



Celebrating 180 Years



February 22, 2026

Melville United Church

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Melville United Church
Sunday, February 22, 2026

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

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

Land Acknowledgement

Lenten Candle Liturgy *reader Marilyn and Paul Parkin*

Lent 1: Stepping Out on the Path

(the Christ candle is lit prior to worship)

One: The desert waits, ready for those who come, who come obedient to the Spirit's leading; or who are driven because they will not come any other way.

Two: The desert waits, ready to let us know who we are—the place of self-discovery.

Three: As we begin our Lenten journey with Jesus, as we join him in the wilderness, we give thanks for his life and example.

(the first purple candle is lit)

One: Let us pray:

All: God of all time, while we are grateful for Lent, for this season of reflection, we may also be fearful of the desert—the loneliness and emptiness and harshness. In our anxiety, we may not see the angels whom you send to comfort and to hold us. Help us to receive the rich blessings you offer as we walk with Jesus along the path to Jerusalem. Amen.

Call to Worship

God beckons us with the words: "Be still and know that I am God."

Let us then still whatever noises dwell within us and around us.

May we be conscious in every moment of our gathering that the Creator God is the life-giving energy pulsing through us.

For God is the energy that connects us to one another, and to all Creation around us.

Come...God is here among us in our worship.

Hymn — Love Us into Fulness MV 81

1. Love us into fullness, touch us with your grace;
Jesus, in your mercy, draw us to your face.

2. Love us into fullness, hold us in your care,
Cheer us with your presence here and everywhere.

3. Love us into fullness, and we will be strong;
Jesus, walk beside us, fill our hearts with song.

Gathering Prayer:

Holy God, once again we are drawn to this place of worship. We come exactly as we are—no masks, no pretensions—to receive the warmth of friendship, to be touched by your grace and loved into fulness. Be with us, Holy God. Amen.

Hymn — Throughout These Lenten Days VU 108, vv. 1,4, 5

1. Throughout these Lenten days and nights

We turn to walk the inward way,

Where, meeting Christ, our guide and light,

We live in hope till Easter Day.

4. And though the road is hard and steep,

The Spirit ever calls us on

Through Calvary's dying, dark and deep,

Until we see the coming Dawn.

5. So let us choose the path of one

Who wore, for us, the crown of thorn,

And slept in death that we might wake

To life on Resurrection Morn!

Children's Time

Ministry of Music — My Redeemer is Faithful and True *words and Music by Steven Curtis Chapman and James Isaac Elliott. Sung by Lillian Gohn*

Reading — Matthew 4:1-11 *reader Mary Lloyd*

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'God will command the angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again....it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on Jesus.

Sermon: A Trip to the Desert

This morning we're going on a trip. To the desert.

Perhaps you've been in a desert before. I haven't. But a few years ago I heard Alastair Summerlee—former President of the University of Guelph—describe his trek across the Kalahari Desert in Botswana, and it gave me a glimpse of what a desert is really like.

- There's the intense sunlight—so fierce that he and his companions covered themselves in mud to keep from burning.
- There's the way your senses sharpen—if a drop of rain falls, you can smell every plant for miles.
- There's the wildlife—strange and beautiful creatures, and the occasional rhinoceros or baboon you'd rather not meet.
- There are the cold nights, following the blistering days.
- And above all, there is the silence—deep, unsettling, almost absolute.

And of course, you travel light. No extra "stuff." Just water, and whatever the land gives you.

So if you're ready...let's go.

Oh yes...one more thing...we'll be gone 40 days.

Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. And for those 40 days he was tempted. Tempted, the story says, by the devil.

- Tempted to turn stones into bread. He was, after all, hungry. So turn the stones into bread to feed himself.
- Tempted to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Prove who he was: somebody who God would protect from all harm.
- Tempted to take control of all the kingdoms of the world.

Three main temptations: Needs, identity, power.

- Get your bodily needs fulfilled.
- Prove that you're somebody special.
- Seize the power. Be the king of the universe.

Each of those temptations touch on deep human desires, are part of the universal human experience.

Not that you and I are ever tempted about anything. For us, temptation is just an academic subject.

Oh...maybe this is what we think of when we think of temptation.

I wake up at 7 am. It's not a very nice day out, and I'm not feeling very ambitious, so I yield to temptation, pull the covers up, and say, "I'm not going to church this morning. I'm just going to

sleep in."

Trouble is...if I feel like that...I'm the minister! What happens if I don't show up?

You're at a restaurant, enjoying a nice meal, when the waiter arrives with the dessert cart—cherry cheesecake, lemon pie, pecan pie, raspberry torte, chocolate brownies, peach flambé, and half a dozen kinds of ice cream.

And you say, "Not me! I'm on a diet."

"Well...maybe just this once. It is the third Tuesday of the month, after all"

Then you turn to your partner:

"What do you think—should we share a peach flambé...maybe split a brownie...add a little ice cream...maybe some maple syrup...and, waiter, could you add some nuts...and a cherry?"

The subject is temptation and our thoughts go to being tempted to sleep in, or pig out on dessert. Trouble is, things get deeper.

Julia and I have been watching *Call the Midwife*. One midwife, Trixie, was drinking too much so she decided to join AA. And it went well for a while...until the relationship she was in took a bad turn...and there that bottle sits on her roommate's bedside table...and nobody else is around, so who's going to know?

See, the ante has gone up. Temptation isn't always lighthearted; sometimes it's about the places where we hurt.

And of course we tell ourselves: it's my life, and no one else will get hurt.

So let's wade out into the deeper end of the pool. If we were to draw a picture to represent the gospel story, I suspect we'd draw something like a wrestling ring. Jesus in one corner, and the devil—dressed in red long johns and carrying a pitch fork over in the other—and with Jesus saying, "Come on, give me your best shot!"

Two wrestlers set to go at it. Two combatants ready for the fray. Each knowing what the other is thinking, what the other is up to. Each trying to find the chink in the other's armour...with the devil all set to prey on Jesus' weakness.

Trouble is it isn't that way at all. There aren't two people in the ring; there's only one. One person. Jesus. And the wrestling isn't external, it's internal. And the fight isn't where Jesus is weak and vulnerable; it takes place where he's strong. That's where real temptation strikes—where we are the strongest!

Real temptation is never a measure of our weakness; real temptation is always a measure of our strength.

The stronger we are, the more capable we are, the more opportunity we have, the more power and influence we have, the greater will be our temptation.

A small person may have small temptations. But Jesus...well...

You're starving, Jesus. Just turn the stones to bread? After all, you've never worked a miracle before; so a good place to practice is out here in the desert, not when you're in front of a

crowd.

Something more intense is going on now. Just listen to it.

Go ahead and give it a try, Jesus! Jump off the pinnacle of the Temple. You won't be hurt. The Bible says God will protect you. You're God's man, after all. You won't even dash your foot against a stone. And just think, if you do that, people will believe who you are. What can be wrong with that?

Just look at all those kingdoms out there. They're all yours if you just say the word. And just think of the influence you can gain over the way things are run if all these kingdoms are in the palm of your hand. Justice. Fairness. Equality. Doesn't that sound like a good thing to do!

You get the picture? Jesus is tested at the point of what is reasonable, what is helpful, and what is good. In its true essence, temptation is not about being tempted to do something wrong. It's not about cheating on an exam, or telling a lie. It's not about whether anybody else is hurt by the mickey of gin we have hidden in the garage.

Temptation has to do with defining who we are!

In Jesus' case, it's about defining what he's going to do with his life. His going out into the desert takes place immediately following his baptism. He has not yet preached a sermon, nor healed any sick person, nor taught in any synagogue, nor even gathered up any disciples. Before he does any of that he has to face who he is at the core of his being.

Will he dazzle them with miracles? Will he turn all the stones in Palestine into bread so that everybody has enough food to eat? Will he seize political control of all the kingdoms of the world so that everybody has an equal shot at the good and decent life? He has the power to do all of that...so why not!

It's awfully tempting, isn't it?

Wouldn't the world run a whole lot better if you and I were in charge?

There is nothing quite as seductive as power and success!

What are you going to do with your life, Jesus? Or Fred? Or Amy? Or you? Or I?

Where are we willing to sacrifice our principles for the sake of something else?

Where are we willing to let our integrity go by the boards for the sake of something else?

We're not talking about being tempted to sleep in, or whether to eat that peach flambé and chocolate brownie.

We're not talking about struggling with our weaknesses.

We're out here in the deep end of the pool and it's more profound than that.

We're talking about struggling with what we will make of our lives.

So, while we're on our trip to our own deserts during this time of Lent...

we'll let the wind blow through our hair...

we'll listen to the voices that shape our lives...

we'll think about who we are, and what defines us...

and how we deal with the things that tug us one way or another.

And as we enter these deserts,
may we feel the wind on our faces,
may we hear the quiet voices that rise in the silence,
may we notice the things that pull us toward life
and the things that pull us away.

And for these forty days,
may we have the courage to listen
to the truth that waits for us in the wilderness.

Amen.

Hymn — Forty Days and Forty Nights VU 114. vv. 1,2,4

1. Forty days and forty nights
You were fasting in the wild;
Forty days and forty nights
Tempted, and yet undefiled.

2. Sunbeams scorching all the day;
Chilly dew-drops nightly shed;
Prowling beasts about your way;
Stones your pillow; earth your bed.

4. If temptations, vexing sore,
Flesh or spirit should assail,
You their vanquisher before,
Grant we may not faint or fail.

We Celebrate at the Table

The Invitation to the Table:

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them up to our God!

Let us give thanks to God!

It is right to give God thanks and praise!

The Consecration of the Elements

Sharing the Bread and Wine

People will come forward to receive the communion elements by intinction.

Sharing our Joys and Concerns

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

Hymn — O, Jesus, I Have Promised VU 120

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 battle if you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.
2. O 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. O let me hear you speaking in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O 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;
O give me grace to follow, my Saviour and my friend!

Benediction

We know that the kingdom of love is coming because...

Somewhere, someone is kind when others are unkind...

Someone shares with another in need...

Somewhere someone refuses to hate...

Somewhere someone returns good for evil...

Somewhere someone is loving everybody...

And each of us has the opportunity to be that someone.

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 — Steal Away (*African American Spiritual*) Performed by Colleen Weber and Rev. Tom Watson

Welcomers: Lorna Ziegler, Alison Rainford

Counters: David Gohn, Allan Hons

Worship Schedule

March 1 st	2 nd in Lent	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
March 8 th	3 rd in Lent (Annual Congregational Meeting)	Rev. Tom Watson
March 15 th	4 th in Lent	Rev. Linda Butler
March 22 nd	5 th in Lent	Rev. Tom Watson

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