



March 30, 2025

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**Melville United church
Sunday March 30, 2025
Fourth Sunday in Lent**

Presiding : Rev. Tom Watson

Prelude

Welcome

Announcements

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

Call to Worship

To celebrate life's beauty...

To wonder at the mystery that gave us birth...

To find comfort for worries, hope for the journey...

To listen for the wisdom that guides and renews...

We gather to worship.

Hymn — VU #120 O Jesus, I Have Promised

1. O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
Remain forever near me, my Saviour and my friend:
I shall not fear the journey if you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

2. Oh, let me feel you near me; the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
But, Jesus, then draw nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

3. Oh, let me hear you speaking, in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will.
Oh, speak to reassure me, to hasten, or control;
Now speak, and make me listen, O Guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you,
That where you are in glory your servant shall be too;
And Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end;
Oh, give me grace to follow, my Saviour and my friend.

Gathering Prayer: Gracious God, once again we make our way through the annual season of Lent. We travel as people on a winding road—sharing our lives, our experiences, our hopes, and our fears. We learn from each other, we share the ups and downs of life with each other. And, together, we are made ready for being your people wherever we go. Amen.

Responsive Psalm — Psalm 91 (807 Voices United)

Sung refrain

And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand.'

You who dwell in the shelter of your God, who abide in God's shadow for life,
Say to your God: "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"
The snare of the fowler will never capture you, and famine will bring you no fear,
Under God's wings your refuge, God's faithfulness your shield.

Sung refrain

And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand.'

You need not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day;
Though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come.
For to the angels is given a command, to guard you in all your ways;
Upon their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash for foot against a stone.

Sung refrain

And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand.'

Because they have set their love upon me, I will not deliver them,
I will uphold them because they know my name.
When they call me I will answer,
I will be with them in trouble;
I will rescue them and bring them to honour,
With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my saving power.

Sung refrain

And I will raise you up on eagle's wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of my hand.'

Hymn — VU #225 We Praise You for the Sun

1. We praise you for the sun, the golden shining sun,
That gives us healing, strength, and joy,
We praise you for the sun.

2. We praise you for the rain, the softly falling rain,
That gives us healing, strength, and joy,
We praise you for the rain.

3. We praise you for your love, your patient, endless love,
That gives us healing, strength, and joy,
We praise you for your love.

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — Lenten Carol by Marc Robinson

sung by the Melville choir and accompanied by Allison Cooke, cello

Gospel Reading: II Timothy 2 (selected verses)

Paul writes to Timothy, "Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

"Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth"

Sermon: "LISTENING FOR GOD THROUGH THE WRITINGS OF PHILIP GULLEY"

Philip Gulley is a Quaker minister and author, best known for his series of books centered in his charming, and also quirky, world of Harmony, Indiana, where Sam Gardner is the Pastor of the Harmony Friends Meetinghouse. Philip Gulley's stories are all church stories that delightfully portray the wonderful mix of people that make up any congregation.

There is the Friendly Women's Circle. The women in it aren't always friendly...and they have their regular power struggles over who controls the kitchen...but somehow they always manage to pull together enough to make the noodles for the church's main fundraiser, the annual chicken noodle dinner.

And there's Dale Hinshaw. Dale Hinshaw is against everything. Well everything, that is, that isn't his idea. He's the one who pushes the minister, Sam Gardner's, patience to the end of his pastoral rope.

I have been told that every congregation has at least one person who will try the minister's patience the way Dale does Sam's. I will not admit to having met anyone like

that during my career...however I have thought that a few people might have made a lot better Baptist or Anglican than United...and therefore mused about the possibility of the churches getting together and having something such as the annual NHL draft. You know what I mean: "I'll trade one seasoned veteran United Church person for 2 rookie Anglicans." Or something like that.

In any event, this morning, I invite you to listen for God in one of Philip Gulley's stories. It's from his book Home To Harmony and is entitled "Mutiny."

The Quaker religion began in 1647 and was based on the premise that God could be known directly by all persons. Quakers believed you didn't need a priest to approach God on your behalf, that you could approach God yourself. A kind of do-it-yourself religion. It was a radical concept at the time and was strongly opposed, mostly by priests who had made a handsome living approaching God on other people's behalf.

The Quaker fondness for self-sufficiency continues to this day—we would never think of hiring a plumber or electrician to work in the meetinghouse. Consequently, our meetinghouse toilet gets stopped up a lot, and when the furnace kicks on the freezer in the basement blows a fuse. Any suggestion to hire a professional to fix these problems is met with derision by staunch Quakers accustomed to standing on their own two feet.

Not hiring professionals become a test of one's faith. "We can fix that toilet ourselves!" and "If we all pitched in we could paint the meetinghouse together."

Except we never get around to fixing anything. As for painting the meetinghouse, when it gets mentioned during our church's monthly business meeting, Dale Hinshaw scoffs and says, "Well, I'll tell you one thing right now. Ever since they took lead out of paint, it hasn't been worth a darn. Used to be a paint job would last twenty, maybe thirty years, but not anymore. Why don't we have Pastor Sam drive up to Canada and buy some paint with lead in it, so it'll last."

I sit quietly, thinking to myself: This is why I went to seminary—so I could drive to Canada and buy lead paint.

The young mothers sit there, horrified, envisioning their children licking lead paint and suffering brain damage.

One of them raises her hand, timidly. "Isn't lead kind of dangerous?" she asks.

"Naw," Dale scoffs, "that's a government lie. The paint companies bribed Congress to take lead out so we'd have to paint our houses more often and buy more paint. It's a big racket. Lead never hurt nobody."

This is Dale Hinshaw at his finest, dismissing a whole body of scientific research in one fell swoop.

The mothers sit there, blinking and dazed. They come to church expecting enlightenment and meet Dale Hinshaw instead.

This is why our church never grows. Just when we've gotten someone committed enough to come to our monthly business meeting, Dale Hinshaw is honing his latest

conspiracy theory. It makes the new people leery about sticking around; they worry they're joining some kind of weird cult.

It happened again in October, when the toilet in the women's bathroom broke and needed replacing. Uly Grant offered to donate a brand-new toilet from the Grant Hardware Emporium. In a fit of new-convert enthusiasm, he even offered to install it.

Dale Hinshaw rose to his feet. "Well, Uly, you do what you want, but I think there's a higher principle involved here—something many of you probably haven't thought about—and that is the topic of these new low-flow toilets. They don't work. You got to flush 'em two or three times. Why don't I drive up to the city to a second-hand store and see if I can get us a used one."

The women began to murmur, ruminating about used toilets. Dale would buy the cheapest one, probably one from the men's room of an old gas station. It would be dark brown with rust. It would have cigarette burns on the toilet seat. The women grimaced.

Dale continued, "I tell you, the government's gone too far this time, telling us what kind of toilets we can put in our own homes. That ain't right."

Miriam Hodge spoke up, the picture of Quaker reasonableness. "Aren't the new toilets supposed to use less water, so we can better preserve our limited natural resources?"

Dale said, "Miriam, this ain't about water. This is about liberty. This is about freedom. They're starting with our toilets, then it'll be our guns, then it'll be the vote. You watch and see. No, I can't agree with this at all. It's time we took a stand."

Suddenly the installation of a toilet had become a political issue, a test of our patriotism, a challenge to the Bill of Rights.

The trouble with belonging to a religion founded on rebellion is that the spirit of rebellion is never exhausted. It just finds different things to rebel against. Now we had toilets squarely in our sights.

After the meeting was over, the women gathered in a corner, talking, their voices raised. I was standing with Uly. The women headed toward us. Fern Hampton emerged from their ranks.

"If we don't get a new toilet by next Sunday, the women of this meeting are going on strike," Fern declared. "No more pitch-in dinners. No more teaching Sunday school classes. No more serving on committees. No more noodles. You think about that."

Then, having fired their shot across our bow, they turned and marched away.

Mutiny. This was getting ugly. No more noodles.

I turned to Uly. "What are we gonna do?" I asked him.

He said, "Meet me at the back door of the meetinghouse tonight at ten o'clock. Don't tell a soul. Come alone. Bring your flashlight. Wear dark clothes."

I wondered all day what Uly had in store. Barbara and I went to bed at nine-thirty. She fell asleep. At nine fifty I slipped out of bed, pulled on my dark clothes, and grabbed my

flashlight. I walked the four blocks to the meetinghouse and stood at the back door, in the shadows.

A pickup truck, its headlights off, coasted into the meetinghouse parking lot and pulled up next to the back door. The driver's door eased open, and Uly slid out of the truck, noiselessly.

He motioned me to the back of the truck. There was a brand-new, low-flow toilet perched in the truck bed.

"Uly, it's beautiful," I told him.

"Shh!" Uly whispered. "Help me lift it out." We snuck the toilet into the meetinghouse and down the stairs to the women's bathroom.

Uly said, "Turn on your flashlight."

I flipped it on. It looked odd in there, with the subtle mingling of shadow and light. It felt wrong to be there—a violation of everything I'd been taught. Spurning the bright light of truth and hiding in the shadows. I felt guilty. I recalled Pastor Taylor admonishing us "to present ourselves to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed..." Now here I was, slinking around in the shadows of the women's rest room.

Uly said, "You hold `the flashlight; I'll put in the new toilet."

It was just about that time that Mr. and Mrs. Dale Hinshaw were driving past on their way home from her sister's house in the city. Dale and his wife had bought a cellular phone the week before and Dale wanted to drive to the city so he could phone someone from the car to tell them he was calling from the car. Halfway to the city, they phoned her sister to say they were on their way.

"Where you calling from?" she asked Dale.

"We're about forty miles out and heading your way," Dale replied. "We just passed the Little Point exit."

She said, "You sound funny."

Dale said, "I'm calling from the car." He said it casually, like it was no big deal.

"Dale's calling from the car," she yelled to her husband, amazed.

Dale showed them the cell phone when they arrived. They passed the phone around and marveled at it. Then Dale told them about the toilet controversy and how he'd had to stand firm against low-flow toilets.

"You have to flush 'em two or three times," he complained. They nodded their heads in firm agreement.

Now, Dale and the missus were on their way home. They were driving past the meetinghouse when Dale noticed a flash of light coming from the window of the women's bathroom.

He pulled to a stop. There it was again. Yes, a light. Someone was in there. Dale eased around the corner and into the church parking lot. A pickup truck was pulled up to the back door.

"Burglars!" he cried out. "Probably from the city."

Every bad thing that happened in our town was blamed on people from the city. Now Dale had caught them in the act. What a glorious day this had been! First, getting to stand firm for truth, then using his cellular phone. Now he had caught some burglars. He pulled out his cellular phone and dialed 911, the first time he'd ever done that. His hand was shaking; he could barely punch in the numbers.

A lady answered the phone.

"This is Dale Hinshaw. I'm calling from my cellular phone. I'm outside the Harmony Friends meetinghouse. There's a pack of burglars from the city in there, right now, robbing us blind."

Ten minutes later the Harmony police car pulled alongside Dale. It was Bernie Rogers. Dale climbed out of his car. He said, "Bernie, I'm the one who called. Right here from my cell phone." He showed Bernie his cell phone.

Dale continued, "It looks like we got some burglars in the meetinghouse. Why don't you go in and chase them out?"

Dale paused and looked at Bernie's considerable paunch.

"Anyway, chase 'em out as best you can. I'll wait for them in the bushes. When they run out, I'll knock 'em on the head with that stick of yours. Why don't you give that to me?"

Bernie handed Dale his nightstick. Bernie and Dale crept to the back door. It was unlocked.

Dale hid in the bushes.

Bernie opened the door, lumbered down the stairs and paused outside the women's rest room. He heard voices. Bernie thought he recognized one of the voices as Pastor Sam's. "What would the pastor be doing in the women's bathroom in the middle of the night? It couldn't be good."

He called out, "Sam, is that you in there?"

Uly and I froze. We were trapped.

I turned on the light and opened the door. There was Bernie, his hand resting on his pistol.

Bernie looked in at me and Uly. He said, "What you doing in here, boys?" He seemed almost afraid to ask. Putting in a new toilet, we told him.

"In the middle of the night?" he asked. "Using a flashlight and wearing dark clothes?"

I told him about Dale Hinshaw not wanting a new toilet and the women not making any more noodles.

"No more noodles!" Bernie said, alarmed at the prospect.

"Not a one," I told him. Then I asked Bernie why he was there.

He said, "Dale Hinshaw called us on his cell phone. He thinks you're burglars from the city. He's waiting outside to knock you on the head with a stick. Don't go out the back door."

I pleaded with Bernie, "Don't tell Dale we're in here. Go tell him there was no one here, and send him home. I'll see that you get a free dinner at our annual Chicken Noodle Dinner."

"It's a deal," Bernie said. We shook on it. Then he left and so did Dale. We heard them driving away. Uly and I finished putting in the new toilet, then went home and went to bed.

I saw Dale Hinshaw the next morning at the Coffee Cup. He said, "Well, you missed the excitement last night. There were burglars at the meetinghouse. Me and Bernie, we tried to catch 'em, but they had guns so we let 'em go. They ran out the front door and got away. We got a look at 'em though. They were from the city."

"Oh, my," I said. "It's a good thing you were there to help Bernie."

"I called him on my cell phone," Dale said. He pulled the phone from his pocket and laid it on the counter. "Aren't these something?" he marveled.

"Yeah, but I read somewhere they give you cancer," I told him.

Dale said, "No. Really?"

I said, "Yeah, it turns out the phone companies bribed Congress not to say anything about it, so they could sell more phones and make more money. It's all a racket."

Dale said, "Well, I'll be."

"Yep, that's what I heard," I told him.

Dale began to rub his ear and look anxious.

That was on a Monday. The next Sunday, Fern Hampton rose up from the sixth row during our prayer time and announced what a joy it was to have a new low-flow toilet in the women's rest room. She invited the ladies to come see it after worship, then invited them to make noodles on Tuesday morning.

All the men smiled, except for Dale.

I expected him to be angry. Instead, he raised his hand and asked for prayer. "I think I might have cancer of the ear," he said. "Think I got it from my cell phone. I'm going to the doctor this week. Can you pray for me?"

Dale's wife sat beside him, twisting her hands and looking anguished. I felt terrible.

In 1647, we Quakers, with high and holy hopes, launched an experiment in holy living, dedicated to the ideals of simplicity, reconciliation, and integrity. But after a while we forsook integrity and became mired in deceit. It is all the sadder because of our heritage. We come from a people whose word was their bond, and we profaned their memory with our indifference to truth. I was the worst of all.

I went to Dale after worship and confessed to lying about cell phones causing cancer. He sagged with relief.

"Well," Dale said, "as long as we're confessing, I think maybe I stretched it a little bit about low-flow toilets. Most of the time it only takes one flush."

We shook hands, reconciled with truth and one another.

No more trickery, I told myself. No more slinking around in the shadows. I'm going to present myself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed. I have a heritage, after all, a legacy to live up to. A straightforward past, with high and holy hopes of a forthright future.

Sharing our joys and concerns

Litany for Lent (based on the writings of Ann Weems)

The way through Lent to Jerusalem is cluttered...

With bits and pieces of our lives that fly up and cry out...

Wounding us as we try to keep on the path that leads to Life.

Why didn't somebody tell us it would be long and difficult?

But, in the midst of the clutter, the children laugh and run after stars.

Those of us who are wise will follow, for the children will be the first to kneel in Jerusalem at Easter.

Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus

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 — MV #173 Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands

1. Put peace into each other's hands

And like a treasure hold it;

Protect it like a candle flame,

With tenderness enfold it.

2. Put peace into each other's hands

With loving expectation;

Be gentle in your words and ways,

In touch with God's creation.

3. Put peace into each other's hands,

Like bread we break for sharing;

Look people warmly in the eye:

Our life is meant for caring.

4. Give thanks for strong, yet tender, hands

Held out in trust and blessing.

Where words fall short, let hands speak out,

The heights of love expressing.

5. Reach out in friendship, stay with faith
In touch with those around you.
Put peace into each other's hands,
The peace that sought and found you.

Benediction

When we leave this place, may God's peace be in each other.

May it echo in our lives...

In our words...

In our deeds...

In our moods...

In our dreams.

May we carry God's peace with us wherever we go...

And thus be a blessing to ourselves, and all we encounter.

Hymn — Go Now in Peace

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour ev'ry day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude

Let There Be Peace on Earth

Music by Sy Miller and Jill Jackson

Arranged by Mark Hayes

Welcomers: Doreen and Larry Broome

Counters: Phil Brown, Chris Hopewell

Worship Schedule

April 6	5th Sunday in Lent	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
April 13	Palm/Passion Sunday	Rev. Tom Watson
April 18th	Good Friday	Rev. Tom Watson
April 20th	Easter Sunday	Rev. Linda Butler
April 27th	Social Justice – Earth Day	