



Credit: Henry Ossawa Tanner – The Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water, c. 1907

August 13, 2023

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
August 13, 2023
11th Sunday after Pentecost

Presiding today - Rev. Felicia Urbanski
Music Ministry: Suzanne Flewelling

Welcome

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

Announcements:

- **If you are worshipping with us for the first time, welcome!** Please join us for refreshments and conversation in the parlour after the service.
- **UCW Meat Pies** are available for purchase after the service or order by contacting Marg Frayne 519-843-3274 or margfrayne@hotmail.com Only **\$5.00** each, cash or cheques made payable to Melville United Church UCW.
- Help is needed with the PowerPoint and sound on **August 27th**. Barry can provide training to anyone interested before then. 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.
- **Call for Young Adults for UN Climate Change Conference.** Are you passionate about climate change and making a difference in the world? The United Church of Canada is searching for a young adult delegate to join the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28) Delegation in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This incredible opportunity takes place from November 30 to December 12, 2023. **Application closes September 13.** For more information visit <https://united-church.ca/opportunities/un-climate-change-cop-28-delegation-dubai-young-adult>

Land Acknowledgement *paraphrased from prayer by Read Sherman*

Let us take time to acknowledge the peoples who have lived on and stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

God, help us to be thankful and to become better neighbours and stewards that we might continue to honour these lands.

Lighting the Christ Candle:

Dear Lord Jesus, Light of the world,

As we light this candle, we acknowledge your love and kindness.

We acknowledge your coming and your sacrifice.

We celebrate your resurrection and the gifts of your Word and the Spirit.

We pray that your light illuminates our minds and our spirits.

Call to Worship:

Lord, be with us throughout these summer days.

Guide us in your paths of service.

Dance with us on the days of joy.

Reach out to us when we are fearful.

Dear friends, Jesus is our guide and our pilot.

No matter how rough the “seas”, Jesus brings us hope and peace.

Hymn: Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me**VU 637**

- 1 Jesus, Saviour, pilot me
over life's tempestuous sea;
 unknown waves before me roll,
 hiding rock and treacherous shoal;
chart and compass come from thee,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

- 2 As a mother stills her child,
thou canst hush the ocean wild;
 boisterous waves obey thy will
 when thou biddest them 'Be still.'
Wondrous sovereign of the sea,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.

- 3 When at last I near the shore,
and the fearful breakers roar
 'twixt me and the peaceful land,
 still supported by thy hand,
may I hear thee say to me,
'Fear not, I will pilot thee.'

Opening Prayer:

God of mysterious ways, you take our fears and turn them into triumphs. You remind us that you are always with us and that we do not need to fear the wind and waves of life. Encourage us to step out of the boat; to come across these difficulties to your redeeming and transforming love. Give us courage and strength, joy and peace for all the times ahead. Amen.

Children's Time

Ministry of Music: Touch of the Master's Hand by John Kramp performed by Kim Wood and accompanied by Suzanne Flewelling

Prayer Seeking Forgiveness

Loving God, we recall times when we had lack of trust in you.

We are like the disciples who, in the midst of fears and storms, could only tremble and wonder about the threatening events. Even when Jesus called to the disciples, they shook with fear.

But Jesus offered words of encouragement.

Many of us can identify with that moment when we let go of our faith and clutch onto our fears.

Help us to place our trust totally in you and your call to us. You will guide and lift us to safety — that is the promise you have given to us and we believe it.

When our faith slips, scoop us up and bring us peace.

Be patient with us, for we are flawed and yet loved by you.

Give us strong hearts and willing spirits to be your disciples. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Keep your focus on Jesus. He is your Savior and your Guide. He will never fail you. Rejoice, dear friends, you are called precious by our God. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination

Guide us, O God, by your Word, and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover peace; through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture: Romans 10:5-15

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

²⁸Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³²When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Prayer

Almighty God, in you are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your Word; and give us grace that we may clearly understand and freely choose the way of your wisdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sermon: “Immediately”

I’ve found some very interesting thoughts which I’d like to share with all of you today, from a Lutheran pastor, Rev. James Laurence.

Today’s gospel reading is probably another very familiar one. Even people who know little about the Bible seem to know the story of Jesus walking on water! What’s really interesting, is this re-occurring word “Immediately”. It even begins with this important word: Immediately. It says: *“Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.”* (Matthew 14:25)

Immediately after what? Well, immediately after what you all heard from your guest preacher, Rev. Jeff Hawkins, last Sunday: the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. After everyone ate their fill and the leftovers were collected, which amounted to twelve baskets full, immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Can you imagine that? No time to celebrate this miracle, or to reflect on its meaning, or to relax and simply enjoy what just happened. Instead, *immediately* they are sent across the Sea of Galilee.

I think that this word is an important part of this story, because it reminds us of how life actually works. A lot of the big changes in our lives, good or bad, happen right away – immediately.

Now this can be a good thing – such as when you learned that you got into that top choice for college, or when you learned that you are pregnant, or when a family member calls you with exciting news. Or when you just found out that you have a new grand-baby. These are life-changing events, often, and even though they are positive, they happen immediately. And immediately, our life is changed.

These can also be unwelcome events, of course, that happen immediately – like an illness or accident, or the death of a loved one. Or even the pandemic. I’m sure we all remember the horror and confusion of that week in March 2020. Not long before, we had never even heard of COVID-19. And then, almost immediately, it seems to have taken over our world, and our lives. And so much has changed since. Life often happens that way.

In the case of the disciples in this gospel reading, the change they experienced was at the command of Jesus, but that doesn’t make it any easier. They are asked to leave Jesus right after he has performed an incredible miracle. And when they do, they find themselves, almost immediately, on a boat being battered by the waves, far from land, with the wind against them. If I were one of them, I would think to myself, “hey, this isn’t supposed to happen!”

And we’ve all been there. We’ve all been caught in one of life’s surprising storms, being battered by circumstances beyond our control, far from the safety of land, with the wind and seemingly everything else against us. We all get our turn in this particular boat, usually when we least expect it. None of us gets through this life completely un-battered and unscathed.

And, like some of the weather we've had this summer, very often these storms come at us immediately, without warning. When they do, it's worth remembering this familiar story, and very much worth remembering the two other times that the word "immediately" shows up in this story, both of which teach us something important about our Christian life.

The next time that in the story when the word "immediately" occurs is when Jesus is walking on the water to his disciples. It is a famous part of this story that even the folks who aren't at all familiar with the Bible have heard about – Jesus walking on the water. Maybe that's why, as I mentioned in the children's time, the invention of standup paddleboarding was invented! Everyone wants to be able to walk on water.

Of course, many of those people who are unfamiliar with the Bible may not know the *reason* for Jesus walking water. But the reason is simple: Jesus *just wanted to be with* his disciples. To keep them company, to "accompany" them, as the modern lingo goes. The disciples are caught in this absolutely terrifying storm, and Jesus doesn't want them to be alone. So, he walks out to them. It's a simple but important detail that this story teaches us: that whenever we are caught in one of life's storms, we can trust that we are not alone. Maybe that's why that line begins the United Church's New Creed: "We are not alone"

Jesus is with us. We are never alone in that boat. God's Son, our Lord and Saviour, is always with us. That is his promise. He may not immediately *calm* every storm, but he is with us *in the midst of* every single one of them. He is with us in the storms of life; he is with us on the boat. When in our life we feel battered by the waves, and far from the safety of land, with the wind blowing strongly against us, that's the time when we can be assured that the spirit of Jesus is actually with us.

The disciples, though, are not immediately comforted by seeing Jesus walking on the water to them. In fact, they're absolutely terrified, thinking that they're seeing a ghost! And so they cry out in fear. And that is exactly when the word "immediately" shows up again. The disciples cried out in fear, and immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; *do not be afraid.*"

And I think there is an important teaching here about prayer. When life's storms hit, we can cry out to God through our fear, and God will immediately answer that prayer. Now, being afraid *doesn't mean* that we don't have faith. There's nothing wrong with being afraid. It's a normal feeling. God *wants* to hear from us when we're afraid. So cry out in fear when life's storm hits, but make it a prayer. God will immediately answer your prayer. Take heart, Jesus says. It is I. Do not be afraid.

But that's not the end of the story. Because now enters our favourite disciple, Peter. In response to seeing Jesus walking on the water, Peter makes a very strange request. "Lord," he says, "if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." So Jesus obliges, saying simply: "Come." Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking on the water toward Jesus! And Peter seems to do this very well, until the moment he notices the storm. Then he becomes frightened and begins to sink.

Now, the storm was there the whole time. So was the water. And so was Jesus. So what changed? Peter's faith, right? Peter's frame of mind. What else is there? That's the only thing

that changed. He began to doubt. He took his eyes off of Jesus. Instead, he looked at the storm all around him, at the wind above him, at the water below him, and he became frightened and started to sink.

Perhaps you've had those moments, too. I know that I have. Times when you've taken your eyes off of Jesus. Looked around at the storms in your life, and started to doubt. If so, remember what happens next, because we get *one more use* of the word, "immediately." Peter, in a sheer panic, cries out: "Lord, save me!" And Jesus does. *Immediately*. He immediately reaches out his hand and catches Peter. No rebuke, no punishment. He catches Peter the moment he cries out to Jesus.

This is important, because sometimes, when we're in one of those blinding storms, and forget our faith, we can feel a little guilty, and our guilt can sometimes keep us from crying out to Jesus for help. Jesus *wants* us to cry out for help whenever we need it, regardless of how faithful or unfaithful we've been lately. And he will immediately catch us.

Now, after he catches us, he might very well confront us about our lack of faith, just as he does with Peter. But not before. It is only after he catches Peter that he says to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I find it interesting that whenever Jesus describes someone as having "little faith," he is almost always talking about his followers. He isn't challenging people without faith to have more. He is challenging those of us *with* faith to have more. Jesus doesn't accuse non-believers of having little faith. *And* neither should we.

You who are hearing (or reading) this are most likely already Christian believers. So, I can ask: How is your faith doing? How's your soul? If you were to get a spiritual check-up today, how would your faith measure up?

But before you answer, remember two things. First, Jesus loves humility. Blessed are the poor in spirit, he says. Blessed are those who aren't sure they have very much faith. And second, remember that Jesus told those same disciples that all they need is faith the size of a mustard seed. So if you feel as though your faith is small these days, take heart. Do not be afraid. Jesus is with you. And if he is with you, faith the size of a mustard seed is enough.

So, if your boat is a little battered right now – and whose isn't, coming out of this storm called COVID-19? – Take heart. If you feel far away from the safety of land, do not be afraid. And if you have taken your eyes off Jesus, open up those same eyes of faith and see Jesus with you in the midst of that storm. Because he is. He always is. Jesus is with you, on the boat, in the storm, and when you feel like you might be drowning. Jesus is there.

Today's gospel reading is a simple story, really, but one that I think we all need to hear right now, because it reminds us of this simple, glorious truth: that Jesus is with us in the midst of the storms. We can *prepare* for some of life's storms. They don't all hit immediately and unexpectedly. Some are more like hurricanes than tornadoes – there are weather warnings, and you can try to predict them and be prepared. But many of the storms of life hit immediately. And when they do, it's good to remember this little story. It's good to remember that whenever we cry out in fear to God, God immediately answers our prayers with the promise that he is with us. And when we take our eyes off of Jesus and become overwhelmed

by what is happening in our life, it is once again good to remember that Jesus will be right there to catch us.

It is no wonder that when all of this was said and done, those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." That's why we worship, isn't it? To take a moment in the midst of our journey through life, to gather on this little boat called faith, and to worship the one who promises to be with through every storm. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn: Eternal Father, Strong to Save VU 659

- 1 Eternal Father, strong to save,
whose arm has bound the restless wave,
 who bade the mighty ocean deep
 its own appointed limits keep:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

- 2 O Christ, whose voice the waters heard,
and hushed their raging at thy word,
 who walked upon the foaming deep,
 and calm amid the storm did sleep:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

- 3 O Holy Spirit, who didst brood
upon the chaos dark and rude,
 and bade its angry tumult cease,
 and gave for wild confusion, peace:
O hear us when we cry to thee
for those in peril on the sea.

- 4 O Trinity of love and power,
all travellers guard in danger's hour.
 From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
 protect them wheresoe'er they go:
thus evermore shall rise to thee
glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Joys and Concerns

- **Birthdays**
 - Joan Foster celebrates 96 years on Tues. Aug. 15th
- **Condolences**
 - Joyce Smith (Norm Porritt's sister)

Prayers of the People

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, our Saviour. We thank You that Your Spirit always lifts us and prays for us. What a joy to know that You meet even this need! Teach us to surrender even more deeply to You so we may do mighty works together. Teach us to trust in You because You have done even the impossible.

We pray for all those who are sick and suffering...
All who are experiencing financial hardship...
All who find themselves in the midst of war and turmoil...
All who are refugees...

We pray for wise government leaders across the globe who will enable us to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change...

We also pray for ourselves as we open our hearts and minds this day - to share our concerns, our joys, and our thanksgivings. Hear now our individual prayers in this moment of sacred silence....

We offer these and all of our prayers in the name of our brother, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray together saying:

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

The richness of God's mercy is poured over us every minute of our lives, even when we least expect it. We offer our gifts and tithes in gratitude for all that God does for and with us, that we might become better servants of the Gospel.

Offering Hymn: What Can I Do

MV 191

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

Lord of sea and storm, of sunshine and meadow, we present these offerings as tokens of our lives in grateful praise for your love for us. Use these gifts for the ministries of hope and justice in this, your broken world. We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Hymn: My Love Colours Outside the Lines MV 138

1. My love colours outside the lines,
 exploring paths that few could ever find;
 and takes me into places
 where I've never been before,

and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

2. My Lord colours outside the lines,
turns wounds to blessings, water into wine;
and takes me into places
where I've never been before
and opens doors to worlds outside the lines.

3, 4 We'll never walk on water
if we're not prepared to drown,
body and soul need a soaking
from time to time.
And we'll never move the grave-stones
if we're not prepared to die,
and realize there are worlds outside the lines.

Commissioning and Blessing

You have been embraced by the love of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and blessed by Jesus to go into this world to offer healing and hope. Go in peace. AMEN.

Postlude: The River by Brian Doerksen performed by Barry Rawn & Suzanne Flewelling

Verse 1

To the river I am going
Bringing sins I cannot bear
Come and cleanse me, come forgive me
Lord I need to meet you there.

Verse 2

In these waters, healing mercy
Flows with freedom from despair
I am going, to that river
Lord I need to meet you there.

Chorus

Precious Jesus, I am ready
To surrender every care
Take my hand now, lead me closer
Lord I need to meet you there.
Precious Jesus, I am ready
To surrender every care
Take my hand now, lead me closer
Lord I need to meet you there

Verse 4

Come and join us, in the river
Come find life beyond compare
He is calling, He is waiting
Jesus longs to meet you there.

He is calling, He is waiting
Jesus longs to meet you there.

Household Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, as the summer days move rapidly toward the busyness of autumn, our attention is drawn forward. We begin to think about all that is coming; children preparing for the new school year; young people off to service, work or college; return to regular work schedules, preparations for retirement. There are so many things looming on our horizons that our focus is placed on them. Be with us, loving God. Remind us to place our focus on Jesus, who calls us to trust in his mercy and care. Keep the needs of others in our hearts and minds; needs for healing, for comfort, for friendship. Help us to reach out to them and offer our gifts and service in your name. As you have loved and healed us, so we ask your healing mercies on these whom we hold in our hearts. We also ask your guidance and patience with us as we enjoy the last weeks of summer. Confident in Jesus' love for us, we pray. Amen.

Worship Schedule

August 20	12 th after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
August 27	13 th after Pentecost	Rev. Tom Watson
September 3	14 th after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins