



September 4, 2022

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
Sunday, September 4, 2022

* *Congregation please stand as you are able.*

Bold print invites congregational response.

Presiding today: Ruth Cooke

Words Of Welcome

Announcements

- **Away on Vacation** – Rev. Lynda will be away on vacation from **August 10th to September 5th**. If you have a pastoral care emergency in that time, please contact Alison Rainford and she will connect you with the ministry personnel who is covering at that time. Worship services will be covered by Tom Watson and Ruth Cooke. Many thanks to all those looking after ministry matters in my absence. Blessings for the remainder of your summer!
- **UCW meat pies** are for sale and only **\$4.50 each!** You can pay by either a cheque made out to Melville United Church UCW or cash. Please have the correct change if you can. Contact Marg Frayne @ 519-843-3274 for your order.
- **Melville Photo Directory**: There have been two sessions of photos taken for the directory. There will be another session on **Wednesday, September 21st**. Please contact Lorna for your appointment. Everyone who has their photo in the book gets a free book and an 8" x 10" photo.
- **Tuition-Free Supportive Care Program** through Conestoga College – this is an 18-week program for home and community support workers across Ontario to receive tuition-free training to develop skills to deliver quality, safe, and ethical supportive care, as well as to collaborate with an interprofessional team in clients' homes. Here is the website <https://www.conestogac.on.ca/fulltime/supportive-care> and those interesting in learning more can sign up for an information session by using this link <https://bit.ly/3QVIA70>
- **Kairos Blanket Exercise – Save the Date!** The Kairos Blanket Exercise has been developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and educators. It is an interactive and experiential teaching tool that explores the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the land we now know as Canada. It is a 2 to 3-hour workshop and will be offered **at Melville on Saturday, October 1st 1:30-4:30pm**. It is intended for those 14 and over, and is limited to 25-30 participants. Please contact Rev. Lynda to reserve a space.
- As more and more people find their dollar shrinking, and having to decide between rent and three meals a day, the demand for food bank assistance rises. We ask you to prayerfully consider if you are able to **support the food bank**, either with a donation of food, or financially.
- **Ukraine Appeal**
The invasion of Ukraine is costing precious lives and creating a humanitarian crisis as people flee to safety. Many millions of people, displaced from their homes, are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Many have lost friends, loved ones, and property; struggle to meet their basic needs; and face an uncertain future. **United Church Mission & Service partners are responding to the rapidly unfolding crisis—visit our website at <https://united-church.ca>, scroll down to Ukraine Crisis and click on the Act Now button to find out how you can show your support and make a gift.**
- **Gifts with Vision** These gifts are perfect for those difficult to buy for people. There's no going out, no standing in line, no wrapping. And you will be helping out those in need near and far. Items address healing and reconciliation, leadership, counter racism, wellness and safe spaces,

education, poverty and hunger, the future, Mission & Service. Gifts range from \$5 to \$140. Gifts include food for the north, help build a well, purchasing Covid vaccines for the Global South and East, and much more. You can find the full catalogue at www.giftswithvision.ca.

- **New Gifts with Vision for Ukraine**

A gift of \$25 will provide families fleeing Ukraine with a **hygiene kit** containing items like toothpaste, laundry detergent and disinfectant

A gift of \$38 will provide **one food basket** with staples such as cooking oil, buckwheat, canned fish and more

A gift of \$40 provides **one hygiene kit plus a supply of incontinence products**

You can find the full catalogue at www.giftswithvision.ca

Sharing the Light

Prelude/Centering Time

Call to Worship:

Stir up the wills of your people, O God.

Move us into new ways of living.

Stir up the minds of your people, O God.

Move us into deeper ways of thinking.

Stir up the hearts of your people, O God.

Move us into fuller ways of loving.

Stir us thoroughly, O God.

Let us worship you afresh.

Opening Prayer:

Wondrous God, you touch our lives with healing and with justice; new life is your gift. We praise you for the Good News which is ours through Jesus Christ. May this time of worship nourish us with your promise of meaning and purpose. May we be empowered to carry your goodness into the coming week. We pray in Jesus' name, our Source and our Saviour. Amen.

***Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" VU 602**

- 1 Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the unity of heart and mind
is like to that above.
- 2 Before our Maker's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.
- 3 We share each other's woes,
each other's burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

4 This glorious hope revives
our courage on the way;
that we shall live in perfect love
in God's eternal day.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, we acknowledge and confess in your presence the smallness of our love, the narrowness of our concern, the denial of our true humanity. Through our careless hands have slipped opportunities not taken, people not cared for, days not celebrated. We are ashamed and sorry for the ways of our unfaithfulness, and ask for reassurance and forgiveness.

(We reflect in silence...)

Words of Assurance:

God is the love that over and around us lies; the grace that is totally unearned; and the healing that makes the earth whole. Give thanks to God; we are forgiven! **Amen.**

First Reading: Colossians 3:12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him.

Children's Time "How to Exit a Burning Building"

How many of you have ever had the experience of being in a large public building when the fire alarm went off? And when it wasn't a drill or a prank, but an actual fire?

In the sixties, smoking was much more common than it is today, and child-proofing your house was not as widely practiced. Matches and lighters were readily available in many homes, and often within reach of kids. When I was in Grade One, a boy in my class thought it would be cool to bring matches to school. He left them in his coat pocket.

That was the year I learned that "spontaneous combustion" was a real thing. The cloakroom, and the school, caught fire. And because the fire was in OUR cloakroom, in order to get out of the school, our class had to walk right past the burning cloakroom.

And we did it. Every single student in that classroom got out safely. It was October, so we might have had one fire drill before then, but the teacher kept order. We walked without panicking. And we all got out safely.

Our gut instinct in a burning building is to get out as quickly as possible.

Run!

And if you're alone, or with only a few other people, that might indeed be the best strategy.

However, what works best when we're alone or with only a few people is not usually what works best when we're in a dangerous situation with a whole bunch of others.

There have been fires in large sports or entertainment venues that have sadly costed many lives. Because people panic, and they try to run. In those situations, many of those in the front and middle get trampled and run over by those behind. The pile up then causes a roadblock, and the people behind end up dead from the fire, while the people in the middle may end up being killed by the press of bodies.

I used to work in a theatre, and we had a fire drill every six months. And we were taught how to direct customers. Out through the exits by the screens with those who used walkers and wheelchairs waiting until most of the others had left in order to prevent them from being trampled by those who were faster.

Right now, the world is on fire. Not so much as literally this year as in past years, but we've got a war going on between Russia and Ukraine that is constantly threatening to go nuclear. We're still dealing with COVID, of course, but we're also dealing with other diseases such as monkeypox and a polio. We've got record heat waves everywhere, and it's estimated that soon the ocean will contain more plastic debris than fish.

We got this way because in the past, we've been more interested in our own personal health and welfare than in the wellbeing of those in other countries. When COVID vaccines became available, rich countries snapped them up, and were not quick to donate doses of the vaccines to poorer countries. But those poorer countries have become a reservoir for those and other diseases, as they have kept polio alive all these years. Rich travelers, or immigrants, migrating from poor countries to rich ones, have then continuously brought those diseases back to haunt the rich.

We're starting to get trampled due to our own selfishness.

Hunger, disease, and war caused by inequalities of wealth in the world threaten everyone. While it might seem more expedient for rich countries to minimize taxes and cut aid to poor countries, or to import goods made with cheap labour and low environmental standards from countries with lax laws, in the end, it will end up coming back to haunt us.

Christianity, and most other religions, are based on a concern for the collective welfare of all people, and not just the welfare of an individual or small group. As religion has become corrupted by proximity to power and by the donations of the rich, the focus has switched.

It's time to change it back. Before we all get trampled.

Psalm: Psalm 42-43 VU 768, Refrain 1

Refrain: **Why rest-less, why cast down my soul? Hope still and you will sing!**

Like a deer that longs for life-giving waters,
so longs my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for you, the source of my life.

When shall I come and behold your face?

Day and night I taste only tears,
while they steadily belittle me, saying, 'Where is your God?'

But I remember - though my soul is distressed -

how I went with the crowds to the house of God,

our voices joyful and filled with praise,
a multitude keeping festival. R

My soul is overwhelmed within me;
therefore I remember you in this land of Jordan,
in Hermon, and on Mount Mizar.

**Like the turbulent roar of your waterfalls,
all your waves and currents wash over me.**

With loving kindness you bless my days,
and by night your song is with me,
a prayer to you, Giver of life.

I say to God, my rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I go like a mourner

because my foes oppress me?'

I am like one whose bones are broken to pieces
through the taunting of my enemies.

They steadily belittle me, saying,

'Where is your God?' R

Vindicate me, O God,
and plead my cause against faithless ones.
Save me from those who are deceitful and unjust.

You are the God in whom I take refuge.

Why have you rejected me?

Why must I go like a mourner

because my foes oppress me?

O send your light and your truth to lead me,
let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!

Then I will go to the altar of God,

to God my exceeding joy.

I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. R

Second Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I

was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Ministry of Music: "Streets of London" *words and music by Ralph McTell*

Meditation: "The Real Place of Religion"

Constantine destroyed Christianity.

For over three hundred years, Christianity had survived and grown despite official opposition from the Roman Empire. In the beginning, Christianity was simply an offshoot of the Jewish religion. Although Jews were tolerated, Christians were seen as both traitors to the Roman empire and as blasphemous to the Jewish leaders and were persecuted.

In 313, Constantine decriminalized Christianity. This in and of itself was a good thing. During the great persecution, that had ended only two years before this, Christians had been sent to their death fighting in gladiatorial contests or tortured and burned. Their property was seized, church buildings were destroyed, and books burned.

The Edict of Milan in 313 did not favour Christianity particularly. It simply allowed for religious freedom for all people and allowed for the return of confiscated property. The state became neutral towards religion, and there was no longer any state religion in the Roman Empire.

However, a few years later, Constantine took on the role of protector of the Christian faith. Although all religions were theoretically allowed, Constantine supported the church financially, building basilicas, exempting clergy from taxation, and endowing the church with land and other riches.

The crowning achievement was the building of Constantinople, the first city built that employed overtly "Christian" architecture, had churches within the city walls, and had no pre-existing temples of other religions.

Although Christianity did not become the official religion of the Roman Empire until 380, long after

Constantine's death, he removed the original separation between church and state, and caused, in my opinion, a rift between the church and its true purpose that has persisted and maybe even widened over the past seventeen hundred years.

Constantine caused us to lose our way, which was never ever to support those in places of power.

Jesus was not a white middle class English-speaking Christian who "blesses" people with riches. I find it amazing that there are so many Christians who actually believe this to be true.

I once held a bible study in a church I was serving. We met every week before the Sunday service. On Easter Sunday, we had a few extra people, as those who attended only at Christmas and Easter joined us.

We were reading from different translations, and one of these newcomers actually said out loud, "If the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me!"

I was speechless, and you all know me—that doesn't happen very often. I had neither the time nor the emotional energy to educate her and tell her that not only did Jesus not speak or read English, but that neither English nor the Bible as we know it existed during his lifetime.

But in case any of you are wondering, Jesus was Jewish, not Christian. Christianity as a religion did not exist until AFTER his death and resurrection. Jesus spoke Aramaic. The scriptures he spoke of were most likely what Jews today call the Torah, or the first five books of the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. He likely had dark hair, dark eyes, and dark skin, and to my knowledge would have looked more like Osama bin Laden than the paintings we have of him from the middle ages and onwards. With no washing machines and baths or showers, he would have been dirty by our standards. And if we read the gospels and truly understand the words that he is purported to have spoken, we would have understood that he looked angry as often as he looked angelic.

He was a poor person, a homeless person, who spoke truth and loved fiercely. He thought of others more than he thought of himself.

And he calls us to do as he did.

All of us grew up in an age and place where it was normal to be Christian. Where OUR worship day is the common pause day. Where OUR holidays are the ones that are the paid holidays. Where OUR understanding of morality is enshrined in law.

We are so used to our privilege that we can't even see it anymore.

But that isn't how Christianity is supposed to be. In fact, that isn't how ANY religion is supposed to be. If you look at the basic tenets of Islam, or Judaism, or most other world religions, you'll find that there is one law that is pretty much universal to all of them.

Treat others the way you want to be treated, and those "others" are the poor and the dispossessed.

The hungry. The thirsty. The unhoused. The disabled. The imprisoned.

We are called, as Christians and as human beings, to make sure the hungry have enough to eat. To make sure the thirsty have water to drink. To make sure the unhoused have safe and secure

housing. To make sure the disabled are treated with dignity and respect. To make sure the sick have adequate medical care. To free the imprisoned, and make sure that they have enough physical resources to get and keep their life on track.

Jesus tells us to do it because every time we care for someone else, we care for Jesus. He is not WITH those who are poor and disadvantaged, he IS one who is poor and disadvantaged.

But the other reason to do the bidding of Jesus has to do with the universality of the command. Jesus did not invent this command, after all, he merely repeated something that had been “in the books,” so to speak, for thousands of years. The real reason is that the building is on fire. And if we rush out, and trample those who are slower, or we attempt to circumnavigate the problem and avoid it altogether, we will end up adding to the problem. Killing more people. Maybe even not getting out alive ourselves.

Think of what is happening in the world today. Do you know that if you want a new car, it might be weeks or even months before you can get one? Because there’s a computer chip shortage. Because all of the computer chips used in our cars come from China. They come from China because Chinese labour is cheaper, and environmental standards are not as stringent, and therefore the chips are cheaper making the cars cheaper.

But...

China is imposing ongoing and very strict lockdowns. The supply of chips, and a lot of other things, has decreased to a slow drip, and North America lots are full of cars waiting for that one last little piece.

The result of this has been that the price of new cars has increased, when you can get them. But you can’t get them, or you have to wait. So those who might have bought a new car but need a car now are buying used cars. Which has increased the price of used cars.

I bought my 2019 Toyota Yaris in 2020, with about 17,000 kilometers on the odometer. It cost about \$20,000, with all taxes and fees thrown in. We’ve driven it for two years, and put on a fair few thousand kilometers. I recently looked up how much a 2019 Toyota Yaris with the same number of kilometers on the odometer as mine has sells for.

\$25,000!

Never before in history has the price of a used car RISEN over the course of two years! And it’s due, in no small part, to our short-sighted desire for cheaper cars that lead to outsourcing critical components of their manufacture.

We cared more for our short term economic gain, and less for the welfare of others, and it has come back to haunt us.

We have a problem with the homeless in our communities in Canada. Tent cities are beginning to crop up in our public parks, or on the streets outside businesses. Eviction notices are posted, and the police are called in, and the tents and other belongings are disposed of.

We have criminalized being homeless. The problem is, of course, that the problem is not solved. It’s

only moved. There are no homes for the homeless people to go to. Cities like Kitchener have promised to build more homes, and they're going to get it done...

In ten years!

And we're sitting here wondering how this problem got started in the first place.

Except, if we have any memory at all of our provincial political past, we know it.

We voted in a conservative government a number of years ago that cut the social assistance rates by 21.6 percent. Increases since then have not even kept up with inflation. No government since then, either Liberal or Conservative, has had the courage to simply undo this disastrous cut.

Right now, the largest amount a single person on Ontario Disability Support Payments can get is \$1169 per month. Rates for Ontario Works (which is the latest euphemism for welfare) are even lower. Doug Ford is set to raise ODSP rates by...

5 percent, or \$58.

The average rent for a one bedroom apartment in the City of Guelph is \$1950, and there is NO city in Ontario where it is under \$1000. In Toronto, some homeowners are charging a thousand dollars a month for a single room with shared bath and maybe kitchen access. A lot of these rooms are neither legal nor safe.

Social housing, where available, has waitlists of up to ten years. Very little social housing has been built at all in the last twenty or so years. Cities get more in development fees from suburban developments of larger single family homes. I see a lot of these being built, usually right on top of some of the best farmland in the world.

It doesn't take a mathematical genius to figure out that a lot of people are homeless simply because they can't afford to rent even a basic apartment.

We, the rich and housed, don't want to pay higher taxes in order to house those who we label as "lazy" or "addicted." We complain that we are on the brink of insolvency ourselves.

We put the rights of landlords and homeowners over the rights of ordinary people to simply live.

And we are about to get trampled, if my spidey senses are at all accurate. When you corner a wild animal, even the most peaceful of species will become unpredictable and violent. And our poor and our homeless are cornered, trapped in a system they didn't create and that criminalizes their very existence.

As people of faith, we stand in a place where we can and should do something about this. Because the place of religion in society, the ONLY place of religion in society in my opinion, is to see to the welfare of the whole people of God, and not simply the welfare of the rich and powerful.

We can do this in a practical sense. By donating as much as we can to food banks. By converting our underutilized church buildings into much needed social housing. By offering places of sanctuary to those who are being persecuted by the law simply for being.

I read recently that Evangelical Christianity is growing and even thriving in the Gulf states, despite the ban on proselytising and conversions.

They are growing and thriving because they focus on the welfare of migrant workers in the here and now. They help migrants who faced exploitation, financial hardship, domestic servitude and sexual abuse.

People whose governments are reluctant to take up the cause of human rights turn to the churches for help. This comes at a cost—pastors and parishioners alike put their freedom and maybe even their lives in jeopardy.

But the gospel is preached, in deed as much as in word.

We can also, here in Canada, speak up and call our municipal, provincial, and federal politicians to account. We can go to our MPPs and say, “Five percent is not enough. The rate needs to be doubled so that those with disabilities can live a life of dignity.” We can go to our federal MPs and say, “We expect you to live up to your promise of clean water on all reserves.” We can go to our municipal governments and tell them, “Ten years is too long to wait to solve the housing crisis.”

We can ask questions of political candidates, and cast our votes at the ballot box based on their support for the least in our society, instead of what they will do for *us*.

We can and should do this, because we are Christian, and being Christian is not about being able to quote bible verses or recite the Lord’s Prayer. Being Christian isn’t about living a “godly” life, whatever that is supposed to mean.

Being Christian is about feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, caring for the sick, freeing the prisoner. Being Christian is about loving others as much or more than ourselves, and the place of religion in our lives and society, the only place of religion in our lives and society, is to continuously remind us of that fact.

Amen.

***Hymn: “When I Needed a Neighbour” VU 600**

- 1 When I needed a neighbour, were you there,
were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
were you there?
- 2 I was hungry and thirsty, were you there,
were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
were you there?

- 3 I was cold, I was naked, were you there,
 were you there?
 I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
 And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
 were you there?
- 4 When I needed a healer, were you there,
 were you there?
 When I needed a healer, were you there?
 And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
 were you there?
- 5 Wherever you travel I'll be there,
 I'll be there,
 wherever you travel I'll be there.
 And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
 I'll be there.

Joys & Concerns

- Past Birthdays
 - Elizabeth Stinson celebrated 95 years on Aug 23rd
 - Vivian Andrews celebrated on Aug 25th
 - Marilyn Stickney celebrated on Aug 27th
 - Lorna Bevcar celebrated 75 yrs on Aug 29th
 - Ken McCorquodale celebrated 88 years on Sept 1st
 - Marjorie Lister celebrated 90 years on Sept 1st
- Past Anniversaries
 - Lorri & Richard Wright celebrated 47 years on Tues Aug 23rd

Prayers for the People & The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy kin-dom 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 kin-dom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Invitation

Offering Response: "What Can I Do"

MV191 *OneLicense #A-740237*

What can I do? What can I bring?
 What can I say? What can I sing?
 I'll sing with joy. I'll say a prayer.
 I'll bring my love. I'll do my share. (x2)

Offering Prayer

***Hymn: "We Are Pilgrims" VU 595**

- 1 We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

- 2 Sister, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

- 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

- 4 I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

- 5 When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

- 6 Brother, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Blessing/Sending Forth:

Go forth, for the love of God is yours to share, the peace of Christ is yours to extend, the power of the Holy Spirit is yours to offer. Go now in peace...

***Parting Song: "Go Now in Peace" (Price/Besig)**

Postlude