



March 10, 2024

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church

Sunday March 10, 2024

Presiding: Rev. Tom Watson

Ministry of Music: Colleen Weber

Prelude

Welcome

Good morning! Welcome to worship at Melville United Church. How wonderful to be together—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.

- The birds are singing... the snow is gone... now is the time to get back to the garden! We invite you to join us in planning this year's garden. We grow many veggies and fruits in the garden behind the church, lovingly called 'Thyme with God'. All of our harvests are donated to the CW Food Bank. Our first meeting is this **Wednesday, March 13 at 7:00pm** in the Parlour. We will discuss what to grow, how to increase our harvests and this season's fundraisers. No experience is needed! Any questions, please contact LindaMae at ogilvielms@gmail.com
- **Job Opportunity** at Melville United Church for a **part-time Youth Leader**. The candidate will be responsible for leadership and resources in areas of Christian Education for children and youth. The successful applicant will lead Kids' Church on Sundays and plan/attend regular Youth Groups. The Youth Leader will work in collaboration with our ministry team. For the Position Profile and information about applications please email mrthdncn@gmail.com
- The new **Search Team** is in place to find a **long-term supply minister for Melville** while our minister is on leave. We have completed our online training and are meeting regularly to learn the required processes and update the necessary documents. It's exciting to look at life at Melville, to see all we do and all we hope to do. Regular updates will be provided to Council and to the congregation. Thank you for your support and prayers. We are excited to see where it will lead us! Jane O'Leary (chair), Heather Halls, Chris Hopewell, Lara Johnston, Alison Rainford, David Ogilvie.
- **UCW meat pies** are available \$5 each. Buy after church or contact Marg 519-843-3274 or margfrayne@hotmail.com
- The music series "Mid-Day Music at Melville" presented by pianist Brad Halls returns on Wednesday, March 13th from 12 noon to about 1:00 p.m. at Melville United Church, Fergus. Brad will continue his musical voyage through the last 100 years of the Broadway musical, and on this coming Wednesday, we will celebrate productions from Broadway shows which debuted between 1967 and 1970. Those seasons were highlighted by Stephen Sondheim's "Company", Burt Bacharach's "Promises, Promises", "Applause", "George M!", and the revolutionary "Hair". We will include classic songs including "I'll Never Fall in Love Again", "Being Alive", "The Age of Aquarius", a medley of songs by George M. Cohan and more. There is no admission cost for these concerts, but a voluntary donation to Melville United Church to help keep the heat on and the piano tuned is always appreciated.

- **Rides needed for seniors:** Can you help? Rides to Wed Piano Concert (Noon - 1pm), Friday Morning Coffee (10 - 11am), and Sunday Service (11am - Noon). Please speak to Lorna Bevcar
- **Friday or Sunday Coffee Time** – We encourage people to sign up to host either a Friday or a Sunday Coffee Time. It is not difficult! We'd be pleased to show you how. Sign-up sheets are at the Parlour Door. Please speak to Lorna Bevcar or Marg Frayne.
- Thank you for your donations to the **Food Bank** there is an **ongoing need** of nonperishables, toiletries, or a gift card. Baskets are in the sanctuary.
- **TCOW Sleepover March 22-23, 2024** - Parkminster United Church, Waterloo. TCOW is hosting a fun sleepover event for youth (grade 8-12+) and Youth Leaders for a fun event full of good, games, community, faith, and learning! For more details visit <https://www.waterlootcow.ca>

Land Acknowledgement

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

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 (*adapted from the writings of Ann Weems*)

Lent is a time to remember the beginnings of our faith story...

To let the events be awakened and walk around in us...

To hover over the thoughts of our hearts...

To place our feet on the road to Jerusalem, and ponder the thoughts of the One who walks persistently ahead of us...

To think, to feel, to wonder...

To allow for a fresh taste of God's grace.

Hymn —Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven **VU 240**

1. Praise, my soul, the God of heaven;
 Glad of heart your carols raise.
 Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
 Who, like me, should sing God's praise.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Maker all your days!

2. Praise God for the grace and favour
 Shown our forebears in distress.
 God is still the same forever,
 Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Sing our Maker's faithfulness!

3. Like a loving parent caring,

God knows well our feeble frame;
Gladly all our burdens bearing,
Still to countless years the same.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! All within me, praise God's name!

4. Frail as summer's flower we flourish;
Blows the wind and it is gone;
But while mortals rise and perish,
God endures unchanging on.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the high eternal one.

5. Angels, teach us adoration,
You behold God face to face;
Sun and moon and all creation,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise with us the God of grace!

Gathering Prayer (in unison):

Holy God, if we're honest, we have to acknowledge that Lent is not our most favourite time of the church year. We'd rather be more active—planning, scurrying around. Remind us that life is made up of a whole set of different experiences, so give us the faith to take up our lives and walk the inward way...just for a little while. Amen.

Hymn — Jesus Loves Me **VU 365** (*verses 2 and 3 have new lyrics*)

1. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong; in his love we shall be strong.
 Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
 Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

2. When the nights are dark and long, in my heart he puts a song.
Telling me in words so clear, "Have no fear, for I am near."
 Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
 Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

3. Jesus loves me, this I know, though my hair is white as snow.
Though my sight is growing dim, still he bids me trust in him.
 Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
 Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — What Wondrous Love arranged by Ross Anderson, Based on Wondrous Love, a traditional American folk hymn

Gospel Reading — Luke 15:1-3, 13-24

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

When he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

Sermon — "QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING LENT"

1. IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME FOR A PARTY?

Since I'm going to be here both today and next Sunday, I thought I'd do a mini-series. Two questions we will ask during Lent.

Today: Is this the right time for a party?

Next Sunday: Why is forgiveness so hard?

So to today's question: "Is this is the right time for a party?"

There are people...and I expect you know some...who will celebrate anything. Friend calls you up and says, "Hey, you know that diet I've been on for the past 6 weeks? Well, I got on the scales this morning and I've lost 2 pounds! 2 pounds! So today I'm going to make one of those Black Forest cakes—you know...chocolate cake, lots of cherries, some cherry liqueur in it—and I'll get some ice cream—because tonight I'm having a few friends in. It's a beginning of the New Me and we're gonna celebrate it, and I'd like for you to come!"

Another friend calls and says, "You know how, last week, our septic tank backed up and...well, it wasn't at all nice? But we've had a guy out and it's all fixed now. So we want to have a party to celebrate. Tomorrow night at 7. Hope you can make it!"

And I haven't yet checked it out to be sure it's true, but I heard that there's a party here in Fergus next Thursday evening. Thursday evening at 7:30. I asked what's being celebrated as I thought it might be an early St. Patrick's Day event or something. "Nope," I was told, "it's just Thursday. Isn't that enough reason for a party?"

A while back, some friends of ours—5 couples to be exact—had been trying to get together for supper. But it was awfully hard to find a date that worked for everybody. So, one date would be set...and then another date...and another.

A supper-time date seemed impossible to arrange so we decided to try for lunch. I watched the e-mail messages. It worked for the other four couples. So I replied that I'd be glad to come providing that my aunt didn't die again.

Notes started to come. Is you aunt not well? How old is she? And so on. I couldn't believe it. There wasn't one of them who noticed the word 'again.'

In any event, we got together for lunch. And had a good time. Just finally getting the five couples together seemed sufficient reason to celebrate.

You know what I mean? Some folks will celebrate anything. Anything's an excuse to have a party. Remember Lewis Carroll's famous un-birthday party in his story *Through the Looking Glass*? Why restrict your life to just one party a year—on your birthday? There are 364 other days each year which are perfectly good days upon which to have a party!

On the other hand, there are folks for whom it's never quite the right time for a party. In response to the wedding invitation, they send their gift, but they don't go because...well, you never know how the marriage will work out. Give it 15 or 20 years and then, if all is well, have the party then. Now is not the right time.

Yes, I hear that she's graduating. But we'd better hold off having a party until we see whether she gets a decent job. Now is not yet the right time to celebrate.

For some folks, it's never the right time to have a party. And, to be truthful, it doesn't always seem the right time, does it?

The other day I was thinking about all of this, and a woman—I don't even know her name—said to me, "Do you have time for me to tell you a story?" I replied that I always have time for a story. So she said, "Well, it's something that happened in our family."

I said, "That's fine. Go ahead and tell me your story."

So she told me the following:

It all began seven years ago. Seems like a long time now, but I still remember it as if it were yesterday.

It was a Wednesday afternoon. I was preparing supper. Kyle came into the kitchen and sat down. After we chatted for a few minutes, he said he had something to tell me. I steeled myself. I knew what was coming. There had been too many family arguments—some with me, but mainly between Kyle and his father...mainly about what he should and shouldn't do...and about the fact that he didn't like to follow any rules.

"I've decided to leave home, Mom."

My eyes began to fill up. I knew there wasn't any point in arguing with him.

"When...when are you going, Kyle?"

He paused before he answered. He knew it would hurt.

"Monday morning, Mom. Bryson and I are going together."

My mind went into one of those time warps. I thought of the day—just a little over 16 years before that Wednesday—when I brought him home from the hospital in his little receiving blanket.

I thought of walking him to school on his first day. And the time he came running home, crying and bleeding—he had been in his first fist fight with another boy at school.

I thought of the music lessons he started and quit. I saw him in his little league baseball uniform. He was in Boy Scouts for a while too, and I remembered when he got his first badge.

He always had the same opportunities as his older brother, Martin. Martin's two years older. Martin did well at everything he tried but, for some reason, Kyle...well, Kyle has never been able to stick at much of anything...seems he easily became annoyed about something or other and quit. Always felt he couldn't measure up to what Martin had accomplished. Consequently, he and Martin never got along.

And then, that Wednesday, he tells me he's leaving home. The following Monday morning. A little over four days off. Only a little over 16 and he's leaving home. Leaving for God only knows where.

Well, I suppose it wasn't totally unknown where he was going. Because I know Bryson. Street kid. On the streets they call him Smirky. He's been picked up by the police a few times for dealing drugs. Kyle started hanging around with him a while back. He tells me Smirky is really a good kid, and so much fun...just misunderstood.

Yes, I could see where they were going. They were off to a place where kids live in hostels, or on the streets, or anywhere they could flop for the night. Places where there are lots of lost children around.

My mind sees them there. Kyle and Smirky and the others. Getting high. Passing out on somebody's couch. Scrounging for a slice of bread in the morning. What I see hurts, but there's nothing I can do to change it. I can only hope that someday...

That following Sunday evening, we have family dinner as usual. Just our family—Kyle, his father, his brother Martin, his little sister Martha, and me. A farewell dinner of sorts. I cook all of Kyle's favourite food. Turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, corn. Lemon pie for dessert. The conversation during dinner is limited. Beyond small talk, nobody knows what to say. And nobody really wants to say what they're thinking.

His little sister, Martha—she's seven—likes to draw. She had made a goodbye card. She gives it to him when we have our pie. It has some shapes she says are her and Kyle playing in the back yard, a building, some trees, some clouds. She can't print very well yet, but she has printed, in her mixture of big and small letters, "Bye, Kyle. Luv, Martha."

Kyle looks at the card, hugs his sister Martha, and gets up from the table. "I have to go pack," he says. I get up too. I walk to him and give him a hug. There might not be another time so what I have to say must be said now. "We love you, Kyle. We will miss you. Whenever you want, just come back home. The door will always be open."

His father gets up, shakes hands with him, says what I couldn't bring myself to say: "Goodbye, Kyle."

Martin stays sitting at the table. "Take care, Bro. Keep safe."

Kyle nods and goes off to his room.

I get up at 6 the next morning. I go to Kyle's bedroom door. I listen. When I hear no sound I gently open the door. As I was afraid of, he's already gone. I spot an envelope on the bed. It says "Mom" on it. I open it and read, "Bye, Mom. I love you. Please don't worry. I'll be alright."

For seven years...seven long years...we hear nothing. No letter, no phone call, nothing. I read the papers from cover to cover every day, listen to the radio, watch the news on television—on the one hand hoping for some news, but on the other hand hoping that I don't get any news of him that way, for if I do it will be bad.

Sometimes I feel really angry. Couldn't he take five minutes and phone? Couldn't he spend a few cents on a stamp and send a note telling us how he is? But then the anger gives way to other feelings and I'm just...sad.

My friends tell me that I need to get on with life. And part of me knows that. But what does that mean—get on with life? If it means holding my breath every time the phone rings, hoping it's him, I've become pretty good at that. If it means being startled every time I hear somebody at the front door, hoping it's him on the other side of the door, I've become pretty good at that.

His father has gotten on with life, I guess. At least, he seems to have. Oh, not totally, I suppose. It's just that he's not one to show his feelings much. A couple of times he has said to me, "I wish for your sake that Kyle would come home."

As for himself, I'm not sure he wants it to happen. There were too many bad words between them when Kyle was growing up, and a big part of him dreads the thought of Kyle coming home for fear it will just be more of the same.

Martin? Martin never speaks about his brother. He graduated from university, and has a wonderful job. He's also working on his doctorate, has lots of friends, is engaged to a really lovely young woman. Life is, as it has always been, good for Martin. But I can't take anything away from him...he has worked hard for all of it. And he's a super son.

I think about those two boys lots. They grew up in the same home. Pretty decent home, I'd like to think. Same parents. Same privileges. Same opportunities. It's as if one of them—Martin—walked out the front door of the house, and the other—Kyle—walked out the back. Why so different?

Martha? Martha used to ask when Kyle would be coming home. But she quit asking some time ago. However, she was only seven when he left, so her memories of him are getting dimmer.

As for me? For all these seven years I have kept waiting. And worrying. And praying. Always praying. Sometimes I was tempted to give up...but I knew that if I gave up I would just become hardened to life...bitter. And I didn't want to become bitter. So I have continued to wait. And worry. And hope. And pray.

She stopped her story at that point and looked at me. To be sure that I had followed everything to this point.

Then she looked off towards a window. Deep in thought for a few moments. Then she looked back at me and said, "There's more." I nodded, inviting her to continue.

"Just this morning..." She paused, looked down, clasped her hands, looked back at me and said, "Just this morning Kyle phoned. He says he's tired of living the way he has been and wanted to know if it's okay if he comes home."

I said, "Wow! That's terrific! Your prayers have been answered! After these seven long years, he wants to come home! What did you tell him?"

"I told him that, of course, he could come home." She paused again. "But I have a question." She stopped, waiting for me to respond. The question was obviously bothering her.

I looked at her. I replied, "Your question...what is it?"

"My question is this: I would like to have a party for him when he gets home. Do you think that would be a good thing to do?"

Now, if she asked you this question what would you say? Is this the right time for a party?

Hymn - MV 169 When Hands Reach Out Beyond Divides

1. When hands reach out beyond divides, and hope is truly found,
Each chain of hate will fall away and bells of peace shall sound,
And bells of peace, of peace shall sound, and bells of peace shall sound,
Each chain of hate will fall away and bells of peace shall sound.

2. When fear no longer guides our steps, and days of war are done,
God's dream for all shall live anew; our hearts will heal as one,
Our hearts will heal, will heal as one, our hearts will heal as one,
God's dream for all shall live anew; our hearts will heal as one.

3. When race and creed blind us no more, a neighbour's face we'll see,
And we shall dance the whole world round, for love will set us free,
For love, yes love will set us free, for love will set us free,
And we shall dance the whole world round, for love will set us free.

POEM — "Blessings" (by James Clarke)

Not being welcomed into this world is our
greatest wounding. A son seeks his father's
blessing to know he's cherished, a daughter

the grace of her mother's unconditional love to know she's beautiful. The rejected refugee, the homeless, the infirm and aged, often feel invisible, need to know they belong.

A blessing is akin to a lily opening on dark waters, or the sweet trace of trust in a small child's voice. Hidden blessings fill the clean mould of the everyday, make small temples of the fleeting moments—a nurse, at the bedside of an elderly Covid patient, smiling encouragements...the words "I love you" from the lips of someone you care for... or just a stranger who opens a door for you to pass first.

We are blessed when we stand astonished before the universe with its trillion stars spinning through the night, knowing we have the gift of life, are beloved of the earth.

Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus

Sharing our joys and concerns

- **Birthdays**
 - Allan Hons celebrates on Mon Mar 11th
 - Trudy Adsett celebrates on Thurs Mar 14th
 - Cody Rawn celebrates on Sat Mar 16th
- **Condolences**
 - We offer deepest condolences to the family of Glenn McGinnis who passed away Sunday, March 3, 2024. Please keep the family in your prayers. A Celebration of Life will be held on Sunday, March 10th, 2024 at Royal Canadian Elora Legion.
<https://www.grahamgiddyfh.com/memorials/glenn-mcginnis/5390363/>

Offering Invitation

Offering Hymn: VU # 541 Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures high and low;
Give thanks to God in love made known,
Creator, Word and Spirit One.

Offering Prayer

Minute for Mission

Hymn — VU 635 All the Way My Saviour Leads Me

1. All the way my Saviour leads me; what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt his faithful mercy who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in him to dwell,
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

2. All of the way my Saviour leads me, cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me strength for every trial, feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul a-thirst may be,
Gushing from a rock before me, lo a spring of joy I see.

3. All the way my Saviour leads me; O the fullness of his love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed, immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages, "Jesus led me all the way!"

Benediction

Somewhere, someone is kind when others are unkind...

Somewhere, someone is gracious and returns good for evil...

Somewhere, someone waits patiently in love...

**Somewhere, someone welcomes home another who has
wandered far away...**

Somewhere, someone gives a party for one whom, to the world around, seems undeserving...

Somewhere, someone is kind, provides calm in life's storms...

That someone could be you...or me.

May it be so! Amen.

Postlude — Day is Done (*Colleen Weber and Rev. Tom Watson*)

Household Prayer:

Wondrous God, I am in awe that you would choose to be born among us, revealing your divineness enlivening the ordinary things of my life.

I thank you for the gift of Jesus who walked among us, wept with the suffering and raged in anger at the injustices of his day. I thank you for the vision you etched in his heart, a fullness of righteousness for all the world.

I thank you that he called others to follow that they too might know the joy of new life. As Jesus' disciple, help me to walk in the way. Help me to carry the vision in my heart, however discouraged I get. Help me to see through eyes of faith, my life, my relationships, the world you so love. Help me day by day, in my words and deeds to reflect your light.

Through your wisdom and Spirit, may I grow in my capacity to love you, my neighbour, and myself, as you so love. Amen.

Tom

Welcomers: Lynne Lamb, Lorna Ziegler

Counters: Lynne Lamb, Mary Lloyd

Worship Schedule

March 17	Lent 5	Rev. Tom Watson
March 24	Lent 6 / Palm Sunday	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
March 29	Good Friday	Rev. Tom Watson
March 31	Easter Sunday	Rev. Jeff Hawkins