**

**Melville United Church**

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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 August 22nd 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:**

Come away for a while, and let your day's concerns drift off like seeds of dandelions, or settle in still urns of some forgotten past!

**Breathe in fresh breath. Sooth your soul with songs of the Spirit. Be open to grace.**

Let all the senses be alert, so that the gifts of God may touch your heart's desire!

**Awaken! Be on fire! Sense fresh life!**

Come away for a while!

**Hymn - Come, Let Us Sing (VU 222)**

1. Come, let us sing to the Lord our song:

We have stood silently too long;  
Surely the Lord deserves our praise,  
So joyfully thank God for our days.

2. O thirsty soul, come drink at the well;

God's living waters will never fail.  
Surely the Lord will help you to stand,  
Strengthened and comforted by God's hand.

3. You dwell among us and cause us to pray, and  
Walk with each other following your way;  
Our precious brothers and sisters will grow  
In the fulfilling love they know.

4. Deserts shall bloom and mountains shall sing  
To the desire of all living things.  
Come, all you creatures, high and low;  
Let your praises endlessly flow.

**Opening Prayer:** Creator God of sacred time and space: open in us the spaces where healing is needed, the spaces in which we are named as yours, the spaces in which we can grow and be transformed by your grace. Amen.

### **Ministry of Music - "Rain Down" - Jaime Cortez (based on Psalm 33)**

#### **Scripture Reading: John 6:56—69**

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe."

For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

#### **Message: "Life in Our Town—Committed in Love"**

Well, it's been a busy week in Our Town. And hot too. Didn't seem as if there was much of a spring this year. Spring shrugged off the stage after only a walk-on appearance. Summer strutted on early, and now we're into the dog days of August. The season of the three H's: hot, hazy, humid.

Marge, over at the Post Office, doesn't like this kind of weather. Although, she doesn't care for winter either. Matter of fact, it's hard to find weather that she really likes. But Marge is Marge, and everybody knows that.

As you probably remember, Marge sees danger in everything, so when Covid hit it really threw her into a tizzy. She didn't want people coming in to get their mail and spreading their germs all over her, so she put the place in lockdown. But when the district supervisor reminded her that where she worked was, after all, a Post Office...and mail was their business...she had to take a different approach.

She had a small window cut in the side of the building. put up a sign that said "Curbside Pickup Only." There was a buzzer for folks to ring, and an intercom. Marge would answer, ask the person their name, the nature of their business—pick up mail, or a parcel, or buy stamps, whatever. Then they had to show ID in a view-finder, so she could authenticate who they were.

When she was satisfied, she would open the window and pass out their mail or parcel using one of those long-handled grabber tools. Folks were a bit surprised to see that Marge was dressed in a hazmat suit. She'd bought one on eBay for \$24.99.

Jack Cameron dropped by to pick up a parcel on Wednesday morning on his way to coffee with the old guys. When Marge asked him for ID, he said, "Oh for heaven's sake, Marge, we've known each other for more than 30 years. Surely you know my voice by now."

"Can't take any chances, Jack. Lotta people pulling scams out there. Impersonating somebody else. Why, just the other day, Etta Flugel came here trying to pick up something that Willy had ordered for The Church of the Reluctant Apostle."

"But, Marge," Jack said, "Willy Flugel is the Pastor at the church, and Etta's his wife. What's wrong with that?"

"Jack," replied, Marge, "the parcel was clearly addressed to The Minister, The Church of the Reluctant Apostle. That's Willy, not Etta. It's a matter of having standards, Jack. Without standards the whole system breaks down. And if I don't keep standards here at the Post Office, how can I expect anybody else to?"

Jack scratched his head. He had to admit that there was logic in there somewhere, even though it seemed a bit twisted. He finally said, "Yes, I guess I see your point, Marge. Now, can I pick up my parcel?"

"Absolutely, Jack" said Marge, "just as soon as you show me some proper ID."

Jack held his driver's license up to the view-finder. Marge went to get the parcel. She came back and said, "This parcel is for Lula, Jack."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Marge! Lula's my wife!"

"I'm open until 5 this afternoon. If Lula can drop by..."

Jack didn't wait to hear what else Marge might say. He just turned away, got in his car and drove off to Al's Café where the old guys gather on Al's outdoor patio. All socially distanced, of course. And they've all had their second shots.

Jack was still muttering to himself when he got his coffee. When Frank Birstead asked him what was wrong, Jack related the story of what had just happened over at the Post Office. Everybody started to chuckle.

"Gotta love Marge," said Fred Bowers. "She's unique. Don't know what we'd do without her."

"Yep," said Pastor Willy, "it takes all kinds of characters to make up a town like ours. That's why we all love living here so much."

Speaking of characters, take Hank Vickers for example. On Wednesday morning, when Hank came downstairs from having a shower and was on his way to morning coffee with the old guys, Mildred was sitting at the kitchen table.

He went over to her and gave her a bit of a shoulder rub, and said, "They say it's gonna be pretty warm today, Mildred. If I were you, I'd just take it easy. Maybe do some inside work. Take a file and sharpen the lawn mower blade or something like that. I don't think I'd plan on mowing the grass. It can stand to grow for another day or two."

Mildred smiled and said, "I'm pretty lucky to have a husband as thoughtful and understanding as you, Hank."

Hank was just reaching for the door handle, but he stopped, turned around, came back and sat down at the kitchen table next to Mildred. He reached out and took Mildred's hand, looked at her and said, "Know what, Mildred, having our activities curtailed so much during this Covid thing has given me a lot of time to think."

Mildred looked at her husband. She noticed a tiny tear trickling down from one eye. It was kinda strange because Hank isn't one who shows his emotions a lot. "What have you been thinking about, Hank?" asked Mildred.

"Well..." Hank paused, and then continued, "I have been thinking that if a fella has to be cooped up with somebody—the way we've been for the past 18 months—I'm sure lucky that it's you I'm cooped up with."

Mildred looked at Hank, got up, moved over and sat on his knees, and gave him a good kiss. "Oh, Hank. I know."

You see, most folks in town consider Hank not only a character, but a bit of an odd duck to boot. And they sometimes wonder just how Mildred has put up with Hank all these years...given the way he has her do all the yard work—cutting the grass in the summer, shoveling the snow in the winter, and all. Those kinds of things and others too, are why Hank is thought of as an odd duck by most people.

But, you see, Mildred Vickers isn't most people. She knows that her husband isn't perfect. She knew he wasn't perfect when she married him. But that's not the point. The point is that she loves him. Did back then. And still does now. And for her that's enough.

She got off Hank's knees. As she did she said, "Well, you'd better go, Hank. That's enough passion for this morning!" Hank chuckled, got up. As he did, he said, "Love ya, Mildred." With that he hurried on out the door.

Well, that's the news from Our Town for this week. At least, from the stories that I've heard.

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Now...I wonder, during their years of marriage, did Mildred Vickers ever think of leaving Hank? I just don't know. But I wonder.

The reason I say that is I don't know of any couple where there hasn't been some point...or maybe several points...where one or both of them couldn't easily have said, "I'm outa here!"

Or maybe it never quite came to that, but I'm willing to bet there were days when each wished that the other would go live on another planet for a while.

You know, men go back to Mars, women go back to Venus.

And as we know, all couples don't stay together. Some don't last together very long at all. Others are there for the long haul. What makes the difference?

What makes the difference is love. And love begins with commitment.

Theologian and author Frederick Buechner puts it this way:

By all the laws both of logic and simple arithmetic, to give yourself away in love to another would seem to mean that you end up with less of yourself left than you had to begin with.

But the miracle is that just the reverse is true. To give yourself away in love to somebody else—as two people give themselves away to each other in love—is to become for the first time yourself fully.

To live not just for yourself alone anymore but for another self is in a new way to come fully alive.

Nobody with any sense claims that living together in love is going to be clear sailing all the way. There will be good times and bad times both. But by holding fast to each other in trust, in patience, in hope, the impossible becomes possible.

In John's gospel, Jesus and his followers have gone to Capernaum. There follows a large section in which Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. But what he is saying isn't sitting well with everybody. Many said, "This is difficult. Who can accept it?"

You, I expect, can understand their reaction. Not everybody buys what the preacher is selling on Sunday morning. Some are listening attentively, but over there a woman fishes in her purse, pulls out a mirror and is checking her eyelashes...over there a man is checking his iPhone...and over there, on the other side of the church, a woman turns around to talk to the man in the pew behind her.

You folks think we preachers don't notice those things? We do.

Jesus was quite aware that his disciples were complaining about what he was saying, so he asked them, "Does this offend you?"

Well, it does apparently offend some of them. Because John says that some of the disciples left and no longer travelled around with Jesus...to the point where there were only the original 12 left...and he asked them, "Do you also wish to leave?"

Peter answers for the rest, "We're in. We're staying! Because we have come to believe that you are the holy one of God." They stayed because they had made the commitment to stay.

Mildred Vickers stayed. In spite of all Hank's idiosyncrasies, Mildred stayed. Because at some point back there, she made a commitment. A commitment to love. To love her husband. And that commitment, come what may, never faltered.

What difference did it make? It made all the difference in the world. That's all. It made all the difference in the world.

Amen.

### **Hymn - Though I May Speak (VU 372)**

1. Though I may speak with bravest fire,  
And have the gift to all inspire,  
And have not love, my words are vain;  
As sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

2. Though I may give all I possess,  
And striving so my love profess,  
But not be given by love within,  
The profit soon turns strangely thin.

3. Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,  
Our spirits long to be made whole.  
Let inward love guide every deed;  
By this we worship, and are freed.

### **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.

### **Prayers**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Reflection**

One of the favourite southern gospel hymns of the 20th century was Just A Closer Walk with Thee. The song gained national popularity in the 1930s, when African American churches sung it at musical conventions. By the 1940s, the hymn was featured at all-night gospel singing rallies. The first known recording was made on October 8, 1941 by the Selah Jubilee Singers. However, the song's origins remain a mystery. The widely held belief is that it predates the Civil War, and comes from the time when slaves sang of walking at the Lord's side as they worked in the fields. It's one of the most requested songs at funerals, and I couldn't possibly count how often I've played it in Dixieland bands.

Let's sing it. Just a Closer Walk With Thee.

### **Closing Hymn - Just A Closer Walk With Thee**

refrain: Just a closer walk with Thee,

Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,

Daily walking close to Thee,

Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

1. I am weak but Thou art strong;  
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;  
I'll be satisfied as long  
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee. refrain

2. Through this world of toil and snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee. refrain

3. When my feeble life is o'er,  
Time for me will be no more;  
Guide me gently, safely o'er  
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore. refrain

### **Departing Prayer**

As we go from this place, we remember that we live in a world of incredible wonder, a world of constant surprises.

**A world of beauty, a world with love at its centre.**

We also remember that wherever we go, God walks closely beside us.

**We go in peace!**

Amen.