



**Sunday June 28, 2026**  
**5<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost**

Melville United Church

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**Melville United Church**

**Sunday June 28, 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**

In the beginning was diversity..

**Puddle and creek, mountain and valley, dandelion and daisy, coyote and cow, you and me...**

And it was good!

**But from the beginning, diversity confused us. We created categories—races, ranks, them and us...**

So divisions came to be!

**God calls us, in this place, in all our living...**

To honour our diversity...

**To embrace everyone in the circle of God's love.**

In this spirit, let us worship God!

**Hymn: Deep in Our Hearts MV 154**

1. Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;

Deep in our hearts there is a common song;

Deep in our hearts there is a common story,

Telling Creation that we are one.

2. Deep in our hearts there is a common purpose;

Deep in our hearts there is a common goal;

Deep in our hearts there is a sacred message,

Justice and peace in harmony.

3. Deep in our hearts there is a common longing;

Deep in our hearts there is a common theme;

Deep in our hearts there is a common current,

Flowing to freedom like a stream.

4. Deep in our hearts there is a common vision;

Deep in our hearts there is a common song;

Deep in our hearts there is a common story,

Telling Creation that we are one."

**Gathering Prayer:**

Gracious God, it is good to be alive. To share life with each other in this wonder-filled and continually evolving universe. To be embraced by all that surrounds us. Be with us now, as we express our gratitude in this time of worship. Amen.

**Hymn: Jesus, Friend of Little Children VU 340**

1. Jesus, friend of little children, let me be one too;  
Take my hand and ever keep me close to you.

2. Teach me how to grow in goodness, daily as I grow;  
You have been a child, and surely you must know.

3. Never leave me nor forsake me, ever be my friend,  
For I need you from life's dawning to its end.

**Children's Time**

**Ministry of Music: 10,000 Reasons** Words and music by Jonas Myrin and Matt Redman,  
Arranged by Lloyd Larson, sung by Cheryl Lee and Colleen Weber

**Reading: Luke 19:1–10** Reader: Susan Barth

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.

**Sermon: The Sheep Detectives**

As you know, in 1973 I went back to school when I was 35 to study for the United Church ministry. In order to be able to survive financially I obtained a three-point pastoral charge. Very quickly I learned that being a minister isn't easy.

Two things:

You have to be careful what you do.  
You have to be careful what you say.

At that time there was a Catholic retreat centre at Port Burwell, Ontario called the Holy Cross Centre. I met one of the priests from there—Father Steve Kenny. Super guy. So when I went on vacation, I invited Father Steve to speak at one of the services while I was away.

When I returned from holidays, one man said, "Well, I've seen everything now! The idea...having a Catholic priest speaking in our church!" He did not at all appreciate it.

Thence the lesson for me: As a minister, you have to be careful what you do...you're bound to upset somebody.

Some of you are old enough to remember the 1977 movie "Oh, God!" It starred George Burns as God. I did a sermon on that movie. After church, the same man who had objected to my having invited Father Kenny to speak at a worship service, said to me, "That does it for me. That movie isn't even worth seeing, let alone do a sermon on it."

So I asked him if he had seen the movie. He scoffed: "Of course not!"  
I'm not sure how he knew I shouldn't be doing a movie about it if he'd never seen it. But be that as it may.

The lesson for me: As a minister, you have to be careful what you say...or what you preach about...you're bound to offend somebody.

So, given those early lessons, I realize I'm treading on dangerous ground this morning by doing a sermon on "The Sheep Detectives" movie. But...nothing ventured, nothing gained...or lost as the case might be.

By the way, a friend of mine saw the movie and remarked that he couldn't figure out how I could possibly do a sermon based on the movie.

Well, although the movie certainly isn't marketed as a religious film, there are strong religious parallels, and I'll get at those.

I don't want to spoil the movie for those who haven't seen it but I do need to say a bit about the it: "The Sheep Detectives" is a 2026 mystery. It features Hugh Jackman as the shepherd on a sheep farm, with various actors voicing the parts of the main sheep. Incidentally, all the sheep are computer-generated images, but they're extremely well done.

In the English village of Denbrook, shepherd George Hardy spends his spare time reading murder mystery novels to his flock of sheep. But one morning, George is discovered dead outside his trailer.

A reporter believes that George was murdered and encourages Tim Derry, the town's only police officer, to investigate. The problem here is that police officer Tim acts as if he wouldn't know a clue to a murder if he fell over it.

Here are some fundamental points from the plot:

- To this point, the sheep have lived in blissful ignorance, believing that death is only a fictional concept, and that everyone turns into clouds at the end of their lives. Finding George lying dead on the ground challenges their thinking.
- When faced with an uncomfortable situation, they can will themselves to forget. The exception is Mopple, a ram who always keeps his memories.
- And this is the main point: typically, lambs are born in the spring, so they discriminate against a lamb born in winter, and are upset because George takes special care of that winter lamb. George also takes special care of a loner called Sebastian—a black sheep that George rescued from a carnival, and who lives off on a hillside by himself. Turns out Sebastian was also a winter lamb.

In the story, the sheep are devastated by George's death and, believing the local policeman to be totally inept, the sheep decide to solve the mystery on their own. They are led by crime aficionado ewe Lily, the ram Mopple who always keeps his memories, and loner Sebastian.

One quite humorous scene exists in the movie. You know the old riddle: Why did the chicken cross the road?

In one scene Sebastian tries to lead Lily and Mopple across the road and into town where they can help solve the murder. Lily and Mopple are afraid to go across that road. As they stand there, a chicken strides up and calmly crosses over to the other side.

A couple of other things the movie invites us to examine are these:

1. What function does memory play in human life?

We can always do what the majority of the sheep do—intentionally forget things by closing our eyes and counting to three.

And that's often the way people handle trauma...refuse to face the things we are guilty of doing by burying our head in the sand...avoid life's hard truths...bury the things that hurt.

My mother was a master at that. If something was hurting her, she would bury it—push it down deep inside, refuse to talk about it.

But she paid a price for that. Because pain pushed down just comes out somewhere else.

Remembering...confronting even the painful parts...is essential for our growth, and also for healing. True healing requires facing things, not erasing them.

2. What do we believe about death?

The sheep's core belief is that we don't die; we simply become clouds. But this belief is challenged when their shepherd George is found dead. It's a new reality that frightens everyone but, true to form, most of the sheep simply will themselves to forget what they saw.

Mopple encourages them not to forget, but to keep remembering who George was, and in that way he will always be alive in their memories.

Here are some further religious themes from the movie.

1. In the end, the murder gets solved. By whom? By police officer Tim—the one who seemed not to be able to spot a clue if he fell over it.

The lesson in that is we should never write somebody off by what we think we know about them; there can be a whole lot more depth to them than we imagined.

The gospel admonition not to judge, lest we also be judged, comes to mind.

2. At a critical juncture, the flock find themselves in peril when they are attacked by a pack of dogs. Sebastian, the loner black sheep, rushes to the rescue and gives up his own life for the sake of his friends. Sebastian is the Christ-figure in the movie.

3. The shepherd knows his sheep by name, guides them through their lives, and at the end, sacrifices his own life for them. Then, even after the shepherd dies, his care lingers. The sheep interpret the world through what he taught them—echoing the biblical idea that the voice of the shepherd—Jesus—continues to guide even when unseen.

4. The value of the "least likely one"—the winter sheep—is underlined. The winter sheep—born out of season, overlooked, underestimated—is a parable of God's preference for the unlikely.

But when Lily and Mopple realize they need help from somebody small to do what they want to do, they bring in the wee winter lamb—the heretofore outcast—and that winter lamb plays a major part in solving the murder.

It's interesting to note that the winter lamb wasn't even significant enough to have a name until Lily and Mopple decide to include him; then, and only then, does Lily name him George—after their murdered shepherd George.

Think about today's reading about Zacchaeus. A despised tax collector. A sinner. But when Jesus comes to town and spots Zacchaeus up there in that sycamore tree, he invites him to come down, because he's going to stay at his house that day. The people who saw this grumbled: "He's going to be a guest at the home of a sinner!" But Jesus replies, "He too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

In keeping with the theme of the movie, Zacchaeus is a winter lamb. He's overlooked, dismissed by others, and yet he's the one Jesus chooses.

It invites us to examine our own thinking. Who are, to us, "winter lambs?" Those born out of season, or on the wrong side of the tracks, or are of some other religion, or race, or follow a set of principles that we don't understand?

Who are, like Sebastian, the black sheep? Those who are of the wrong colour? Those we wouldn't want our son or daughter to marry?

Last Sunday, here at Melville, was Pride Sunday. That service underlined how for too long a good many people were considered to be "the other." The movie "The Sheep Detectives" invites us to examine all of the preconceived notions we hold about other people and realize that they too—in the words of this morning's scripture reading—are people of Abraham.

Also, consider this: At last Tuesday's Guelph-Wellington Men's Club meeting the speaker was David Connolly, the Artistic Director for Drayton Entertainment. When David was born his legs were deformed. In due course, both legs were amputated.

What to do now? His mother took him to the Shriners Hospital. They said they couldn't do anything for him. The mother replied, "I'm not leaving here until you do something." They converted and expanded a closet, made it into a room for David, and he ended up living there for 5 years. During that time, two artificial legs were manufactured. In due course, he discovered that he could tap dance on those two artificial legs.

Today, David Connolly heads up the Drayton Youth Academy. The main theme is "inclusion." No matter who they are—lacking abilities, Downs Syndrome, whatever—they're included. One girl came to them in a wheelchair; recently they made a "dance wheelchair" for her.

Many of the young people who come to the Drayton Youth Academy have never found a place in society...because they've been put in the category of "the other." But there they're no longer "the other," they have a place.

That certainly challenges us to ask: Who do we consider to be "the other?" Why do we persist in separating people into "them" and "us?"

Now, where does the church fit into all of this? The movie also explores the concept of community as a flock. The sheep's bumbling, affectionate, sometimes misguided, teamwork becomes a humorous but sincere picture of the church:

In some ways we are flawed, but continually faithful.

Always willing to learn and discover together.

A place where every sheep brings their own gift to offer to the building of the community.

In the end, no matter what, we need to, as the sheep did in the movie—seek the truth in love, follow what seems wise and just.

I found that "The Sheep Detectives" gave me a lot to ponder. But good stories always do that. They push the boundaries of our imagination. They challenge our preconceived notions about other people. They invite us to see the world around us in new and different ways, to include all those "winter lambs" in our community of grace and caring.

The movie was like a parable. Jesus' parables always invited us to hold a mirror and find our place in the parable.

- The parable of the prodigal son: We, you and I, are the prodigal son, or daughter, who returns.
- The parable of the mustard seed: We, you and I, are the mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, the one that looks insignificant, but ends up growing into the tallest shrub.
- The parable of the Good Samaritan: We, you and I, are the Good Samaritan who should never be the hero, but is.
- The story of Zacchaeus that we read today: You and I are Zacchaeus. Sitting up in the tree. One who's looked down upon by others. And yet we're the ones to whom Jesus says he's going to stay at our house... because, no matter who we are, we're all sons and daughters of Abraham.

You see, in reality, we're all, in some way or another, winter lambs.

### **Hymn: Are You a Shepherd MV 126**

1. Are you a shepherd, good shepherd who leads us  
Safely through danger, while calming our fears?

Are you a father who shelters and feeds us,  
Shares in our laughter and wipes away tears?

Yes, you are shepherd, parent and teacher,  
But you are greater than all that we know.  
Holy and living, loving and giving,  
God, you are with us wherever we go.

2. Are you a mother, good mother who bears us,  
Comforts, protects us and helps us to rest?

Are you a teacher who daily prepares us,  
Challenging students to offer their best?

Yes, you are shepherd, parent and teacher,  
But you are greater than all that we know.  
Holy and living, loving and giving,  
God, you are with us wherever we go.

3. Great, gentle shepherd, forever beside us,  
Lead all your children in paths that are right.  
Great, loving parent, wise teacher, you guide us.

We want to love you and bring you delight.

Yes, you are shepherd, parent and teacher,  
But you are greater than all that we know.  
Holy and living, loving and giving,  
God, you are with us wherever we go.

## Sharing our Joys and Concerns

- **Birthday**

- Helen Bradley celebrates June 28
- Barbara Zirk celebrates June 28
- Rev. Marion Loree celebrate July 4

- **Anniversary**

- Lynne and David Lamb celebrate June 28
- Alison and Ralph Rainford celebrate July 4

### **Poem: Breathed Back to Life: A June Meditation** By: Tom Watson

On early June mornings, the  
flowers tilt and shimmer as they  
greet the long, bright hours;  
in the late evenings, frogs in the  
nearby watersheds croak  
a soothing bedtime lullaby.

Around us, the world spins  
in its frenzy; would-be rulers  
stroke their storms, but Nature's  
patient sights and sounds help us  
remember there is still good  
woven through the world.

Grace threads its gentle way  
through everything that moves  
or sings, or just stays strong  
in its deep green beauty...  
signalling that the mending  
of all that's broken is being breathed  
back to life.

Grace threads its gentle way  
through everything that moves  
or sings, or just stays strong  
in its deep green beauty...  
signaling all that's broken  
is being breathed back to life.

## Prayers of the People

### The Lord's Prayer

### 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: Amazing Grace      VU 266**

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed!

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

4. The Lord has promised good to me,  
This word my hope secures;  
God will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures.

5. When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we'd first begun.

### **Benediction**

When we leave this place, may God give us...

**For every storm, a rainbow...**

For every tear, a smile...

**And for every trial, a blessing.**

For every problem life sends, may God give us...

**A faithful friend to share.**

For every sigh, a sweet song...

**And for every prayer, an answer.**

Go in peace.

**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: Song For The Myra** Celtic ballad by Allister MacGillivray, Colleen Weber and Tom Watson

(everyone sing) "This Land is Your Land"  
This land is your land, this land is my land,  
From Bonavista to Vancouver Island.  
From the Arctic Circle to the Great Lakes waters,  
This land was made for you and me.

As I went walking that ribbon of highway,  
I saw above me that endless skyway;  
I saw before me that golden valley,  
This land was made for you and me.

(everyone stand to sing) "O Canada"

**Welcomers:** Alison Rainford, Mildred Perkin

**Counters:** Phil Brown, Chris Hopewell

#### Worship Schedule

July 5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup> after Pentecost	Rev. Jeff Hawkins
July 12 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup> after Pentecost	Rev. Tom Watson
July 19 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> after Pentecost	Rev. Linda Butler
July 26 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup> after Pentecost	Rev. Kate Keilty