

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ **Sunday May 24, 2020** ◆
Seventh Sunday after Easter
Ascension of our Lord

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – “Passepied”, excerpt, from *Suite Bergamasque*

C. Debussy

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

* OPENING HYMN – *Crown Him with Many Crowns* VU 211

*1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.*

*2 Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.*

*3 Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a sceptre sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,*

*absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end;
and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of Paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.*

*4 Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds yet visible above,
in beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me:
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.*

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Before Jesus, we were lost and alone. Then he came to make
God's love known to us.

**All: He lived, died, rose, ascended and now his light shines
brighter to continue to illuminate our way.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Christ has risen and has ascended to the father, and yet
Christ is here with us today;

All: Christ's presence is a mystery.

One: God's kingdom does not depend on politics and power, but
is based on peace and justice;

All: God's kingdom is a mystery.

One: When our lives are tested with trials and suffering, we are
told to be glad and shout for joy;

All: This Christian life is a mystery.

One: Come, worship with us: search the scriptures, receive the word, and sing and move with the music.

All: Together, let us explore the mysteries of our God.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

God our Creator, you made humankind glorious in its diversity and complexity. We have not always acknowledged your will to make all people members of your human family. Help us to receive the words of Jesus who told us that in God's house, all are welcome. We pray for those, here and everywhere, those who are sick, isolated, lonely, disheartened and dealing with illness, addiction, or mental health problems.

In this time of worship, open our hearts and minds to reach out with love, justice and forgiveness as we center ourselves in your presence. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Margaret Duff

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: We are thankful for the gifts shared by everyone who is sharing in bringing your Word to us today. We pray that you will express your desire to us today through your Words of Life found in your Holy Book. Amen.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Acts 1: 1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to

heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

One: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: "The Moment of Change!"

Acts 1:1-11

The ongoing saga of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples had taken a drastic turn. Betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection and reappearances, had left the disciples conflicted and hungering for

more. The day finally came when all this was to change. “He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he was carried up into heaven.”

It was at that moment of divine favour that a change overcame the disciples giving them a new perception of the unfolding events. The resurrection alone was not sufficient to cement their authority. It was in this mystical taking up of Jesus that their new transformation began.

We had already heard that Jesus promised an advocate to be with them when he was no longer available. We know that this advocate/spirit is to come sweeping in to a large community gathering. We will hear that super sonic event next week.

Karl Barth, the great German/Swiss theologian says that Christ’s ascent into heaven is an unrivaled historical turning point. The resurrection left Jesus as the focal point, raised and alive. In his death, salvation had come to the world. But the ascension was the final mark of God, his glorification and raising to divine status without going through another human death experience.

The bystanders on that hillside were witnesses that Jesus has not only come from God, but Jesus returns to God. While we cannot hope to be drawn up without going through the portal of death, we can be assured that God is both our beginning and our end. The challenge for us is to keep our lives focused on God while here on earth.

Jesus was given forty days with his disciples to continue his teaching and their preparation for ongoing ministry. Scripture

tells us that they had great difficulty in understanding his message and didn't quite "get" what was happening. Nor did they understand his purpose.

They continued to hide out, desiring to go back to their fishing nets and their families, yet continuing to cling to Jesus. Their short sightedness prevents them from seeing the big picture. "Is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" We all have questions about the future. We want reassuring answers that all will be well.

That is one reason why we have such difficulty with this pandemic. We fear the stories that are played up in the media. We don't know what to believe because those who are considered expert are stumped by their lack of knowledge of how this virus will behave. They are literally learning as they go and shifting their opinions daily, based on new information as it comes in.

We do not do well with uncertainty. It affects our mental health, further exacerbated by the isolation from friends and family and normal routines. Some of us are not doing well at all. This is a time of waiting and hoping for things to return to normal.

Just as the disciples were waiting for something extraordinary to bring their lives to a climax, they were told to hold fast. Help was coming. A comforter would be given. That Holy Spirit which was unleashed in a whirlwind of power on Pentecost is available to all in this age. It is our silent partner through which God works to change the world.

The ascension allowed Jesus to pass off the Spirit to continue his work in the world. As we stand looking heavenward, waiting for

someone to do it for us, we are reminded that we have been given the commission to continue as the community of Christ, to bring this Good News of God's kingdom to those around us.

This mission as witnesses involves very important work for the kingdom. We are to visit the sick, advocate for justice, feed the hungry, house the homeless, pray, study, read the Bible, worship together and build up the church. This in-between time is a time for looking beyond ourselves to the care of others by ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Looking up towards the heavens, the disciples watch as Jesus rises, his humanity being taken into the divine heart of God. As we watch and wait in this in-between time in a constantly changing world, we experience oppression, violence, insecurity, suffering and death. We long for healing and wholeness. We look back and understand our value to God because of the "human one" who made his home with us in humanity. He was taken up, sustained, valued and held, before he will be returning home to restore our broken world. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 93

The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved;

your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring.

More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD!

Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

THE GOSPEL: Luke 24:44-53

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ

REFLECTION: “A Transfer of Power!”

Luke 24:44-53

There are many episodes of astonishment during the time of the disciples at Jesus' side, but none quite as daring as the lifting up into the heavens. The ascension is in a class of its own.

In my recollection of the church year, the ascension was never one of the highlights, yet it is crucial to the power of witness as the resurrection.

Immediately preceding the ascension, we are told Jesus opened the scriptures to the disciples. This is significant and certainly more than the ordinary teaching of the earlier days as they ministered together. The implication is of an emptying of knowledge and understanding passed between Jesus and his disciples so that they were equipped to their very core with all that he possessed. They are now in Christ's body and mind, a mystical union that transforms them into powerful emissaries.

Jesus is intent on helping his disciples, as well as we who look back, on understanding his life, ministry, death and resurrection in the scope of God's saving love. For us, Jesus, incarnated the love and vision of God in continuity with the much larger witness of all the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs. Jesus helps us to see that his life and ministry is continuous with God's presence and plan for humankind from the very beginning. Present with God in the beginning, he remains through incarnation and the risen Christ, to this day, at work with God in God's plan for all of creation.

In this moment in time, we have a vision of God's love that takes the worst that humanity can do and transforms it into a witness of God's redemptive love and power. Once again the disciples' eyes are opened and they are finally able to see the bigger picture,

the risen Lord, the Son of the Living God. They begin to understand that they are co-creators with God in unveiling this expansive redemptive love for all God's created order.

The idea that God's Messiah had to suffer and die has been a monumental stumbling block for many who could not accept less than a conquering hero. Yet, it has been ingrained and foretold throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. The loving God that we proclaim challenges our understanding of power. It takes the suffering and gives it meaning through the inclusive love that he portrays. Death does not have the last word. And therein is the paradox of power.

Jesus blesses all with the goodness and favour of God. This is a blessing that we confer through our church rituals at ordination, baptism, weddings, and funerals. The love of God expressed in Jesus has been transferred at the moment of ascension to those that Jesus equipped to continue his mission in the world.

This is the moment of transfer of power, from the ministry of Jesus to the ministry of the church in fulfillment with Scripture. Repentance and forgiveness in the name of Christ becomes the staple of Christian preaching.

There are patterns in the Old Testament for transfer of leadership to the next generation at the end of their ministry - Moses to Joshua, Elisha to Elisha and now Jesus passes on a share of his spirit to his disciples. In the end the disciples recognize that Jesus is worthy of worship.

Luke's focus is on the importance of the church as an instrument of God's continued action on earth. This is not the ending of

Jesus' story rather a beginning of the story of the church and its faithful representation of this Gospel of Good News. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

OFFERTORY - Alman
Chris Palmer, guitar

R. Johnson

★ 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 (followed by the Lord's Prayer)

One: Loving God, we wait for the world to change:

for understanding between warring middle-east nations;
we wait for the oil industry to be as concerned about spills
and emissions as profits;
we wait for a globally organized response to natural
disasters, and especially this world wide pandemic;
we wait for same gender weddings to be as accepted as the
weddings of straight couples.

All: We wait but we do not wait patiently. We will see what we can do to hasten change.

One: Loving God, we wait for the plight of suffering to change:
for persons who are kept waiting for results of job
interviews;

for patients who are left for hours without treatment in emergency departments;
for nursing staff who are abused by patients and patients who are abused by nursing staff;
for children who are ignored by teachers, and teachers who are treated harshly by students;
for conflicts within the family circle that are kept hidden when plain speaking or counseling is needed.

All: We wait but we do not wait patiently. We will see what we can do to hasten change.

One: We wait for the church to change, loving God:
when will all forms of ministry both lay and professional, coffee makers, and cleaners be seen as equally important?
When will the mission of the church members to the local neighbourhood be seen as essential?
When will all the church groups get the appreciation they deserve?

**All: We wait, but we do not wait patiently.
We will see what we can do to hasten change.**

One: We wait for change within ourselves, loving God:
we realize we judge ourselves more severely than we need;
we know we judge others sometimes without having all the facts;
we believe our spiritual side needs time, encouragement, and learning opportunities in order to develop;
we struggle to maintain a healthy diet, and to live a healthy lifestyle;
we are certain we could be more patient with those around us;
we are sure that there are leisure activities we might try out

and some we might give up.

All: We wait but we do not wait patiently.

We will see what we can do to hasten 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 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 - *All Praise to Thee*

VU 327

1 All praise be yours, for you, O King divine,

Your rightful glory freely did resign

That in our darkened hearts your grace might shine. Alleluia!

*2 You came to us in lowliness of thought;
By you the outcast and the poor were sought,
And by your death was God's salvation wrought. Alleluia!*

*3 O Jesus, let your mind within us be,
For you were servant that we might be free
And humbly stooped to death on Calvary. Alleluia!*

*4 Therefore you are, by God's eternal vow,
Most high exalted o'er all creatures now
And giv'n the name to which all knees shall bow. Alleluia!*

*5 Let ev'ry tongue confess with one accord
In heav'n and earth that Jesus Christ is Lord,
And God the Father be by all adored. Alleluia!*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: We are God's people. We belong in the world amongst those of friend and stranger alike. We are called to continue the work of Jesus Christ, reaching out to the vulnerable, offering words of comfort and hope. From wherever you are able, live and act as Christian people of the light.

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 – Variation 2, *The Goldberg Variations*

J.S. Bach