



July 16, 2023

Melville United Church
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Team Ministry

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Faith Formation & Youth	Naomi Flint
Ministry of Music Team	Suzanne Flewelling, Colleen Weber
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Custodian	Suzanne Flewelling
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Melville United Church
July 16, 2023
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Presiding today - Rev. Felicia Urbanski
Music Ministry: Colleen Weber

Welcome

Good morning! Welcome to worship at Melville United Church. How wonderful to be together on this summer Sunday morning – both in person here in the sanctuary, and online.

Announcements

- Help is needed with the PowerPoint and sound on **August 27th**, and possibly on **September 3rd**. Barry can provide training to anyone interested before those dates. Please contact Barry Rawn brawn@cogeco.ca
- **We are in need of welcomers and counters.** Onsite training will be provided. Excellent benefits. Please see Ralph Rainford to volunteer.
- **Kids' Church** is on a summer break and will gather again September 10. During the summer books and independent activities will be available in the sanctuary. Have a great holiday!
- **Summer office hours (July & August):** Wednesday, Thursday, & Friday 9:00am - 3:30pm

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this land on which we gather for worship is the traditional land of the people of Petun, Haudenosaunee, Anishinabewaki, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Odawa and Mississauga nations. We acknowledge that we live on this land as people who have agreed to share the care and use of this land as a result of treaties—the Simcoe Patent—Treaty No. 4 and the Haldimand Treaty, that outlined the rights and responsibilities associated with our place in this land. I recently found it particularly insightful to learn that we are on the land promised to the Six Nations people which includes a whole ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River. May we be people who remember this with thanksgiving and respect.

Lighting the Christ Candle

O Loving God, as we light our Christ Candle, we pray that you give us eyes to see as Jesus sees, and put within us the mind of Christ, so we may understand as Jesus did, and live within our hearts so we may love as you love.

Call to Worship

LEADER: The Holy Spirit pours on us life and gives us the power to become new people.

PEOPLE: The winds of the Spirit have given us breath, and the fire of the Spirit has kindled in us a love for God and for each other.

LEADER: Come here in faithfulness and be ready for the surprises that God's Spirit brings.

PEOPLE: We open our lives to the presence of God and trust God's promise to us that we can live new lives of freedom and grace.

ALL: May God help us to be true people of spirit letting holy surprises fill our days!

Hymn: Called by Earth and Sky MV 135

Refrain

Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.

1. Precious these waters, endless seas,
 deep ocean's dream,
 waters of healing, rivers of rain,
 the wash of love again.

2. Precious this gift, the air we breathe;
 wind born and free.
 Breath of the Spirit, blow through this place,
 our gathering and our grace.

3. Precious these mountains, ancient sands;
 vast fragile land.
 Seeds of our wakening, rooted and strong,
 Creation's faithful song.

4. Precious the fire that lights our way,
 bright dawning day.
 Fire of passion, sorrows undone,
 our faith and justice one.

Opening Prayer:

Above us, the summer sun burns with an unquenchable fire, O God.

We thank you for all the beauty and abundance around us that reminds us of the unquenchable fire of your love for all Creation.

Come like the heat of summer, Living God, to warm our hearts and bring forth the fruit of faithfulness.

Come like the sun, Merciful God, with fire to cleanse and heal the stains and pains of our souls.
When we shield our eyes from your goodness and freeze out those who need your warmth and ours, challenge us.

May the light of your presence bring growth and possibility.

Inspire us to bear fruit in this season of summer sun, so that we may be people of your Son. **Amen.**

Ministry of Music: Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil

Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word.
Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood.
When my heart is hard, break the stone away.
When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.
When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.
Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart,
Lord, let my heart be good soil.

Prayer Seeking Forgiveness

God our Redeemer, the words of our mouths often lead to hurt and harm. We tear down when we could build up. We speak of death and destruction when the power of life resides in our tongues. We say what is unnecessary and unhelpful while hesitating to offer encouragement and hope. Transform our speech as you write your word into our hearts. Stir us to speak life, joy, and love in all things. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Romans 8:1 tells us, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." God does not shame or condemn; rather, the One who is holy makes us holy, restored, and whole. Receive the grace of God as it is freely given. Be empowered by the one who observes you and declares your good. Know that you are loved, forgiven, and transformed in Jesus Christ.

Prayer of Illumination

Come Holy Spirit, come. Come into our place of worship this day. Come into each heart, each prayer, each song, each life here today so that we may live with purpose, courage, and enthusiasm serving our world. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 119:105-112

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to observe your righteous ordinances.
I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O Lord, according to your word.
Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord,
and teach me your ordinances.
I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
Your decrees are my heritage for ever;
they are the joy of my heart.
I incline my heart to perform your statutes
for ever, to the end.

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Parable of the Sower

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

The Parable of the Sower Explained

'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

Prayer

God of sacred texts,
speak powerfully to us today
through what is written in your holy scripture.
Help us hear the witnesses
to Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,
and to the promises of life in his name.

Sermon: "How to Make DIY Seed Starting Soil"

I found this title on a website, called GetBusyGardening.com. I've never actually made my own do-it-yourself seed starting soil, but on this website there are many interesting topics on growing your own vegetables to choose from: A quick and easy recipe for pickling beets, how to freeze cucumbers the right way, how to can onions, how to grow cauliflower, how to freeze rhubarb with or without blanching, how to grow okra, and so on.

These are probably very helpful to those who enjoy gardening, and I have to say that I learned quite a bit when I served the Erin United Church, where there are several farms and farmers. Kind of like the outskirts of Fergus and Elora. One couple who were church members in Erin owned a place out in the country that they developed into an organic market garden. Every Saturday morning in the summers, for several decades, they would pick, pack up, and take their lovingly-grown produce to sell at the bustling Farmer's Market in Guelph. However, a number of years ago, both of them retired. Note that they still grow vegetables for themselves as well as for friends and neighbours, using a traditional "barter system" which apparently farmers have used for thousands of years.

Now over the years, I've learned quite a bit about soil from these folks: about the tiny things called microbes and the earthworms that live in there, and how organic matter is needed to fertilize crops, completely without the use of artificial fertilizer. Apparently, it's much better NOT to roto-till your garden! I certainly didn't know that. You disturb the microbes and other organisms too much when you do too much disturbing of the soil. It's okay to simply *turn* the soil at the end of the season, and of course to keep on adding your compost from the composter.

There's also a technique which our organic gardening friends refer to as "making lasagna". You put *layers* of things like compost, regular dirt, and then a layer of newspaper or cardboard! That's right – and between the fall and the following spring, that paper will actually dissolve right into the soil! It disappears into a nice rich composition of fertile dirt. I find this completely amazing! Who knew.

So my husband Larry and I adopted at least some of these fascinating techniques for our little garden here in Fergus. We created some raised beds both in the backyard, and in the front yard.

After all, as our organic gardener friends would say, why waste good, fertile soil in your front yard growing a pristine lawn when you could be growing beautiful vegetables which you can eat? Makes sense, especially these days with the soaring costs of food. And we always manage to harvest far too much for the two of us, so we give some away to our neighbours.

So let's explore how all of this connects with our Gospel reading today – the parable of the sower, a familiar one to many of you I'm sure. Now you can take the story at face value: seeds get sown, and where they land determines how well they will grow. And this is a perfectly reasonable way to hear this parable. Even anyone who is not a gardener can understand how this makes perfect sense.

Or, you can try to assign meaning to the parts of the parable, treating it strictly as an allegory. The Sower is God, the Word is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the soil is our hearts. Using this interpretation, and the explanation Jesus gives of this story, we might think the point is to do everything we can to become good soil. That's certainly the point of the new hymn you joined in singing today, along with Colleen and myself.

But there's actually a problem with this approach. Let's explore another way of looking at the parable. Can *we* actually change the kind of soil we are? Perhaps to a certain extent, influenced by all the kinds of life choices we make. But in essence, perhaps we *can't* change the kind of soil we are – only God can do that.

Perhaps the bigger problem with this kind of interpretation is that it makes the story be about *us*, about the soil. But the story is not *about* you or me ; the story is *for* you and me. This parable, like all scripture, is really about God and God's extravagant generosity.

Let's look at it this way: God is the Sower, scattering seed liberally, even wastefully, everywhere. Just tossing it here, there and everywhere.

It's what God does. It's what God keeps on doing. God keeps on throwing seeds, regardless of where the seed might land. As gardeners, we look at this as kind of crazy!

But -- God is love, and love is generous, lavish, abundant, eager to share what is good. God will not withhold the Word from anyone. God will not deny anyone access to the Good News.

God sows liberally, even wastefully.

As Bible scholar David Lose write: This parable tells of "a sower who is ridiculously generous with the amount of seed he scatters, throwing it not only on the good soil but on soil that even non-farmers ... can recognize weren't good bets: thorny soil, [rocks,] ... and even a beaten path. I mean, what are the chances the seed is going to take root in that?"

God doesn't use a computer-driven tractor to plot out perfectly spaced rows, carefully inserting each seed at the exact depth of carefully prepared soil for optimum germination. God scatters the Good News of the Kingdom of God liberally, even in places where it is not likely to grow or bear fruit. My goodness!

God sows everywhere.

Whether on the path, on rocky soil, among thorns, or in the good dirt, the Good News cannot be contained. God does not discriminate between good soil and bad soil. God throws the seed of the Kingdom everywhere! It goes out into all the world, to transform any who will accept it. You see, seed can only become fruitful *when it stops being a seed*. Right?

A seed must die to become a plant. It literally rots in the earth. It breaks open, just as God has broken into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. As it grows, it becomes something that is not a seed anymore – it becomes a plant that bears more seed!

This parable reads us – where the seed lands, how we understand the Word and absorb it into our lives, how well our ears are tuned to listen to it, determine the extent to which it can change us, transforming us into fruitful plants that bear abundantly.

The question then becomes: Are we willing to be broken? Are we willing to let Christ crack open the hard shell of one's spirit, and change us into someone new, people whose lives demonstrate God's abundant generosity and grace?

How will we be changed, as we find ourselves drawn into God's story, as God invites us to become part of it? How willing are we to be transformed by this story, becoming something we have not been before?

The Psalm that Alison read today begins: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." (Ps. 119: 105) Each of us is invited to walk on that lit path of love, compassion, grace, and generosity of spirit. We are invited to share this essence of the word of God.

Now, for a few months you have had each Sunday, you have had the experience of pulpit supply ministers. Each of us is preaching something that we find important from the scriptures. Preachers all try to cast the gospel as broadly as possible, with no assurance of where or how it will land. Let's take a look at who might hear the gospel through us:

- It might be heard by newcomers to the community, who are looking for a place to call their spiritual home.
- It might be heard by people experiencing crisis in their lives.
- It might land among those who think of church as their social network, a way to connect with friends.
- It might even be heard by those who are hungry for God's Word; who are eager to worship the Lord in the spirit of holiness.

But every preacher knows that no matter how carefully crafted the sermon may be, no matter how much prayer and study have been poured into sharing the Word of God, the chances of something taking root are no better than the chances that Jesus describes in the parable of the sower.

Yet we *all* have been called to sow the seed of the gospel, and to bear the heartache and frustration when it falls on rocky, weed-infested ground. And you've been there, friends! Each of you have experienced the hard truths of this parable on some level. Look at it this way:

- Every parent whose words of loving concern have fallen on a teenager's deaf ears knows something about hard-packed ground.

- Everyone who has operated a small local business with integrity, only to see clients go where prices are cheaper, perhaps a big-box store, understands shallow roots.
- Every person who has been overwhelmed with worry, or caught in the trap of loving money has experienced the chokehold of thorny weeds.

This parable reminds us that we are not alone in these struggles. We can waste precious effort despairing when the seeds we sow do not take root.

Now the sower does not do that. The sower accepts the reality that a good quantity of seed will fall on bad soil. Yet the sower keeps sowing. Jesus keeps spreading the word, and he calls us to do the same. But Jesus calls us to something even more in this parable. He calls us to *hope*.

Jesus challenges us to believe in God's abundance. See, the story could have ended with a normal harvest from good soil. But this story is filled with the promise of lavish abundance, even in the face of rejection and the hard realities of living in this world.

Some of you may have come to expect scarcity instead of abundance. Your experiences have taught you to assume that there is not enough – not enough love, not enough joy, not enough grace – and you've come to expect that you are going to get the short end of the stick, that someone is going to do you wrong. But the good news is that God is a God of extravagance!

Our God does not hold anything back. God doesn't worry if there will be enough to go around. God wants our hearts to be good soil, but God will continue to hurl "a ridiculous amount of seed even on dry, thorny, or beaten soil. Goodness, but you get the feeling this God would probably scatter seed or love or mercy or grace on a parking lot! Why, because there *is* enough!"^[1]

So perhaps this story is not about the dirt.

The story is about God's abundant generosity, and God's desire to draw us into the kind of transformation that bears abundantly more than a "normal" crop could possibly bear. Hear God's love for you and be broken like the shell of a seed, to become something new, as part of God's story. Let the Word of God grow in you, and produce an abundance in you! Let these parables read you, and change you. All who have ears, listen! Amen.

[1] David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/07/pentecost-6-a-enough/>

Hymn: Sent Forth by God's Blessing VU 481

- 1 Sent forth by God's blessing, our true faith confessing,
the people of God from this dwelling take leave.
The supper is ended, O now be extended
the fruits of this service in all who believe.
The seed of Christ's teaching, receptive souls reaching,
shall blossom in action for God and for all.
God's grace did invite us, God's love shall unite us
to work for the kingdom and answer its call.
- 2 With praise and thanksgiving to God ever living,
the tasks of our everyday life we will face.
Our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring,

embracing God's children of each tribe and race.
With your feast you feed us, with your light now lead us;
unite us as one in this life that we share.
Then may all the living with praise and thanksgiving
give honour to Christ and the name that we bear.

Joys and Concerns

- **Birthdays**

- Barry Rawn celebrates on Thurs. July 20th
- Mildred Perkin celebrates on Fri. July 21st
- Millie Cumming celebrates on Fri. July 21st
- Ruth Sproule celebrates on Sun. July 23rd

- **Anniversaries**

- Ioan & Elmer Shortt celebrate 71 years on Wed. July 19th

Prayers of the People

Holy One, in the quiet reverence of this moment, we pause to sense anew your comfort and guidance within our lives. In the midst of many decisions that we must make every day and in the midst of numerous activities that demand our personal attention, we do appreciate the opportunity to be renewed by your spirit and to turn to you for wisdom.

We take this time this morning to thank you, God, for our farmers!

For those people who have touched the soil, who have known it intimately, the feel of it in their fingernails, the taste of it, the way it smells after the rain.

For those who have cared for animals, touched them, heard their cries, nurtured them carefully. We know that being a farmer can be a hard life, the bills sometimes don't match the income, the weather doesn't co-operate, or the markets are fickle.

Be with our farmers, Lord, and particularly the farming families in our church and community, in hard times as well as good.

Help us to create a society where farmers are respected, and compensated for their work fairly. Help us to personally be thankful for their work, that sustains us in the most basic way possible.

We pray for farmers and communities around the world where the rain did not come, or the rain came too hard, or too late, for those whose soil is depleted, or who cannot afford the cost of production.

So many in the world are hungry today because of a poor or non-existent harvest, or because war interrupted the harvest. Open the hearts of the world, O God, open our hearts, to be generous, to share the bounty that you give us.

All of our farming relies on the good earth, and we pray for the earth today too. Help us take care of it, help us cherish it, help us pass it on, safely, to a new generation. Guide our governments to make wise decisions regarding the earth. Particularly we pray for our Canadian politicians, that you would open their eyes to the long term health of our rich land, giving them the courage to make decisions that will benefit Canadians a hundred years from now.

We are so thankful for the beautiful home you provide for us, for the municipality of Centre Wellington and Wellington county, rich in soil and generous in weather, a garden of delights for us who live here. It's your gift, and we thank you for it.

We pause now to add our own special intentions.....

Energize, uplift and guide us for the time to come and renew us for the days ahead, we pray in Jesus' name, as we share his words of assurance...

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

As the church, we are committed to doing God's work in our community and around the world. We are invited to offer our gifts toward that end. Therefore, friends, let us join together in our morning offering.

Offering Hymn: What Can I Do

MV191

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.

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.

Offering Prayer

You have given us so much, God of love and generosity. Help us as we respond to your gifts: with our gifts of time, talent and treasure. We dedicate these offerings to your work and our lives in your service. Amen.

Hymn: You Shall Go Out with Joy

VU 884

You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace;
the mountains and the hills
will break forth before you;
there'll be shouts of joy,
and all the trees of the field
will clap, will clap their hands!

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)
the trees of the field will clap their hands,
(clap, clap)

the trees of the field will clap their hands
(clap, clap)
while you go out with joy.

Commissioning and Blessing

We go, as a blessed and blessing people, pilgrims on a journey –
Let us live God’s love through our hands, our hearts, and our voices that we might make a Good News difference in our world. Amen.

Household Prayer

O God, give us eyes to see as you see, and the put within us the mind of Christ, so we may understand as Jesus did, and live within our hearts so we may love as you love.

Worship Schedule

July 23	8th after Pentecost	Rev. Tom Watson
July 30	9th after Pentecost	Rev. Felisha Urbanski
August 6	10 th after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
August 13	11 th after Pentecost	Rev. Felisha Urbanski
August 20	12 th after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
August 27	13 th after Pentecost	Rev. Tom Watson