



September 28, 2025

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
Sunday September 28, 2025

Presiding: Rev. Tom Watson
Ministry of Music: Colleen Weber

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

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

Autumn leaves, autumn sky, autumn sun...

Reminders of the beauty that surrounds us in God's world.

Autumn leaves, autumn sky, autumn sun...

Reminders of light and warmth that surround us in God's world.

Autumn leaves, autumn sky, autumn sun...

Reminders of how things change, with each season bringing its own special character in God's world.

In all seasons we rejoice!

And give thanks for God's abundance!

Hymn — We Praise You, Creator VU 293

1. We praise you, Creator, in earth, sea, and sky;
Our Ruler, our Maker, our Sovereign most high.
Each new generation lifts voices in praise;
How good your creation, how gracious your ways!

2. Each springtime the blossoms bloom fragrant once more;
Each summer and autumn brings forth its rich store.
With witness compelling our praise and our prayer,
Creation is telling of your faithful care.

3. Your wondrous works teach us, Creator, to trace
The limitless reaches of your love and grace.
Your grace dwells among us, your love goes before:
From eldest to youngest we praise and adore.

Gathering Prayer:

Your creation, O God, is a gift to us. Time and again, you provide us with abundance. Time and again, you reveal your legacy of love. Time and again, we are blessed more than we can imagine. We gather in this place to give thanks. Amen.

Hymn — This Is God's Wondrous World VU 296

1. This is God's wondrous world, and to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is God's wondrous world; I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, God's hand the wonders wrought.

2. This is God's wondrous world: the birds their carols raise;
The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.
This is God's wondrous world: God shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass or mountain pass, God's voice speaks everywhere.

3. This is God's wondrous world: O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is God's wondrous world: why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing, let the heavens ring: God reigns, let earth be glad!

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — Where Charity and Love Prevail *Tune: "Christian Love" by Paul Benoit*
Arr. Albert Mendoza

Reading — Luke 16:19-31 *reader Alison Rainford*

Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

"Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.

"The rich man shouted, 'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'

"But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.'

"Then the rich man said, 'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.'

"But Abraham said, 'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.'

"The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.' "But Abraham said, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'

Sermon: "I Used to Be Somebody..."

As usual, in the parables that Jesus told, today's parable has a bare minimum of characters. He doesn't clutter up the stage with a bunch of extras; just the essentials. 3 people. A man who is very rich...a man named Lazarus who is very poor...and Abraham.

Well sure, it does refer to some angels who took Lazarus away when he died, and also to the rich man's brothers, but none of these really figure into the story. Even Abraham has only a brief walk-on part in the drama. The central players are the rich man and the poor man.

And one wonders why the rich man isn't given a name but the poor man is—Lazarus. That's certainly not the way it happens in real life. Remember that TV show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, narrated by Robin Leach. I don't remember anyone doing a show on the "Lifestyles of the Poor and Unknown." That's not the way it works. So why is this rich guy unnamed?

However, don't make too much of this because, in all the stories Jesus told, this is the only time he ever names any character. This one poor man—Lazarus. A name that means 'God helps.'

And you can hear the laughter in the background when Jesus uses that name. Because, given Lazarus' sad state of affairs, people would be saying, "If Lazarus means God helps, God was certainly doing a pretty lousy job of helping him!"

For, while the rich man, all dressed up in his purple finery, feasted sumptuously every day from sirloin camel, Lazarus lay at his gate—in agony, all covered with sores, and would have been glad even to have the leftovers from the rich man's table.

The pageantry and the peasantry of life depicted in two people! And between them lies this great chasm—this great gulf that separates their individual human conditions—a gulf so great that never the twain shall meet.

And notice that when they die this great gulf is maintained. The only difference is that their fortunes are reversed. Now it's the rich man who's in agony, while Lazarus basks in the eternal comfort of the bosom of Father Abraham.

So the rich man pleads: "Uhh, Father Abraham, kind sir...over there on the other side...if you can manage it, I could use a little mercy here!"

And Abraham says, "Yes, what did you have in mind?"

"Well, I was thinking...would it be too much trouble to send Lazarus over, to dip his finger in some water and at least cool my tongue from this frightful heat I'm feeling?"

To which Abraham replies, "Well, that would be nice, I'm sure, but surely you see that big gulf between you and us—a gulf so big that, even if we wanted to, nobody can get from one side to the

other. I'm sorry. There's just not much we can do."

So then the rich fellow says, "Okay, look...if you can't do anything for me, then at least send Lazarus to warn my 5 brothers, so that they won't end up where I am."

And Abraham says, "You know something...they already have Moses and the prophets. Just the same as you had. If your 5 brothers won't listen to them, I frankly doubt they'd listen to any other messenger?"

On further thought...I doubt they'd even listen if somebody came back from the dead!"

And there ends the story—with this obvious reference to Jesus and the resurrection.

Well, look...where to go with this story? What's our point of connection with it? When I read the story this week, my focus was drawn to this poor chap, Lazarus. I began to wonder who he was...or who he had been before.

Was he always poor? Born on the poverty side of the tracks? Or, is it possible that, somewhere along the line, his fortunes took a turn for the worse and he tumbled to his current level?

I remember, a few years back, when a friend of mine, who had been fairly successful in his business, suddenly came up against more difficult times. And I remember him saying that one day he woke up to the realization that he was perhaps only about 2 days away from going on welfare.

And how quickly and easily it had happened. Could that be what happened to Lazarus—a former somebody who was now a nobody that people passed by without even seeing?

And then I remembered another story...a story told by my friend, the late Bruce MacDougall. The story was about Bruce's father.

His father had been a senior executive with the Canadian National Railway—somebody you might call a big wheel. He had traveled on royal trains with the Queen. He had represented the CNR in negotiations with the government. And done several other things of note.

Then Mr. MacDougall Sr. retired. And one day Bruce had to go with his father to the bank for something. As they were leaving the bank, after he did whatever business he had to conduct, he handed his card to the manager and said, "Here's my card. I used to be somebody...once."

As he told that story, Bruce's voice broke at the memory of his father saying, "I used to be somebody...once."

I wonder...did this fellow Lazarus used to be somebody once? Did he at some time count for more than he seems to now, as he lies at the rich man's gate? Is it only the fellow in the mansion who is somebody? And why is there this gulf that separates the somebodies from the nobodies?

You see, the truth is that all of us—every last one of us—has felt, at some time or another, like we're nobody...or like we used to be somebody but aren't now.

And what do we need then? You know. Surely you know. We need a connection. We need to keep in touch. We need to think that we still matter, that somebody somewhere will still take us in, love us, keep us whole.

I think God dreams of that kind of world. Where there is no gulf between the somebodies and the nobodies. Where everybody is a somebody. Not only once upon a time, but always. And I think that's why Jesus told this story—because of God's dream for a world where everybody has a place

to go, a place where they are loved and wanted.

I may have told this story before, but it makes the point.

In his novel *Plainsong*, author Kent Haruf tells of a teenager who, when she became pregnant, has been thrown out by her mother. So she goes to live with two old bachelor farmers named Harold and Raymond. Then, one day the father of the child she is bearing comes to see her, and she leaves with him for a while, much to the consternation of the two old bachelor brothers.

We pick up the story at the point where she returns to the house.

The car pulled up the old county road and stopped at the wire gate. The girl sat for a long moment, looking at the weathered old house. Inside, the kitchen light came on. Then the porch light above the door lit, and Raymond stepped out onto the little screened-in porch.

"Go on," Maggie Jones said. "You may as well find out."

"I'm afraid what they're going to say," the girl replied.

"They not going to say anything if you just sit here in the car."

She opened the door and got out, still looking at the house, and at the old man standing on the porch. Then Harold appeared beside his brother. The two of them stood unmoving, watching her.

She walked slowly, heavily, up to the porch, leaning back a little to balance her weight. In the cool, darkening evening, she stopped at the bottom step to look up at them.

The wind gusted up. The winter coat she wore was too tight now, it was unbuttoned over her stomach and the coat skirts flapped against her hips and thighs.

"It's me," she said, "I've come back."

They looked at her. "We can see that," one of them replied.

She looked up at them. "I've come to ask you," she said, "I wanted to ask if you'd let me come back here to live with you."

They watched her—the two old brothers in their work clothes, their iron gray hair short and stiff on their uncombed heads, the knees of their pants baggy. They said nothing.

She looked around. "It all looks the same," she said. "I'm glad of that."

She turned back toward them once more. She waited, then went on: "Anyway, I wanted to thank you. For what you did for me. And I wanted to say I'm sorry for the trouble I caused. You were good to me..."

She was halfway to the house when Harold spoke. "We can't have you leaving like that again," he said.

She stopped. She turned around to face them. "I know," she said, "I won't."

"We wouldn't want that again. Not ever!"

"No," she replied.

"That has to be understood."

"Yes, I understand."

She stood and waited. The wind blew her coat.

"Are you alright?" Raymond asked. "Did they hurt you?"

"No, I'm alright."

"You better come in," Harold said. "It's cold out here, outside in this weather."

"Let me get my box," she said.

"You come in," Harold said. "We'll get the box."

She approached the house and climbed up the steps, and Raymond went past her to the car. Then he turned abruptly, peering out into the dark, where the night was collecting beyond the horse barn and the holding pens.

"Harold," he said, "that girl never meant us no harm. That girl made a difference out here for us, and we missed her when she was gone. Anyway, what was we suppose to do with that baby crib of hers?"

Later in the house. "It wasn't you at all," she said. "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." She began to cry. The tears ran down her cheeks and she tried to wipe them away, but she couldn't keep up. She didn't make any sound at all while she was crying.

The two old brothers watched her uncomfortably. "Here now," Raymond said. "It's all right. We won't have any more of that now. We're glad you came back. Don't you mind now. It's alright."

He reached across the table and tapped the back of her hand. It was a clumsy act. He didn't know how to manage it. "Don't you mind now," he said to her. "If you come back here, we're glad. Don't you mind it now anymore."

An image of God's dream fulfilled. People caring for each other, loving each other back to wholeness. Back to that place where the "I used to be somebody" is still a somebody. The hand reaching across the human gulf and makes the difference.

That caring hand is for us too. The caring hand that links us one to another as human beings. The comforting hand that reaches out to us in those times in our lives when we feel like we used to be somebody, and we long to be somebody still.

There's an old song that talks about a man who was once somebody and would like people still to remember that. A song from 1932. The era of the Great Depression. "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?"

Once I built a railroad, made it run,

Made it race against time.

Once I built a railroad, now it's done.

Brother can you spare a dime?

Amen.

Hymn — Take, O Take Me as I Am MV 85 *(verses 2 and 3 composed by Tom Watson)*

1. Take, O take me as I am.

Summon out what I shall be;

Set your seal upon my heart

And live in me.

2. Guide, O guide me when it's dark,
Speak the truth that sets me free;
Lift my eyes when hope feels dim
And live in me.

3. Hold, O hold me in your love,
Shape my soul with mercy's flame;
Write your promise deep within,
(*last line slowly*) And live in me.

Sharing our Joys and Concerns

- **Birthdays**

- Rachel McIntosh celebrates on September 28th
- Shannon Rawn celebrates on September 30th
- Bruce Lloyd celebrates on October 3

- **Anniversaries**

- Dennis and Edith Hons celebrate on September 30th

Poem —Wings and Footsteps (by Tom Watson)

As summer drifts towards autumn,
migratory birds sense the shaping
of a new time and gather on wires,
fences, rooftops, awaiting the signal
for their annual flight to warmer skies.

The female hummingbird flits
from flower to flower, storing
energy for her long journey on
airstreams still unseen, to meet
her mate who left a month before.

As September unfurls its earthy
colours, the hum of a new school
year invigorates the air. Parents
gather backpacks, tuck inside
pencils, notebooks, along with
small hopes for their children's
futures.

Soon, birds will lift their wings,
and children will find their
footing, adapting to winds that
beckon—the quiet choreography
of wings and footsteps.

Prayers of the people and the Prayer of Jesus

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 — 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

With faith in the creative powers of life...

We lean into the future.

Seeking to live in harmony with all others...

Resolving to restore any broken relationships...

And being at peace within ourselves...

We go forward together.

May God's spirit of grace attend us this day and always.

Amen!

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, within, around, above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude —Brother, Can You Spare a Dime *by E. Y. Harburg and Jay Gorney (Colleen Weber & Tom Watson)*

Welcomers: Alison Rainford, John Cuming

Counters: Karen Smillie, Chris Hopewell.

Worship Schedule

October 5 th	Worldwide Communion	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
October 12 th	Thanksgiving Sunday	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
October 19 th	19 th after Pentecost	Rev. Tom Watson
October 26 th	Melville's Anniversary	

Council Meeting Oct. 1, Nov. 5, & Dec. 3. Please reach out to a Council member if there is a concern or question to be shared with Council.