



**Celebrating
178 Years**



March 17, 2024

Melville United Church

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Melville United church
Sunday March 17, 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. And...a Happy St. Patrick's Day!

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.

- **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
- **Search Team Update:** We're busy preparing the "job description" for a long-term supply minister for Melville. Our thanks to those who have contributed to the process, and for the support, encouragement and prayers. All is appreciated! Confidentiality is critical for this process so we won't be sharing many details. Our work looks at the effort, support and caring that our congregation gives to our members and our community. Joyfully, it is abundant. So many people generously share their time, talents and treasures; living our mission and values. This is an exciting time for Melville! Change often comes with anxiety and discomfort. Melville's history shows we have the heart for it. ❤️ With thanks, 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 20th** 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, he will present selections from classic musicals from the Broadway seasons between 1971 and 1975. Come and enjoy selections from hit productions such as Chicago, A Chorus Line, Godspell, Stephen Sondheim's Follies, Andrew Lloyd Webber's Jesus Christ Superstar among others. Come and enjoy classic Broadway music such as "Day By Day", "Broadway Baby", "All That Jazz", "What I Did For Love" and many 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 Cancelled.** Due to low enrollment the sleepover event on March 22-23 will be cancelled.
- Join the **Watoto Children's choir** as they sing, dance, and share their stories of reformation and hope. Bethel Baptist Church, 675 Victoria Terrace, Fergus **April 3rd at 6.30pm**. Enjoy this **Free Concert** featuring music from the new album, "Better Days – There Is Hope". Promotional Video: [Better Days Watoto](#)

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

God has made a covenant with us!
No matter what, we are God's people!
 When we wander afar...
God patiently waits for us to come home!
 When we fail to make good choices...
God makes possible a new beginning.
 When life seems strange and unsettling...
God offers peace and renewal!

Hymn: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You VU 232

1 Joyful, joyful we adore you,
 God of glory, life and love;
 hearts unfold like flowers before you,
 opening to the sun above.
 Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
 drive the gloom of doubt away;
 giver of immortal gladness,
 fill us with the light of day.

- 2 All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain,
sound their praise eternally.
- 3 You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
wellspring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Source of grace and fount of blessing,
let your light upon us shine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.
- 4 Mortals join the mighty chorus
which the morning stars began;
God's own love is reigning o'er us,
joining people hand in hand.
Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward
in the triumph song of life.

Gathering Prayer (in unison):

We gather in this place in reverence before the wonder of life, the wonder of this moment, the wonder of being together. While we are here, may the secret chambers of our hearts be open, may we be held in the hollow of sacred hands, and molded into a people of forgiveness and grace. Amen.

Hymn: Dance With the Spirit MV 156

1. Dance with the Spirit early in the mornin',
Walk with the Spirit throughout the long day.
Work and hope for the new life abornin',
Listen to the Spirit to show you the way.

2. Move with the Spirit early in the mornin',
Move with the Spirit throughout the long day.
Work and hope for the new life abornin',
Listen to the Spirit to show you the way.

3. Sing with the Spirit early in the mornin',
Sing with the Spirit throughout the long day.
Work and hope for the new life abornin',
Listen to the Spirit to show you the way.

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 15:22-32

When the younger son came home, 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.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Sermon — "Questions to Ask During Lent"

Why Is Forgiveness So Hard?

Last Sunday, in our mini-series of "Questions to Ask During Lent," we asked: Is this the right time for a party?

Today's question: Why is forgiveness so hard?

As the basis for our thinking, I want to tie in two stories—the story I told last week about the boy Kyle who left home at the age of 16, and also the parable that Jesus told about the young man who went off to the far country...the story that we refer to as the *parable of the Prodigal Son*.

You will recognize, of course, that they are essentially the same story—just different contexts.

So to begin, let's recall the gist of the story I told last week. A mother has three children. Martin the oldest...Kyle, two years younger than Martin...Martha, seven years younger than Kyle.

Martin is a high achiever. Works hard. Focused. Does well at everything he puts his hand to.

Kyle is the opposite. Doesn't work hard. Not focused. Never sticks very long at anything. Doesn't like rules and restrictions, being told what he should and shouldn't do—something that, over the years, created all too many arguments...some with his mother but mainly with his father.

He also felt that he could never measure up to his high-achieving brother, Martin, so why bother trying.

Consequently there was an animosity, and a more or less armed standoff and between Kyle and both his father and older brother.

Where we began the story was with Kyle telling his mother that he was leaving home with his friend, Bryson—a drug-dealing friend known on the streets as Smirky.

For seven long years the mother agonized over her son—where he was, what was happening to him—but no news of any kind. For seven long years, she agonized, waited, worried, hoped, and prayed.

Where we ended the story was with Kyle phoning his mom to ask if he can come home. And we were left to consider the poignant question she asked: Is this the right time for a party?

Now, let's switch gears and bring in the parable that Jesus told. When Jesus told this story, it's clear that it pushed all of the buttons of those who heard it, and I suspect that it still pushes our buttons today.

The late Fred Craddock once told of his experience of preaching about this parable, and discovering that this was a story that, to use Craddock's words, "folks said needed fixin'."

I had been invited by a church in north George to preach on that text, and I did. But I gave it just as it was. There was a man who had two sons. The older son stayed home and worked and did his father's bidding. The younger son went away into a far country, lived among Gentiles apparently, fed the hogs, came into terrible times and decided to return home.

As he approached the house, the father met him, embraced him, kissed him. And the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am not worth being called your son. Make me a slave." But, instead, they brought the robe and the rings. They hired the fiddlers, they killed the calf, they had a party upon his return.

I thought that it was appropriate that I say to the people that God frustrates the proud and gives grace and forgiveness to the humble sinner.

After the service, my wife and I were taken to lunch by an attorney in that church and his wife. At the lunch the attorney said, "I really don't know whether to say I didn't like your sermon or I didn't like the text. But it's easier to say I didn't like your sermon because my wife doesn't like for me to speak against the Bible."

I said, "Well, you can here. What's your problem?" And he said, "It's receiving that boy back home and having a party for him."

And I said, "Well, what would you have transpire?" He said, "He should have been arrested. He broke the law, he ruined the family, lived with the Gentiles, ate with the pigs. Totally against the law. He should have been arrested."

I asked, "And given a mandatory sentence?"
He replied, "At least six years."

He was serious. I tried to make light of his comments but he would have none of it. So I decided the story needed to be fixed as it was running into problems.

One Sunday morning, about 9:20, I got a phone call from a church some distance from my place. The caller said, "Can you come teach our adult Sunday School class?"

I said, "It's Sunday already."

The caller said, "I know, but our teacher just called and he's ill. So can you come do it?"

I said, "Well, I need time to prepare."

"Oh no," the caller replied, "it's the New Testament. A parable. We're studying parables."

I said, "Which parable?"

She replied, "The Prodigal Son."

I said, "Okay," and, on the way there, I decided to fix the story. So I told it this way:

There was a man who had two sons. The older son stayed home, did his father's bidding, worked hard on the farm. The younger son took his money, wasted it in a far country, came into hard times, decided he should come home, confess his wrongs. When he drew near the home he heard music and dancing, so he called one of the servants and said, "What is this party going on?"

The servant replied, "Well, your older brother stayed here and worked, your father appreciates him, and he's giving him a party."

I couldn't even get myself straightened up in front of the class before some woman yelled from the back. "That's the way it should have been!"

So, having heard about Fred Craddock's experiences, I ask you: What is there about this story, the way Jesus told it, that just grates on us? Is it that it offends our natural sense of justice?

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato defined justice as *giving each part its due*. Is this the problem that the lawyer who tackled Fred Craddock has with this story...that the younger wastrel son gets far more than he's due, gets far more than is coming to him?

After all, he's the one who gets the robe, and the family ring, and the fatted calf feast, while the older one—the one who has dutifully slugged it out in the trenches all those years—he doesn't even get a bologna sandwich!

"Hey! This is wrong! That should have been my party!"

I recently read a quote. I can't remember who said it but it went like this: "Give us enough religion to keep us from hating, but not enough to make us love."

At its roots this Parable of the Prodigal Son is about love and forgiveness. In fact, some have argued that it should be called the Parable of the Loving, Forgiving Father.

So let's think a bit about that possibility as it applies to the story I told last Sunday—the story I adapted from the parable. In the story there's a mother, a father, the oldest son Martin, the younger son Kyle, and the still younger sister Martha.

Begin with Kyle. He was 16 when he left home. He's coming home now, after being away for seven years. So who he is now—now that he's 23?

Oh, we know who we want him to be. We want him to have changed, become more focused, more responsible. But is he? And why he is coming home? Does he really want to come home because he is dissatisfied and unhappy with the life he is living...or is it just that he realizes home would be better than what he's experiencing now?

That's what it says in the Prodigal Son parable. He finally says to himself, "Even my father's slaves live better than this!"

The mother. She just wants her son home. She wants the family back together. I'm sure she realizes that the waters will not all be smooth, and that feathers will still get ruffled from time to time. But it's her son. Her flesh and blood. The one she bore from the womb. She wants to hold that boy in her arms again. She wants him home where he's safe.

Her friends said that she needed to get on with life. But for her that meant holding her breath every time the phone rang, hoping it was Kyle. It meant being startled every time she heard somebody at the front door, hoping it was Kyle on the other side.

Still, at a deeper level, the problem was that a piece of her died the day Kyle went away, and she would like her grief to settle.

The father. Beyond telling his wife that he wished for her sake that Kyle would come home, he rarely mentioned Kyle. So does he wish him to come home for himself? Maybe a small piece of him does, but a bigger piece doesn't.

Because every time he thinks of his coming back through that door, he replays the many bad words they had when Kyle was growing up. Will it just be more of the same now? If the two of them are to get along, a lot of work will have to be done. A lot of work.

Martin. My sense is that he couldn't care one way or the other. He has his own life. He's 25 now, a university graduate with a great job. He's also working on his doctorate, has lots of friends, is engaged, planning marriage. Life is, as it has always been, good for Martin. He and Kyle never did get along anyway, and he's become used to Kyle not being around, so why would he want to spend any energy whatsoever repairing a relationship that never had anything to it to begin with?

Martha. Martha was only seven when Kyle left. She's 14 now. When a child, she liked Kyle as an older brother and never had any issues with him, but there was a great enough age between them that they didn't have all that much in common either. Now that she's 14, she's a teenager with a rapidly developing social life, her own friends, her own interests.

And, to be truthful, Kyle's been gone long enough that she won't remember that much about him. So the two of them will have to get to know one another. Notice I didn't say "get to know one another again." I said simply "get to know one another." Due to the age difference, they never really did know one another.

But the other three—mother, father and Martin—they and Kyle knew one another very well. And it's those three who will have to get to know one another again. All over again! For they're not the same people now. All have changed. So the memories of how things were before will have to be replaced with new ones if things are going to work.

And it's going to take work. On everybody's part. Mutual intentionality about finding new ways to get along.

The father may be reluctant to risk that. For the mother's sake, he will say it's fine for Kyle to come home, but as for himself he may well hope it's only for a brief visit and then he'll move on again. Truthfully, he may also feel some guilt over the part that he played in all those bad scenes years ago, but doesn't want to address that because there's pain in that too.

Martin, the brother? Well, I can imagine that when he hears Kyle coming home, he might say, "What? After all the trouble and heartache he caused? What's the matter? You gone soft, Mom?"

He knows the way the world works. You do good, you get rewarded. You do bad, they throw the book at you. You go letting people like my brother off with a slap on the wrist and what have you got?

One time Jesus was teaching. Right in the middle of the lesson the disciples raised their hands. Jesus stopped and said, "Yes. What is it?" They said, "Teacher, we hear what you're saying but what we really need is for you to tell us how to increase our faith. This other stuff you were talking about...it's just too hard. Increase our faith."

What had Jesus been talking about? "Even if someone sins against you seven times...no, more than that, 70 times seven...you forgive."

But they said, "No, no, what we need is for you to tell us how to increase our faith. What you ask is just too hard."

Forgiveness. Why is it so hard? Why is it so hard for the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son? Why is it so much easier for him to stand in righteous indignation, and lecture his father about the sins of his brother?

Why will it be hard for the father and the brother Martin to forgive Kyle? And, indeed, on the other side of the coin, why will it be hard for Kyle to forgive his father and his brother, Martin, for what he always saw as their faults when he was growing up?

The thing that Jesus constantly talked about was the restoration and maintenance of right relationships. And in many, many cases, that begins with forgiveness. When Kyle steps across the doorstep and back into the family home, if there's to be a restoration of right relationships it has to begin with forgiveness.

Why forgiveness is hard is that we generally misunderstand what it is. It's not forgetting what has been done. It's not condoning what has been done. It's not saying that whatever the hurtful thing that occurred is okay, and that we don't mind being a doormat and leaving ourselves open to it happening again.

No, that's not it at all. Forgiveness is

- deliberately choosing not to continue to nurse old hurts and wrongs
- deliberately choosing not to keep drinking the poisoned water that damaged our relationship
- deliberately choosing not to spend our energy on the past but rather spending it on finding a new way to make the present and the future better.

Forgiveness doesn't change the past...what it changes is the future.

Each of us has a past. There are a number of things about that past. Some was good. Some wasn't so good. The bits that weren't so good we call "baggage."

So...here comes Kyle up the walk. He's carrying two suitcases. Two suitcases. There's a label on each suitcase. One label says Clothing. The other label says Baggage.

He sets the two suitcases down on the front step...takes a deep breath...reaches out his hand and knocks on the door.

The door opens. When he steps inside will it be with both suitcases? Or with just one?

Right now is the time to make choices.

Two choices, actually.

Remember... Kyle is carrying two suitcases: Clothing and Baggage.

Question One:

You're the one who opened the door. Which suitcase would you have him bring in?

Question Two:

As Kyle comes through the door, are you willing to put down the baggage you've been carrying ever since Kyle left home?

Amen.

Hymn: Draw the Circle Wide MV 145

(refrain) Draw the circle wide. Draw it wider still.

Let this be our song, no one stands alone,
Standing side by side, draw the circle wide.

1. God the still-point of the circle, 'round whom all creation turns;
Nothing lost, but held forever, in God's gracious arms. *(refrain)*

2. Let our hearts touch far horizons, so encompass great and small;

Let our loving know no borders, faithful to God's call. (*refrain*)

3. Let the dreams we dream be larger than we've ever dreamed before;
Let the dream of Christ be in us, open every door. (*refrain*)

POEM — "One Small Act" (by James Clarke)

O Suffering God, who flung open
the gates of heaven and labours daily

in us to be born, take pity on us—
Your broken people prisoned in

time—who do not always hear the
whisperings of Your Spirit,

forget to be gentle with ourselves and
others. Remind us, Lord, that without

lovingkindness we wither like
grass where no rains fall. As Saint

Francis would say: even if we
beseeched You with a hundred hymns,

or uttered a thousand prayers
at church each Sunday, it would not

bring us quicker to heaven than
one small act of human kindness.

Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus

Sharing our joys and concerns

- Birthdays
 - Suzanne Flewelling celebrates on Mon Mar 18th

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: Bless Now, O God, the Journey VU 633

1. Bless now, O God, the journey that all your people make,
The path through noise and silence, the way of give and take.
The trail is found in desert and winds the mountain round,
Then leads beside still waters, the road where faith is found.

2. Bless sojourners and pilgrims who share this winding way,
Whose hope burns through the terrors, whose love sustains the day.
We yearn for holy freedom while often we are bound.
Together we are seeking the road where faith is found.

3. Divine Eternal Lover, you meet us on the road.
We wait for lands of promise where milk and honey flow.
But waiting not for places, you meet us all around.
Our covenant is written on roads, as faith is found.

Benediction (from an Irish Blessing):

May the road rise up to meet you!

May the wind always be at your back!

May the sun shine warm upon your face!

May the rains fall soft upon your fields!

And, until we meet again...

May you be held in the palm of God's hand.

Amen.

Postlude — The Irishman (tune "Home on the Range", lyrics by Tom Watson)

Oh, give me a home
Where the Irishman roams
And plays on his fiddle all day,
Where everyone's dancing
And there's lots of romancing
As the Irishman fiddles away!

(chorus)

Home, home over there,
On the Emerald Island so fair,
Where everyone's happy
'Cause the tunes are so snappy,
For that's how the Irishman plays!

O'er the shamrock-green knolls
The Irishman strolls,
A-fiddling and fiddling away.
From the break of each dawn
He makes music and fun,
To melt folks' troubles away.

(chorus)

Home, home over there,
On the Emerald Island so fair,
Where everyone's happy
'Cause the tunes are so snappy,
For that's how the Irishman plays!

Oh, the Irishman boasts,
"To St. Patrick a toast!
To his heart we forever belong!
So, with me, raise your glasses,
All ye laddies and lasses,
And, please, while I play, sing along!"

(chorus)

Home, home over there,
On the Emerald Island so fair,
Where everyone's happy
'Cause the tunes are so snappy,
For that's how the Irishman plays!

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.

Welcomers: Alison Rainford, John Cuming

Counters: Norm Porritt, David Gohn

Worship Schedule

March 24	Lent 6 / Palm Sunday	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
March 29	Good Friday 10:00am	Rev. Tom Watson
March 31	Easter Sunday	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
April 7	2 nd Sunday of Easter/Baptism	Rev. Marion Loree