

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Minister:

Music Director:

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Custodian:

Office Administrator:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Alexander Cann

Meg Chalmers

Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday May 10, 2020 ◆

Fifth Sunday after Easter

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

* indicates a time to stand, if you are able
congregational responses are in **boldface type**

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Sinfonia #3 in D Major

J.S. Bach

* OPENING HYMN – *God of Grace and God of Glory*

VU 686

*1 God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your power;
now fulfil your church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.*

*2 Lo, the hosts of evil round us
scorn your Christ, assail your ways;
fears and doubts too long have bound us;
free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days.*

*3 Cure your children's warring madness,
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton selfish gladness,
rich in goods and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.*

*4 Set our feet on lofty places;
gird our lives that they may be
armoured with all Christ-like graces,
pledged to set all captives free.*

*Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
that we fail not them nor thee.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: In these days of anxiety and gloom, any speck of light can offer us hope and raise our spirits.

All: Kindness and an act of remembering open us to the light of Jesus Christ; we are his hands and feet at work in our world. Blessed is he who comes and remains among us!

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, mothers and those who mother! Come, all who have mothers -

All: through birth, adoption, or fostering, or simply by being taken under the wing of someone with a kindly, mothering soul.

One: Come, those for whom today is difficult and confusing, those for whom today brings anger or grief.

All: Today we worship through our virtual music and prayer the God who loves us with a maternal love beyond anything we could ask for or imagine, beyond what we hope. We come to worship God.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

On this Christian Family Sunday, we think of mothers, thankful for those mothers who have loved and cared for us; grieving for mothers unable to love and care, and for those that we are unable to be with today because of our current pandemic.

We think of fathers who were caring and kind, always there, and others who are unknown, far away or unable to love.

We think of those in our lives of all genders and all generations, biologically connected, adopted, or befriended, in all the various relationships that make up our family.

We rejoice in the love we share with those to whom we are close and count ourselves blessed. We name the grief and anxiety of not being able to physically connect with family and friends, to receive hugs of comfort and joy. We ask God that you help sustain each of us in this separation, to let it not overtake us, to live in the hope of an end and return to families interacting together. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Sylvia Chitty

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: God, we pray that your Word is opened to us in ways that you would like us to think and reflect. Help us to hear the words of hope and direction so that we may live into the intent and purpose that you desire for us.

Amen.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Acts 7:55-60

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid

their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

One: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: The First Martyr - Acts 7:55-60

We go from Peter's overwhelming success in presenting his first sermon on the Good News of Jesus Christ to a dismal showing for Stephen. Stephen presented his witness. He told what he knew, what he had seen and heard. This crowd was not buying it. They took him out and stoned him. Stephen became the first martyr in the newly formed church of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus was not tolerated as a prophet amongst his own, neither was Stephen. This new spiritual change brought excitement and acceptance to some, but for others, it was both threatening and fearful. Stephen's execution stemmed from that fear.

Things were not going well for Christians. The initial excitement wore off and persecutions were on the rise. Christians began to scatter for safety. I can't imagine as a preacher standing up in front of you facing such an angry lot. Some of you might fall asleep, or raise your brows, thinking I've lost her, what is she talking about? But to take me out behind the church and stone me is probably, fortunately for me, not likely to happen.

How does one understand being put to death for telling the truth? It did happen to Martin Luther King Jr. It has happened in third world countries to priests and nuns and missionaries who advocated religious values in extremist societies. It has happened

in countries under terrorist regimes, but these are all extraordinary situations and do not normally reflect what Christian preachers face in the modern world.

Stephen showed much grace under distress. He prayed as Jesus did. Jesus prayed for his Father to take his spirit; Stephen prayed to Jesus to receive his spirit. And in his final moments before giving up his spirit, he too asked for Jesus to forgive his attackers. Both have died unjustly and in their final moments seek forgiveness for those responsible.

We, who carry the torch to continue making Jesus known, need to demonstrate that grace in our lives. Through our words of justice, healing and judgment we point to where we see Jesus at work in our world, and to how he is reshaping peoples' lives.

In the midst of that angry mob and unrelenting cries to silence Stephen, was a man who through the miraculous intervention of God, was to bring about new and vibrant life to the Christian movement. Saul, as he was known then could not have known what lie in store for him. We too, have no way of knowing how our actions, through little seeds of kindness, hope and witness will bring about the reign of God in ways we cannot foresee.

The message we take away from this is that God's love cannot be destroyed. It is poured out and seeks ways in the midst of whatever turmoil presents itself. We are free to follow God's ways regardless of the clash of common assumptions and practices in our society because we have the assurance that God's ways will and do prevail. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16

In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.

Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for
me, a strong fortress to save me.

You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake
lead me and guide me,

take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my
refuge.

Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me,
O LORD, faithful God.

My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my
enemies and persecutors.

Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast
love.

THE GOSPEL: John 14:1-14

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in
me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it
were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for
you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again
and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be
also. And you know the way to the place where I am
going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you
are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am
the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father

except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ

REFLECTION: Show us the Father! - John 14:1-14

Early years in Prince Edward Island, Upton Gospel Chapel, around age 7 - I remember Sunday mornings walking with my next-door neighbours the mile plus to attend Sunday School, and during the summers, Vacation Bible School. Those were the days of scripture memorization and learning the Catechism. "Let not your hearts be troubled" was one of the first that made its way into my head and my heart.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for life after he is gone. It is our first introduction to understanding that life continues beyond the

veil of death. We are warmly assured by Jesus that a place has been lovingly prepared for our arrival. Like a good host, we may expect an open door, outstretched arms, and a feast upon our arrival.

The disciples have already seen the confirmation of Jesus' identity in his resurrection, they are able to trust that what he lays out for them is a promise to all who will one day join him on the other side. He will be leaving them shortly, moving into a future they cannot see, but he will secure passage for them and make ready their eternal home.

Thomas' plea is one raised by all of us. "Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" Jesus says. I will be with you. I will show you the way. Jesus is the ultimate tour guide. He is intimate with the Father; he has been there before; he knows the way; he will guide us as if he were a Seeing Eye Dog, walking in front of us, protecting us and bringing us to where we need to be. Central to this belief is the relationship between Jesus and God. "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." "The Father and I are one."

Through Jesus, we have come to know God as never before. Jesus does nothing apart from God; he does not speak on his own; he does not perform works on his own; neither does he bring others into the kingdom of God on his own. When one believes in Jesus, one begins to believe in God with the same depth of trust and hope that flows out of the living savior.

We are living in a post Easter time period. We know the agony and the ecstasy that has transpired after this passage was enacted. Birth and death were mere bookends that contained the stories of

transformation brought about by Jesus' life. Like the disciples, we cannot see and do not know what comes next in the narrative of life.

As we stand at the precipice of a freshly dug grave, and our world teeters into despair, our hope lies in the portrayal by John of a bond of love and fidelity that cannot be broken by death. It remains a pillar for us who journey through the death of a loved one in the certain knowledge that there is more to come.

Here, in our congregation, there are those who are troubled by the fact that the gift of mortal life does not last. Jesus tells us all that in times of deep uncertainty, we are to hang our hearts on God and on him. Our hearts are troubled when our times comes to an end. Its brevity robs us of those we love. Yet ,we are uplifted by the promise of eternal life in one of God's many rooms. Jesus has shown us the Father. God has chosen not to be God without us. This is a love that has no end. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

Let us continue to support the work of our church as we are able.

OFFERTORY

★ 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.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (concluding with the Lord's Prayer)

One: In spite of how alone we sometimes feel, you are faithfully with us, O God. You are with our world.

Among our nations where terror and revenge root and grow, you are the way of reconciliation and peace. You are with us in the hands and hearts of the overworked medical personnel as they medicate and intubate the very ill; you are in their tears as they have to tell families their loved one did not make it; you are in the darkness of night as we each have our struggles with loneliness and anxiety, health and finances.

You are among those who seek control over pollution of air and water; you are the spirit of endurance and love. You are with those who fear abuse and harm every day, you are the hope for radical change.

All: In the spirit of Jesus, you call us to faithfulness.

One: You are faithfully with us, O God. You are with us when we go through tough times,
Giving teachers and stay at home moms patience with students/children to teach them in the knowledge and values of living in a just society.

In our everyday struggles with filling out tax forms, forms requesting relief of financial burdens, and health insurance questionnaires.

You are with us in giving the dying a loving presence and the words of peace when their own family members are not

permitted to be with them.

You are with the bereaved in offering them comfort and a time to grieve.

All: In the spirit of Jesus, you call us to faithfulness.

One: You are within the communities of which we serve and live, in the needs of the young and the seniors, those without food and shelter.

You are with us in our congregation of Melrose as we wait for this virus to recede and we face the challenges of the coming years; and as our national church works through new structures and new directions. We commit ourselves to working with others for Gospel values.

All: In the spirit of Jesus, you call us to faithfulness.

One: You are faithfully with us whatever our situation may be, Searching for our direction that will be in line with our gifts and talents; calling us to a way of compassion and sustained caring; reminding us that we have the ability to forgive and to apologize; steadying us when the storms of life threaten to engulf and overturn us.

All: In the spirit of Jesus, you call us to faithfulness

One: We pray for our community of Melrose - for Loretta and her family, for Jeff and his family, for Flo and her family, for Fred and Linda and Shari, for Vic and his family, for Cheryl's mother and her family. We pray for those outside

our church community who are impacted in many ways for our current situation. Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs.

For all those that we hold in our hearts we raise up to you for their safekeeping.
(Quiet reflection)

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be
done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those that
trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.**

* CLOSING HYMN - *Your Hand, O God, Has Guided* VU 274

*1 Your hand, O God, has guided
your flock from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page.
Our forebears owned your goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one church, one faith, one Lord.*

*2 Your heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest as to least;*

*they bade them rise, and hasten
to share the heavenly feast.
And this was all their teaching,
in every deed and word,
to all alike proclaiming:
one church, one faith, one Lord.*

*3 Through many days of darkness,
through many scenes of strife,
the faithful few fought bravely
to guard your people's life.
Their gospel of redemption,
sin pardoned, earth restored,
was all in this enfolded:
one church, one faith, one Lord.*

*4 And we, shall we be faithless?
Shall hearts fail, hands hang down?
Shall we evade the conflict
and cast away our crown?
Not so: in God's deep counsels
some better thing is stored;
we will maintain, unflinching,
one church, one faith, one Lord.*

*5 Your mercy will not fail us,
nor leave your work undone;
with your right hand to help us,
the victory shall be won;
and then, by earth and heaven,
your name shall be adored,
and this shall be our anthem:
one church, one faith, one Lord.*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: We are sent to be a blessing
As we ourselves feel blessed
By the God who loves us, and
Cherishes us.
Let us go now into God's world to live as
God's people caring for one another.

May God keep us
In our going out and our coming in
In our lying down and our rising up,
In our work and in our leisure,
In our laughter and in our tears,
Until we meet again. Amen.

POSTLUDE – Piano Sonata No. 23, Andante con moto

L. van Beethoven