

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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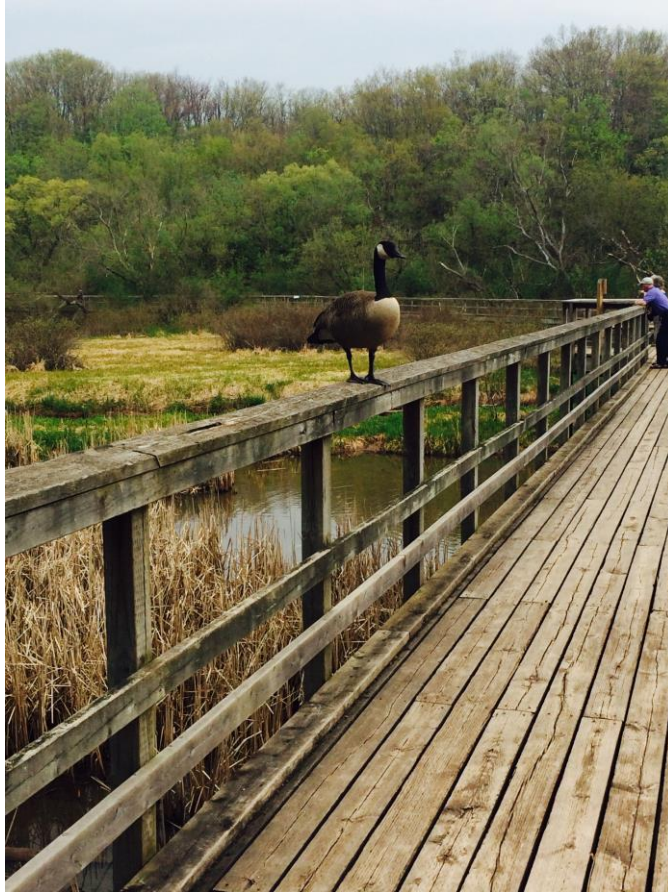
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Youtube channel: Melrose United Church Virtual Service



Minister:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Music Director:

Alexander Cann

Family Ministries Coordinator:

Meg Chalmers

Custodian:

Kevin Geluch

Office Administrator:

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday May 3, 2020 ◆

Fourth Sunday after Easter

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Invention No. 14 in B-flat Major, BWV 785 J.S. Bach

* OPENING HYMN – *The King of Love* VU 273

*1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine for ever.*

*2 Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.*

*3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.*

*4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.*

*5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!*

*6 And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Light reaches us from every opening. It shines through crevices bringing us hope.

All: Jesus brings light into our hearts to chase away the gloom and fear of darkness.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: From the comfort of our homes, we gather in spirit to worship.

We come in serenity, warmth and community.

All: Together we seek the connection of the Divine.

One: For generations, people have found sanctuaries to be sacred places.

All: We, create our sanctuary wherever we are and we, too, yearn for holy mystery in our lives.

Let us worship this awesome God!

OPENING PRAYER (together)

Holy One, we bring our undivided selves to worship this day. We bring our certainty and our doubts. We bring our despair and our hope. We bring our fear and our assurance. We bring our total selves into this community, that we may worship you as people broken yet seeking to be made whole. As we worship, may your Spirit bless and renew us through the promise of your resurrection. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Ian Brisbin

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: We have been called to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ, and we will do so enthusiastically. The Word of God will be read and reflected on. The stories of Jesus will be received by us in the midst of all we are facing in life. Good news when we need heart-filled hope. Now let us receive the Word of God.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

One: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: Awe and Wonder

The early days of the Christian movement were filled with excitement and wonder. People were hearing for the first time about the life of this extraordinary prophet, his teachings about God, his love for all and his life-giving miracles. They were hearing first hand about the incredulous news of crucifixion and burial turned into a triumphal story of God's vindication through resurrection.

The numbers were increasing daily. The Apostles now had the authority and power of the Holy Spirit to be able to carry out their own amazing wonders and signs as they continued the work of Jesus.

People were being helped, included, and given new hope. The Book of Acts describes the new converts as disciples who were being equipped to become spiritual leaders, empowered by the Spirit, to inspire radical and hopeful change in the lives of others.

It is a reminder for us, to grasp that we are all given the responsibility of ministers of the life and work of the church in a community of mutual support.

Countless Christians divested themselves of their wealth and property to share with their brothers and sisters in their new life. The connection is made of the birth of the church to the divine work of the Spirit. The response of the people is one of awe and amazement. With the pouring out of the Spirit, God is fulfilling the promises of the prophecy.

The four main thrusts of the early life of the church revolved around teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer. The authenticity of the church today is still understood as adherence

to those initial categories. Foundational, is our call to dwell in scripture, to explore the text as a means for nurturing our own faith.

Today, the teaching of scripture is mainly left to the pulpit where the faithful are limited to once a week reading and interpretation of scripture. In days past, scripture reading was part of the daily life in people's homes, usually a responsibility of the head of the house.

Devotion to fellowship ensured that the church members took the initiative to welcome the newcomers into all gatherings where they received encouragement and support. The breaking of the bread became more than straight fellowship of table. It involved the frequent sharing in the Eucharist where Jesus Christ is recognized in the sharing of the bread and the promise of the gospel is available through all the senses. Finally, the expression of community prayers was intended to bring an intentionality and energy that nourishes the group and leads to spiritual growth.

We have lost some of the wonder from those early days. Our practices have become mundane and devoid of the reality of the early excitement and passion. The Way, as it came to be known, rose out of the practices within the Jewish Synagogues. It was reinterpreted, modified and augmented by the new Christian experience. It became an enormous shift in faith and practice.

Eating together became a spiritual experience, not just in the breaking of the bread. It allowed for a fellowship in community that encouraged and supported one another while building up the body of Christ.

We have a picture of the early church by Luke that was somewhat idealized. We know from our readings, and modern-day experience, that it will not last as differences begin to creep in. As numbers were increasing and different leadership styles took over, emphasis was placed on divergent forms of worship and factions began to arise.

Each of us has been called to the task of discernment as a Spirit-led community to continually look for ways that we can embody Christ's church in the present. The work of our church determines how well we live up to that calling. If our actions heal, bring hope, and invite others to participate in God's work of transformation, then we are fulfilling our mission as Jesus' followers in helping people to find purpose and rebuild their lives.

The Christian life is about adjusting ourselves to the existence of a gracious God where believers have an authentic fellowship with God in a humbling awareness of God's divinity in the midst of our ordinary lives.

Our sanctuary, exists to promote and point out awe and wonder at the infinite wisdom and power of God. Only when we have shared this vision through our stories and observances, can we point beyond ourselves to the awesomeness of God. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff –
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.

REFLECTION: Drowning in Stress
Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd...Gentle, familiar, and predictable, only because we have heard it read so many times. How can we bring this beloved psalm to life to experience once again its richness, to hear it with fresh ears?

Idealistic, and out of sync with the life we lead in 2020, as it was in first century Palestine, the picture painted in our familiar psalm leads us into yearnings for comfort and hope amidst a troubled world. Its counter cultural message assures that in spite

of evidence to the contrary in society all around us, the peace of God is ever with us.

This psalm that most can recite all or part of from heart, is a stalwart for readings at Funerals. It brings comfort, confidence and trust from a God who creates, sustains and remains present with us – in life, in death, and in life beyond.

There is far more at stake here in the underlying words and message, for people who are living and coping with the everyday stresses or unusual chaotic times that our current pandemic has uncovered. The power and scope of this passage needs to be read, heard, and understood, primarily as a psalm about living. It challenges our usual way of thinking. It offers us a prescription for the moments when we are drowning in stresses that are outside our control.

One theologian says that this is a “God-given” cosmic integrity that funds and sustains our lives. Life comes to us as a gift, not an acquisition. We have absolutely no control. The promises offered in this psalm tells us that in this culture of consumerism and wants, the Lord God is all we “need.”

The psalm incites our imagination, begging us to leave the hustle and bustle of over-taxed living and sojourn to the countryside with its scenic pastures of rail fences, wildflowers and shade trees, and memories of leisurely picnics on soft, green grass.

We listen to the babble of the nearby brook with its side-by-side pools of still water, and swiftly moving currents. Perhaps, if we fish, this would enter into our thoughts as well. On our one-hundred-acre farm in Prince Edward Island, there was such a

brook at the back of the cattle pasture. With a simple branch for a rod, a line and fishing hook, and the ever-present wiggly worms, I would try to catch small unsuspecting fish. Either my memory is faulty, or I was not very good at it because I don't remember catching many and if I did, it was not likely me that took them off the hook.

What concern is the psalmist facing in his assertion that God is all he needs? Could he be facing a lack of money, sufficiency of food and drink, shelter, safety, to be able to pay his bills, or care for his family?

Stresses come to us from many avenues – bullies, foes, insufficiency, over work, looming deadlines, arguments, and misunderstandings, job losses, relationship breakdowns, unmet expectations, disease and death. We all walk through dark valleys, many times thinking we are alone. The psalmist reminds us that God is a powerful protector who guides us and comforts us. Our cup is not just filled half way, or even to the brim, our cup is poured out and splashes over the side filled with God's grace.

God grants our needs, gives us rest, and brings us restoration. God pursues us with goodness and kindness and meets us needs. We are invited to slow down our frenetic pace, to accept the healing and wholeness that is being offered. In total reliance we take what God gives, not as a means of settling with just enough to scrape by, but as a comprehensive answer to our physical and spiritual needs

The promises of God do not render our hardships and challenging moments nonexistent, we still walk through them,

however, the level of extraordinary stress diminishes and its capacity to hurt us recedes into the comfort that God offers.

The Lord is our shepherd. God is also our host. Throughout the changing seasons of our lives, we should never lose sight that we dwell in the house of the Lord always. Amen

THE GOSPEL: John 10: 1-10

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again, Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

One: This is the good news of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

All: Praise to you, O Christ.

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: Good and Compassionate Shepherd

We are aware of the fear and anxiety that is prevalent in our world.

We pray for the province of Nova Scotia in the aftermath of its abhorrent loss of life brought about by an embittered and angry shooter. It is too much to take in, and outside our capacity to understand.

We feel the horror of neglect, and abuse of our vulnerable amongst us.

We know the anger and despair of health professionals in trying to prevent deaths when rules for safety are ignored.

All: Christ who leads us, you are the inspiration for change.

One: Led by the Good and Compassionate Shepherd

We stand beside those who have lost their jobs.

We empathize with those whose dreams have crumbled to dust.

We encourage those who are struggling with mental health, loneliness and boredom.

We comfort those who are bereaved.

All: Christ who leads us, you are the inspiration for change.

One: We hold up our national United Church, its work locally

and internationally.

We give thanks for the reflective calm of our leaders and their desire to keep us safe.

We express our willingness to work and worship in a world of multi faiths.

All: Christ who leads us, you are the inspiration for change.

One: Led by the Good and Compassionate Shepherd

We gain confidence to speak out for change.

We are free to explore new and surprising ventures.

We appreciate and learn from our mistakes.

We rejoice in faith that is alive and questioning.

All: Christ who leads us, you are the inspiration for change.

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, 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 - *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy* VU 271

*1 There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in God's justice
which is more than liberty.*

*2 There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven;
there is no place where earth's failings
have such gracious judgement given.*

*3 There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that Christ has shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.*

*4 Troubled souls, why will you scatter
like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts, why will you wander
from a love so true and deep?*

*5 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: As you participate in the world outside your doors, listen

for the voice of our wonderful Shepherd,
who gave himself for us.
Share his love, in joy and friendship,
with open hearts, open minds,
open hands, and open lives
for all the world to see and enjoy.

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 – Impromptu No. 3, Op. 90

F. Schubert