



**Celebrating
178 Years**



July 14, 2024

Melville United Church

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Melville United church

Sunday July 14, 2024

Presiding: Rev. Tom Watson

Ministry of Music: Suzanne Flewelling

Prelude

Welcome

Announcements

Land Acknowledgement

Lighting the Christ Candle

Call to Worship (*adapted from poem "Watch" by Bartie Jones*)

Watch the flight of a seagull
as he glides in the sky above...

**Or follow the path of a piper,
in the sand on the beach by the cove.**

List' to the song of the robin,
in the morn as she calls to her mate...

**Or follow the streak of a comet,
as it burns through the night towards its fate.**

Watch as the flower breaks open,
from bud to its wide, smiling face...

**And your heart will be filled with wonder,
and your soul with the Creator's grace.**

For all of life's beauty and wonder...

Let us give thanks to God in worship.

Hymn —Let All Things Now Living VU 242

1. Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving
To God our Creator triumphantly raise,
Who fashioned and made us, protected and stayed us,
By guiding us on to the end of our days.
God's banners are o'er us, pure light goes before us,
A pillar of fire shining forth in the night;
Till shadows have vanished and darkness is banished,
As forward we travel from light into light.

2. By law God enforces the stars in their courses,
And sun in its orbit obediently shine;
The hills and the mountains, the rivers and fountains,
The deeps of the ocean proclaim God divine.
We, too, should be voicing our love and rejoicing
With glad adoration a song let us raise:
Till all things now living unite in thanksgiving,
To God in the highest, hosanna and praise.

Gathering Prayer (in unison):

Creator God who makes all things new, make our lives as buoyant and light as a summer morning. When we are slowly ploughing through old furrows, bring us a new purpose. When our hearts have grown cold and dry, help us reach for new springs of living water. And bring us grace for every moment of our lives. Amen.

Hymn — The Church is Wherever God's People VU 579

1. The church is wherever God's people are praising,
Singing God's goodness for joy on this day.
The church is wherever disciples of Jesus
Remember his story and walk in his way.

2. The church is wherever God's people are helping,
Caring for neighbours in sickness and need.
The church is wherever God's people are sharing
The words of the Bible in gift and in deed.

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — Morning Has Broken - Cat Stevens version (soloist Jo Anne Hall, accompanied by Suzane Flewelling)

Gospel Reading — Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of what the disciples had been doing in Jesus' name, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

So Herodias had a grudge against John, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom."

She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."

Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.

Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother.

When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Sermon — "Life in Our Town...I Promised"

Well, it's been a busy week in Our Town. Normal for this time of year, I suppose. People tending to their gardens, doing little painting touch-up jobs, keeping their lawns and yards looking good.

On his way out to coffee on Friday morning, Hank Vickers stopped for a minute in the driveway, looked at the yard, then went back in the house. "Just noticed the hedge, Mildred. Thought I should remind you that this time of year that hedge grows pretty quickly. When you have a bit of extra time, it wouldn't hurt to give it a trim."

"I'll put it on the list, Hank" replied Mildred.

"Well, all I'm saying, Mildred, is just don't let it get ahead of you. I don't like to see you have to work too hard."

"I know, Hank. You're always thinking about me," replied Mildred.

"It's what I'm here for," said Hank. "See you at lunch."

With that, Hank shut the door, climbed in his car, and went off to coffee at Al's Café with the rest of the old guys. Mildred just sat there for a few minutes, then went to the living room, laid down on the sofa, and picked up the book she just bought the other day—Mary Harrington's latest book, "For Better or Worse or How to Survive a Lengthy Marriage and Still Keep Smiling."

Now, over at the Flugel house on Friday morning, when Pastor Willie Flugel came downstairs, Etta couldn't help but notice he wasn't his usual cheerful self. He was pensive. Obsessed with something. So Etta said, "Want to talk about whatever's troubling you, Willy?"

"The trouble, Etta," replied Willie, "is that it's Friday."

Etta thought for a moment and then said, "Friday? Oh, I get it. Only two days until Sunday and the sermon's not in the bag. Right?"

"Right," said Willie. "But the problem goes further than that, Etta."

"And..." replied Etta.

"I have no idea where even to start," sighed Willie.

"Wait a minute. Don't you have the lectionary that gives you a gospel story and that's the place to start?"

"Yes, Etta. But that's the problem," said Willie.

"Oh, I get it...you don't like the story," replied Etta. "Tell me what it's about."

"It's about Herod having John the Baptist beheaded."

"Why'd he go and do that, Willie?"

"Because he promised his daughter, Herodias, that he'd give her anything she asked for. And she said she'd like to have John the Baptist's head on a platter."

"Ah. I can see why you don't like it, Willie," said Etta. "It's a dumb promise, followed by a bizarre request. But surely Herod didn't have to grant her request."

"I guess he felt he had to keep his promise, Etta. It was an obligation."

"Okay," said Etta. "But since you don't like the story, and since it's already Friday, and since you've only two days left to pull a sermon together, why don't you find something else to preach about?"

"Can't do that, Etta."

"Why?"

"Because the lectionary is the lectionary, and my job is to preach the lectionary. The congregation expects me to stick to business."

"Willie, have you forgotten this is The Church of the Reluctant Apostle? Their expectations aren't as high as you often presume they are."

"Doesn't matter, Etta. When I was hired here, I promised to do my job properly."

Etta thought for a minute and then said, "Oh, I think I'm starting to get the picture. Herod made a promise and felt obligated to keep it...even if the request didn't make any sense. In the same way, you feel obligated to preach on a text that doesn't make any sense."

"That's right, Etta. An obligation is an obligation, like it or not."

"Well, good luck then, Willie. As for me, I can hardly wait until Sunday morning, to see how you make sense of this."

Well, that's all the news from Our Town for this week. At least from the stories that I've heard.

Now, I have a confession. I'm with Willie Flugel. I don't like this story.

Actually, I have two confessions. The second one is that I've been at this preaching business for 50 years and, as far as I can recall, I've never preached about this text before.

50 years, and I've managed to avoid it. But sometimes, you just have to face up to things.

There are a good number of biblical texts that are difficult for us to understand. For example:

- Jesus curses a fig tree for not having any figs hanging on it...but it's not even fig season. How are we to understand that?

- Or Jesus telling Peter to go catch a fish, open its mouth, and in the fish's mouth he'd find two coins to pay his taxes with. My goodness, if it was that easy to pay taxes, I'd go fishing every day.
- Or when Jesus says that if somebody asks you for your coat, give them your shirt too. I know we're generous folks, but don't you think that's a bit over the edge?
- Or here's a good one: Whoever looks upon a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. Oh my...

See what I mean? Some parts of the Bible are just tough to understand. Fella starts preaching on those texts, people go looking for another church!

Which will explain why I've gone for 50 years without touching this story about Herod having John the Baptist beheaded.

Frankly, as Etta Flugel said, it's a bizarre request that Herod's daughter makes. Yes, John had criticized Herod for marrying his brother's wife. But Herod had some respect for John. He also feared him a little.

And yet here he is stuck with this promise he had made to his daughter at his birthday party—in front of all of his guests—that he would give the daughter anything she wanted. "Just name it, and I'll grant it. I'll even give you half of my kingdom! I promise!"

She didn't want half the kingdom. What she wanted was John the Baptist's head on a platter. And that leaves King Herod in a terrible bind. He doesn't want to grant the daughter's request, but if he doesn't he will be going back on his word, and nobody will be able to trust what he says from then on.

The only sense I can make out of this story is the obligation that Herod feels to keep his promise.

Have you ever been in a situation where you made a promise, and then something presses you not to keep it?

You're 5-years-old. For your birthday, your folks gave you a brand new bike. No training wheels. A full two-wheeler. You're going out to ride it on the sidewalk. Your mom says, "When you get to the corner, turn around. Don't cross the intersection."

"I won't, Mom."

"Promise?"

"I promise, Mom!"

So you ride to the corner and back a couple of times. Your mom watches, sees you're doing alright, goes back into the house.

The third time you get to the corner, your friend Patti is across on the other side. She's got a new bike too. Patti says, "Hi! Come on over! We'll ride over to the park together."

"I can't, Patti."

"Why?"

"Because I promised my mom I wouldn't cross the intersection."

"We won't be long," says Patti, "your mom will never know."

In that moment, you wish for all the world that you hadn't promised your mom. And yet you did. And yet still...is Patti right that your mom will never know? What will you do?

It doesn't seem like a big deal, maybe, but right there, at the tender age of 5, you're deciding what kind of person you'll become.

You're doing your annual income taxes. You get everything calculated and are somewhat astounded to see that you still owe over three thousand dollars.

You go back over everything. If you just slip three or four hundred bucks into your Charitable and Medical receipts, that'll bring the amount you owe down a bit. And after all, they don't ask for you to send in your receipts with the forms. Unless you get audited.

Yes, when you sign the form at the bottom, you attest to the fact that everything you've shown is accurate...but how are they going to know?

But here's the rub. You will know.

You promised your mom...

You promised on the bottom of the income tax form...

You said, "I promise."

Recently, I've been reading David Baldacci's latest book *A Calamity of Souls*. The story is set in 1968 in Freeman County, Virginia, where the dividing line between Blacks and whites is vicious.

Jerome Washington, a Black man, works for the Randolphs, a wealthy white man and his wife. One day the Randolphs are murdered, and because Jerome is there when the police arrive he is charged. He's beaten by the police who arrest him, and by the prison guards when he's thrown in jail. And the jail doctor refuses to treat him.

Jack Lee, a white lawyer, agrees to take Jerome's case. Everybody criticizes him for doing so. Even Jack's own mother. Here's a piece of dialogue between Jack and his mother.

"How any son of mine..." She looks at her husband, "You put him up to this, didn't you, Frank?"

Jack interjects. "I made the decision to represent the man, Momma. I think he's innocent."

"Innocent or guilty, this is going to ruin our reputation," says the mother.

"But you always taught me to stand up for what I believed in," says Jack.

Mother: "So what are you going to get out of this? No white woman will ever want to walk down the aisle with you after this!"

Jack: "You taught me to be kind and respectful to people. All people. You and Daddy take care of Black folks at his work, and their families, when they get sick or injured, or need food."

Mother: "Oh, that was just helping someone in need. I told you that. But different races are not meant to associate outside of situations like that."

Jack: "Then why encourage me to read all those books that said the exact opposite?"

He watched her strong, nimble fingers, which had nursed his childhood injuries and dried his little-boy tears, play erratically over the tabletop.

Jack continued calmly, "And when I became a member of the bar I took an oath to fight for what was right, not for what was easy."

"I promised."

It's an incredible story. During the trial, Jack is severely beaten, his office is torched, his older autistic sister, Lucy, is murdered. All of these are meant to exert pressure on Jack to give up defending the Black man.

But Jack persists. Why? One simple answer: I promised.

Two of the most powerfully profound words you and I will ever utter.
I promised.

Hymn: I, the Lord of Sea and Sky VU 509

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in deepest sin my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

(refrain) Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.

I have wept for love of them; they turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.

I will speak my words to them. Whom shall I send? *(refrain)*

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.

I will set a feast for them; my hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send? *(refrain)*

Poem — "The Road to Where" by John Core

What journey are they on today?

The people in the cars passing down my road.

Some flash by with total concentration on their destination,

Others meander along looking this way and that

Oblivious to the line forming behind them

Unmindful of the flaring tempers of those looking for a gap

To leap into and accelerate on their way.

Some are cautiously pulling a trailer
Their first trip with something more than a car or truck
An otherwise leisurely drive turned into a chore
As they search for that spot of ground to pause for the night.
A temporary home away from home.

We are a transient society
Not content to be at home
We travel down many roads like this
Always on the move
To find a new friend
To visit friends from the past
To re-affirm family ties
To search out new places, new sights, new sounds
To see what lies beyond the next curve or hill
Searching for the next spot to pause awhile and catch our breath.
These journeys take up much of the life we live
Do we meander enough and enjoy the sights?
Are we too impatient to take the more leisurely route?
The pauses are what will be remembered
The time with friends and family
The places explored and lived within
The time spent enjoying the companionship of those you love.

Not many who have passed down the road today
Have taken that pause
To relish the world around them
They're in too much hurry
To get where they think they're going.

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

- **Condolences**
 - We offer our condolences to the Ogilvie family on the passing of David Ogilvie's brother, Rob, on June 3rd.

Offering Invitation

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

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: **The Lord's My Shepherd VU 747**

1. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie in pastures green;
He leadeth me the quiet waters by.
2. My soul he doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make within the paths of righteousness,
Even for his own name's sake.
3. Yea, though I walk in' death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill; for thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.
4. My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.
5. Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me:
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.

Benediction

May the grace of God—deeper than our imagination...

The strength of God—stronger than our need...

And the companionship of the Holy spirit—

Steadfast and true—

Guide and sustain us today...

And all the days of our lives.

Go in peace!

Amen.

Postlude — Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore VU 563 performed by Rev. Tom Watson and Suzanne Flewelling

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: Barb Gregory and John Cuming

Counters: David Gohn and Chris Hopewell

Worship Schedule

July 21	9 th Sunday after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
July 28	10 th Sunday after Pentecost	Rev. Ruth Brown
August 4	11 th Sunday after Pentecost	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
August 11	12 th Sunday after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins