



**Celebrating  
180 Years**



**January 11, 2026**

Melville United Church  
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**Melville United Church**  
**Sunday January 11, 2026**

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*Presiding: Rev. Tom Watson*

*Ministry of Music: Colleen Weber*

**Prelude**

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Land Acknowledgement**

**Lighting the Christ Candle**

**Call to Worship**

God calls...

**And we listen.**

Deep calls unto deep...

**And we listen.**

God calls us to new life—as people committed to the future.

**And we listen—to discern what that means for us.**

Come...let us listen for God together.

**Hymn — O God of Bethel VU 650**

1      O God of Bethel, by whose hand  
your people still are fed,  
who through this earthly pilgrimage  
have all your servants led:

2      our vows, our prayers, we now present  
before your throne of grace.  
God of past ages, be the God  
of each succeeding race.

3      Through each perplexing path of life  
our wandering footsteps guide;  
give us each day our daily bread,  
and shelter fit provide.

4      O spread your covering wings around,  
till all our wanderings cease,  
and at our God's beloved abode  
our souls arrive in peace.

### **Gathering Prayer:**

**O God of Bethel, just as in times past, you continue to draw us onward. You continue to speak to us in new ways, and call us into new times. You beckon us to new life, new joy, new hope for the future. Sometimes we need a bit of encouragement and assurance...so take us by the hand and gently lead us. In the name of Christ. 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.
2.    Let our hearts touch far horizons,  
so encompass great and small;  
let our loving know no borders,  
faithful to God’s call.
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.

### **Children's Time**

### **Ministry of Music — Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit by Roberta Rowland-Raybold**

#### **Readings reader Lara Johnston:**

#### **Matthew 5:1-5**

Seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him. And he taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

#### **I Corinthians 1:27**

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, to reduce to nothing things that are. So that no one might boast in the presence of God.

### **Sermon: Living in a World of Contrasts**

Aphorisms are pithy sayings that contain a general truth...generally in a witty way. Here are a few that a friend of sent to me the other day.

- Bills travel through the mail at twice the speed of cheques.
- The probability that the piece of toast will land jelly-side down is in direct proportion to the value of the carpet.
- Success always occurs in private and failure in full view.
- The colder the x-ray table, the more of your body is required to lie on it.
- 42.7% of statistics are made up on the spot.

and the last one...

- The severity of the itch is proportionate to the reach.

Thinking about that last aphorism, I must say that there are things in the current mix of life that itch, but my reach isn't quite long enough to scratch them.

The biggest itch is the tremendous contrasts I notice. While the wealth and power of some increases exponentially, the number of homeless people rises.

- Take the case of Elon Musk. He recently negotiated a salary of one trillion dollars. Does Musk's need for wealth have no bounds?
- Or take the case of Donald Trump. Does Trump's need for power and self-aggrandizement have no bounds?

In this tension between these two extremes that we hear Jesus' word from today's gospel. "Blessed are the poor, and the meek!"

Jesus was, of course, speaking to people of his time, and here we are in our time, but I think it's safe to say that to be poor in any age is no picnic. There's not much "blessed" about it. And the meek—if they're supposed to inherit the earth, I don't see any indications of it happening.

Still, I know that I'd far sooner be rich than poor. And when I walk down the streets of Guelph, and am confronted by a homeless person who wants a hand-out...well, it's uncomfortable. Because I don't know what to do.

On Tuesday of this week, as I walked towards the shopping carts at FreshCo in Guelph, a man sitting beside the store doors in his walker asked, "Do you have any spare change?"

I replied, "Just a minute," and proceeded to put a quarter in the cart slot. As I do so, and trying to decide what to do, these voices are playing in my head...some saying one thing, some another.

- He probably only wants money to buy some more booze or drugs.
- But how can you possibly know that?
- Perhaps he's homeless. If so, he likely prefers to live on the street.
- But how do you know he's homeless?

- People make choices and have to live with them.
- But how can you make that judgment about him without knowing his story?
- He's not your responsibility. It's the government's problem.

Back and forth the voices bounce.

The question is: how do I make responsible decisions? What does it mean to live as a Christian disciple, as a follower of Jesus, in a time of immense contrasts?

In order to probe this a little further, I want to offer us a story that I first heard several years back on Stuart McLean's *The Vinyl Café* on CBC. The story's characters are Dave and Morley, who run the Vinyl Café, and a man named Emil.

It was a beautiful spring. Just the right kind of spring for gardening. In fact, so right that even criminals got into it.

"I don't believe it," said Morley, standing on her front lawn, waving at her garden. "They took 2 ornamental cabbages, my hens-and-chickens, and the purple smoke bush!"

Each plant had been dug up with medical precision. Whoever did it had made off with everything, roots and all. "What should I do?" she said. "Should I call the police?"

When someone you love is upset enough to suggest calling the police over a missing smoke bush, you have two choices. You can...if you don't care how the rest of the day goes...say, "The plant police? We should phone the plant police? Are you out of your mind?"

Or you can muster as much affection as possible and say, as Dave did, "You stay with the plants. I'll call the police." Then you go inside and stand in the kitchen for what seems like an appropriate amount of time before you come back outside and say, "They are sending out a car. And if they see anyone walking down the street carrying a smoke bush they are going to stop them. On the spot!"

Dave considered saying more, but the important thing about lying successfully is not going too far.

That night, Morley said, "I'm going to get him!" She meant the thief.

It took her 3 weeks.

One night she woke up at 3:15 am and looked out the window. There was movement across the street. Someone was down on their hands and knees in the neighbours'—the Schellenbergers'—garden.

When you witness a crime in progress in the middle of the night, the only reasonable thing to do is to phone the police. Unless, of course, emotions like rage are stronger than reason. If

that's the case, you grab your housecoat, one of your socks, and one of your husband's socks, and race out the front door and across the street without even stopping to think.

Morley stormed into the Schellenbergers' garden. There the man was, on his hands and knees digging up Betty Schellenberger's gold flame spirea. The man heard her, stood up, whirled around and gasped.

He was bearded and dirty, looked frightened. He took a step towards Morley but she stood her ground. "Hello, Emil," she said, "I see you're doing some gardening."

The man—Emil—began breathing rapidly. And wringing his hands. "I am going on vacation," he panted. "I am going to Greece. Have you ever been to Greece? I am going on a charter flight because it will be safe, because they line the planes with lead. Before they didn't, the rays got you and that's how you got cancer. Did you know that, Morley?"

You see, Morley met Emil 3 years ago. He showed up one morning in front of her husband's store, wearing a pair of ripped pants and slippers, and stood on the sidewalk for 2 weeks.

"He's driving me crazy," said Dave. "He's driving business away.

"He's not driving business away," said Morley.

"I've asked him to go somewhere else," said Dave. "But he's back every day. He can't just stand around on the street like that."

"Why not?" asked Morley. And she looked at her husband carefully.

Eventually, Emil moved across the street. And for the past 2 years he has made his home in the stairwell next door to the Heart of Christ Religious Supplies Store and Fax Services. That stairwell has become "his place" in the world.

His only recreation seems to be to go and stand outside the Beaver Electronics store and watch television through the store window. He likes baseball games. He has a universal remote control so he can change the channel to the ball game, and raise the volume loud enough so he can hear the game through the store window.

The first time Morley gave Emil money—she gave him \$5—he said, "That's too much." And he gave her \$2 back.

Other times he wouldn't take her money. "I don't need it," he would say. "I already have enough."

One day he showed up at the Vinyl Café with a shopping cart full of books. Old library books he had bought for 25 cents each at a library sale. Bunch of used magazines he had picked up at garage sales. He was starting a portable library service. Dave bought a membership.

"You can only take out two books at a time, Dave," Emil said.

Dave picked out a couple of books to read. But then he forgot he had them. Until one day when Emil showed up at the store and said, "Did you know your books are overdue? You owe \$5 in fines." Dave promised he'd pay.

But Dave doesn't actually agree with giving Emil money. He has argued with Morley about this. "If he gets money, he buys cigarettes and lottery tickets. And I'm sure he loses the tickets. Why would you give someone money so they can throw it away on lottery tickets they are just going to lose?"

But Morley had stuck up for Emil. That's why she felt so let down that night as she stood on the Schellenbergers' lawn at 3:15 in the morning.

But instead of getting angry, she said, "Is that for your garden, Emil?"  
Emil said, "Did you know the moon is a hotbed of hostile alien activity?"

Morley wasn't falling for that. "I want to know if that plant is for your garden."

"Yes," Emil replied softly.

"Will you show me your garden tomorrow?"

Emil blinked, hung his head, and replied, "Yes."

And the next day, he showed Morley his garden. In one of the large concrete boxes on the street near Emil's stairwell, were Morley's hens-and-chickens and all the other plants.

On the last Saturday of June, a strange thing happened. Emil won the lottery. Not the big prize, but big enough. \$10,000. It took him several weeks to get the money, because he needed 2 pieces of identification.

Finally he got a social insurance number card in the mail, and went to the lottery office, and they gave him the cheque. He cashed it and put it all in his pocket.

The bank tried to convince him to open an account. They were afraid somebody would rob him. He said he knew what to do. And he walked out of the bank with \$10,000 in \$20 bills folded up in a burgundy vinyl pouch.

He took up his spot in front of the Heart of Christ Religious Supplies and Fax Services store, and that day he gave away \$7000. Not to just anybody who walked by. He gave it to people who had given him money when he needed it. He called them "his regulars."

Everybody tried to refuse. But Emil was persistent. He gave Morley \$500. Dave said, "You didn't take it, did you?"

"I'll give it back to him bit by bit," Morley replied.

"He'll just spend it on lottery tickets again," said Dave.

"Dust to dust," said Morley, "it's his money."

Dave decided to go and talk to Emil. He said, "I hear you're a big winner, Emil! Do I get my share?" He meant it as a joke. Emil took him seriously.

"No share for you, Dave. You still owe your library fine."

Dave and Morley aren't sure what happened to the money Emil didn't give away. They know he had a haircut and a shave. He looked great for about a week. So good that Dave didn't recognize him the first time he saw him.

He bought himself a portable battery-powered television and a chair, and all July he sat on the chair in his stairwell and watched TV.

One day, somebody stole the chair. And his TV was stolen too.

When Morley asked him about it, he said, "It's okay. The battery was going anyway, and it only got Canadian channels. You can't get cable on those small sets."

Now that his money has run out, Morley will slowly return to him—\$25 at a time—the \$500 that he gave her when he won the lottery.

And she's been buying up some flowers to plant in his concrete box garden. And at the end of September, she's going to buy some hyacinth bulbs, and plant them some night when Emil isn't there—knowing that they'll come up in the spring and surprise him.

That's if he's still there in the spring. But if he is, Morley won't mind if he comes to her house in the middle of the night and digs up some more flowers out of her garden. She'll even plant some extras, just in case.

Well, what's the lesson for us in this story?

- Seems to me it's a story that invites me to think about what we ultimately value.
- It's a story that invites me to think about who's poor and who's rich and who's not; who's actually blessed and who's not.
- It's also a story about how grace works, and how much of a two-way thing life is, as one life touches another.

And, as I try to make decisions about what it means to be a responsible Christian person living in a world of contrasts, in the background of this story, I hear Paul's words from this morning's epistle, from his letter to the people of the Corinthian Church:

For God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, to reduce to nothing things that are. So that no one might boast in the presence of God.

For no matter who we are—rich or poor, sinner or saint—we are all the same. Morley and Dave...and Emil.

And you and me.

And...oh yes...the guy outside FreshCo last Tuesday who asked me if I had any spare change. What do you think...should I have given him any money?

**Hymn — I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me      VU 575**

1. I'm gonna live so God can use me,  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna live so God can use me  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!

2. I'm gonna work so God can use me,  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna work so God can use me,  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!

3. I'm gonna pray so God can use me  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna pray so God can use me  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!

4. I'm gonna sing so God can use me  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna sing so God can use me,  
Anywhere, Lord, anytime!

**Sharing our Joys and Concerns**

• **Condolences**

- We extend our deepest condolences to the family of loan Shortt who passed away on January 4th Please keep the family in your prayers.

**Poem — At the Threshold by Tom Watson**

On New Year's Day, the old year  
waves and blows a parting kiss,  
and the new year toddles in,  
unsteady, full of promise.

We find ourselves standing  
at a threshold—that in-between  
place where memory settles  
and possibility stirs.

We recall the bright new births,  
and the grief that clung to us

like a heavy winter coat  
we couldn't shrug off.

We remember the cruelty  
caused by human hands, but also  
the courage and kindness  
that rose from the darkest places.

Drawing on our wisdom, and  
from all we've come to know,  
we imagine a different world—  
one based on a better story.

At the threshold, we grasp a  
belief in what's possible and, with  
new light to leads us, we choose  
to help write that better story.

### **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 — Dear God, Who Loves All Humankind VU 608**

1. Dear God, who loves all humankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
In purer lives thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.

2. In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
Beside the Syrian sea,  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow thee.

3. O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!

4. Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.

5. Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,  
O still small voice of calm!

### **Benediction**

Knowing that God loves all humankind...

**We embrace life with enthusiasm.**

Knowing that the love of God, and our love for all other around us, can keep us strong...

**We are encouraged to live with a spirit of generosity.**

Knowing that our faith in God provides a sure foundation for living...

**We live each day in hope.**

Now, as we go our separate ways, may the peace of Christ go with us.

**And remain with us this day and always.**

**Amen.**

### **Departing 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 — Light the World with Love** by Janice Kapp Perry (arr. Laurel Hunt Pedersen)

**Welcomers:** Doreen and Larry Broome

**Counters:** Chris Hopewell, Eleanor Johnston

**Worship Schedule**

January 18 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Rev. Linda Butler
January 25 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Rev. Felicia Urbanski
February 1 <sup>st</sup>	Black History Month	Martha Duncan
February 8 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany	Rev. Tom Watson

Council Meeting Feb 4, Mar 4. Please reach out to a Council member if there is a concern or question to be shared with Council.