

# ◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Minister:

Music Director:

Family Ministries Coordinator:

Custodian:

Office Administrator:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Alexander Cann

Meg Chalmers

Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday May 17, 2020 ◆

Sixth 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

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

\* OPENING HYMN – *Rejoice, the Lord is King*

VU 213

**1** *Rejoice, the Lord is King!*

*Your risen Lord adore!*

*Rejoice, give thanks and sing  
and triumph evermore:*

*[Refrain:]*

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
rejoice; again I say, rejoice!*

**2** *Jesus the Saviour reigns,  
the God of truth and love;  
when he had purged our sins,  
he took his seat above. [Refrain]*

**3** *God's kingdom cannot fail;  
Christ rules o'er earth and heaven;  
the keys of death and hell  
are to our Jesus given. [Refrain]*

**4** *Rejoice in glorious hope,  
for Christ, the Judge, shall come  
to glorify the saints  
for their eternal home:*

*We then shall hear the archangel's voice;  
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!*

#### LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: God came to us in Jesus, into our world of darkness and habitual sin to encourage us, to bring us hope, to make us aware of the loving Divine presence.

**All: We are forever a grateful people that Jesus brought this Divine Light so that we see beyond the trappings of this world into the fellowship of the Divine Spirit.**

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God of all time and all seasons,  
We come to you with the rest of our lives before us,  
Wishing to follow the way of Jesus.

**All: We worship alone in quiet, and we worship in crowds with noise, and we try to filter out competing voices, voices that urge us to turn our backs.**

One: God, you are patient and faithful. You watch and listen, you encourage and you place people and words in our reach so that we may remain committed and true.

**All: We struggle to follow your path, the one that leads to contentment, peace of mind, fullness of life, and with Jesus as our focus, we do not lose sight of our way home.**

One: Guide our footsteps, do not let us falter. Bring us in to your presence now even though we are apart.

**All: Fill us with your joy as we come to worship you.**

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

God, I believe is happy we are here today, gathered in the comfort of our homes, sharing this time of family worship. Each Sunday becomes a holy day of celebration, a remembrance of the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Worship is the way in which we honour our God through praise, prayer, reading of the Word and with our voices uplifted in songs of praise. We miss that part of our celebration and pray that God will bring us back together again very soon. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

◆ **SERVICE OF THE WORD** ◆

Reader: Tim Webb

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 17:22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines

made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

One: This is the word of the Lord

**All: Thanks be to God.**

REFLECTION: An Unknown God!

The summer of 1989 when I strongly felt my call to ministry, I began a love affair with religious and inspirational books. It was not my initial discovery of the thrill of learning, for that had already begun when I was four years old. But this specific time of exploring and discovering was euphoric. In that year, I read 126 books related to the subject of theology. It was an appetite that became insatiable to this day, however, now, much less intense, but still very satisfying. That is how the Athenians lived. They had a thirst for knowledge. They lived in the center of intellectual pursuits. They loved to read, or hear about anything new. It filled their waking hours.

Paul addresses these people in his first sermon to the Athenians. As he travelled in to their city, he noted their religiosity. Their hunger was evident in their portrayal of idols and their altar built to their “unknown God.” In spite of their great search, they remained empty and unfulfilled. They heard his teachings about Jesus and this was so very different from their pagan gods that they brought him before the high court to further explain.

Paul does not criticize or destroy their illusions of deities, he decides to build on it. He is quite adept at tailoring his message to his audience. He introduces them to their “unknown God.” He testifies to what he knows to be the truth and enlightens them about the incarnation of Jesus, his life, works, death and resurrection. In that portrayal they could see for themselves that Jesus was not just one of the everyday deities, he was in a class all his own. He was the one before which the whole world must give account. He is the one who sets the standards of righteousness and will judge the world accordingly. His claims then were disruptive as they are now.

From our golden towers today, we have created for ourselves our own golden images, we worship money, worldly success, and celebratory status, crowding out the claims of Jesus.

Paul’s arguments are presented with wisdom and logic. He indicates that humans are created with a yearning for God. “Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” The searching is innate to us; we instinctively grope for God in the darkness. “In him we live and move and have our being.” This great universe of ours “is not separate from God, but in God.”

We say, or more specifically, I say, there are many paths to God and it does not matter which one you take. Paul would not agree with this. He was no universalist. He was respectful of other religions, of pagan ways, but he testified to the truth as he knew it through his own experience. The quandary we struggle with is how do we speak to spiritual hunger around us and be able to offer our truth, and honesty in our experience of God without shutting out other ways to experience the holy?

Paul proves himself to be adept at listening to and answering what drives the people of Athens. He sees their creative potential, their art, culture and learning and he ties it all back in to God's great gifts to us in many forms. All good things that we enjoy come from God, our Creator. Around us lie the diversity and extraordinary creative endeavors, the human potential to be co-creators with God through the beauty of artistic expression. The more we reach and delve deeper, the more we make our connection with the one Unknown God, "in whom we live and move and have our being." Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 66: 8-20

Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.  
You brought us into the net;  
you laid burdens on our backs;  
you let people ride over our heads;

we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

I will come into your house with burnt-offerings;  
I will pay you my vows,  
those that my lips uttered  
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
I will offer to you burnt-offerings of fatlings,  
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;  
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.  
*Selah*

Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done for me.  
I cried aloud to him,  
and he was extolled with my tongue.  
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.  
But truly God has listened;  
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

Blessed be God,  
because he has not rejected my prayer  
or removed his steadfast love from me.

THE GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.



"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

**All: Praise be to you, O Christ**

REFLECTION: The Advocate!

LeDerick Horne told this story at a summit conference about growing up with a learning disability which was diagnosed in third grade. He was separated out from his class and put in a glorified resource room, which was really a teacher's storage closet.

His anxiety and self-doubt swiftly overtook him and he had to contend with feeling like a second-class citizen all his growing up years. He went on to graduate and become a speaker for people with disabilities.

At one conference in which he was a speaker, Carlos came up to him to tell him about his story. He, too, was learning disabled. He persevered through high school and one day attended a lecture in which LeDerick was speaking about how he had overcome his own disability. Carlos said it gave him the hope to carry on and he was also able to graduate and go on to college. The one who had experienced what it was like to be disabled became the Advocate for many others like him.

There are many such stories of others, and even some among you, who have taken on the role of Advocate to assist others to find their way.

In today's Gospel, John tells us about Jesus' words to his disciples before he is about to leave them. "And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you." "I will not leave you orphaned." Jesus sticks close to the disciples while he is in physical form, but once he leaves, he intends for them not to be abandoned. They will continue to receive an overseer, a comforter to be with them always. Jesus assures them that they will not be alone in their efforts to live a life shaped by love.

This discourse comes in the midst of a chaotic time for Jesus. He is nearing the cross, the last supper has been memorialized, the kiss of betrayal has occurred and, the feet have been washed with great humility. Jesus knows he has little time and he desires to leave his companions with hope.

This same Spirit that Jesus asks his Father to be with his closest friends, indwells in us and helps us to live in a world not dominated by tyrannical power (although this is becoming more of a reality) but one in which the influences of consumerism and greed dominate, and where love is not the overriding criteria for daily life.

The love to which God calls us does not intend class differences or a hierarchy, it calls us into a truth that all are part of this

generous love. God's love is not only true and freely given, it is the source of all life.

Anxiety without Jesus is a fact of life through all the ages not just with his chosen disciples but also with us today. Jesus' response addresses our needs as well as his immediate audience. He suggests that loving him and keeping his word is the essential calm for all. He reminds us that access to the Father continues through our adherence to keeping his commands to "love one another as I have loved you."

This advocate is not only a warm comfy feeling, it is one who stands up for us, a force that brings about action. Jesus is the Spirit of truth. In his healing, teaching and dying, he remains "in" us. We know this not to be an individual mystical union, but one in a community of faith. Jesus is present among us when we keep his commandments to love and serve one another. We see his presence in our action to and with a caring community.  
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: We realize, O God, that we are members of a worldwide family where there is injustice, children go hungry, and people of advanced years are neglected. We ask that you bring insight and action.

Where there is conflict, where innocent civilians suffer, where fear reigns, where military persons abuse their power. We ask that you bring reconciliation and peace. Where hope seems dead, and corruption is an accepted part of the system. We ask that you bring change and new ways. Where there is need, bring change.

**All: O Lord, enable us to realize our responsibilities and our opportunities.**

One: Give us empathy, O God to understand differences in personality and generations other than ourselves. Give us courage to face family conflicts and long outstanding grudges. Give us patience to listen to those in crisis and despair. Give us endurance to help the struggling, comfort the bereaved, and reach out to those who have suffered loss.

We pray for the leaders of worship and teachers in your name.

When we downplay our life of faith or the joy of worship, renew us.

Open our eyes to worthwhile partnerships in mission and beyond our boundaries.

Do not let us stay downhearted because of temporary setbacks and loss of self esteem.

Help us to take our failures as foundations for new endeavours.

Hold us safe with your all-encompassing love, no matter what befalls us.

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 - *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

VU 333

*1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
all thy faithful mercies crown.*

*Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.*

*2 Come, almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.*

*3 Finish then thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee,  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.*

#### COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: Jesus has taken the unknown God and made God known to us.

We go out into the world with the certainty that  
We are molded in the image of God - we are  
compassionate, loving, and kind and we bring this to the  
world who still does not know this forgiving, loving God.

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 - *Sonata No. 5, Allegro, KV 283*

W.A. Mozart