

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

86 Homewood Avenue ◆ Hamilton, Ontario ◆ L8P 2M4

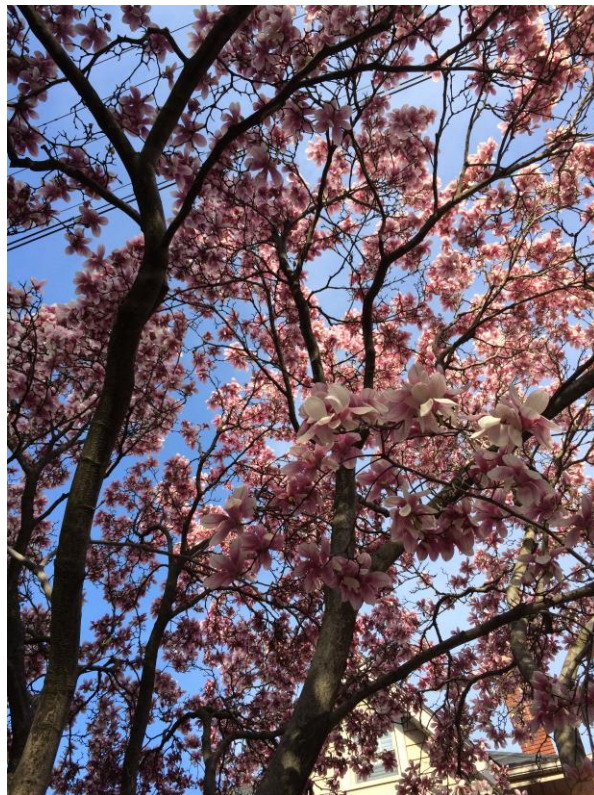
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◆ Sunday April 19, 2020 ◆

Second Sunday of Easter

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

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

* OPENING HYMN -- *The Strife is O'er* VU 159

*1 The strife is o'er, the battle done,
the victory of life is won;
the song of triumph has begun, hallelujah!*

*2 The powers of death have done their worst,
but Christ their legions has dispersed:
let shouts of holy joy outburst, hallelujah!*

*3 He closed the ancient gates of hell,
the bars from heaven's high portals fell;
let hymns of praise his triumphs tell, hallelujah!*

*4 On the third morn he rose again,
glorious in majesty to reign;
O let us swell the joyful strain, hallelujah!*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Here we are in the aftermath of Easter celebrating our faith
that God raised Jesus from death to life. That was Jesus'
promise to us.

All: Hallelujah! Thanks be to God.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

One: The risen one came to the disciples on the Emmaus road and turned their despair into hope.

All: With joy in their hearts, they returned to Jerusalem with the words: "Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed."

One: As we gather in our separate houses and claim them to be our houses of prayer, we bring our troubles and our fears. May this time of worship be our Emmaus road, the place where we meet the risen one and hope is born anew. In faith, let us proclaim that Christ is risen.

All: He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah!

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

On Easter morning, the disciples observed nothing

When they peered into the empty tomb.

On the road to Emmaus,

The disciples heard your voice,

But were unable to perceive that it was you.

When you ascended to heaven, they were bereft,

Unaware that your Holy Spirit would fill their lives.

Grant us your grace, we pray,

So that we can notice and perceive,

And be filled with your Holy Spirit

During this time of worship and always. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

◆ **SERVICE OF THE WORD** ◆

Readers: Catherine and Imogen Clase

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: We listen carefully to your word, O God, seeking, hoping, praying to understand.

We search for meaning in the text, and then discover that we learn its meaning for our lives in our interactions with each other and in the breaking of the bread.

Be made known to us today, Loving God; be made known. Amen.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Acts 2:14a and 22-32

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

"You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' "Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this

day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.' This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

One: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: Inflammatory and Misleading Blame!

One cannot read this passage and easily gloss over Peter's remarks concerning his accusations of the Jews as "Jesus killers". This scripture has arisen again and again as fodder to discriminate against the Jewish race. Indeed the Gospel of John in many of its passages supports this belief.

In order to look at this more closely, we need to go back to King David, one of God's favourite prophets. God promised that David's royal line would always have a successor. The Gospels carefully trace the lineage from the time of David to the birth of Jesus. The connections of God's covenants with patriarchs of the Old Testament culminates in the person of Jesus, who augers in a new covenant with God through his death and resurrection.

At the time of his death, Jesus, a Jew, was living under Jewish traditions and Jewish Torah. His friends as well as his enemies were Jews. What separated the Jews was their belief for or against Jesus as being the Messianic figure that the Jews had long awaited. Some believed the Messiah had not yet come. Others who chose to follow Jesus saw in him the realization of God's promise to David. Thus it was Jews pitted against other Jews and

never a case in the early emergent church of Christians pitted against Jews. Christianity did not yet exist. The struggle in the beginning was then a struggle between Jews who saw things quite differently.

Today Judaism is a religion of Jews who are still awaiting the arrival of the Messiah, while modern Christians believe the Messiah has already come.

Peter's sermon to his Jewish compatriots concerning Jesus' resurrection left them feeling quite regretful and great numbers of them believed and begged Peter to tell them what they could do about it in light of this new information. Repentance and baptism led over 3,000 to respond. Their skepticism gave way to unwavering belief. The power and wonder of Jesus' resurrection still affects us today. Death has no dominion over us, in Jesus we are all made new. Amen

THE GOSPEL: John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to

them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

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

All: Praise to you, O Christ.

REFLECTION: My Lord, and my God!

My Lord, and my God! I never fail to hear those words read without the hair standing up on my back. They are the singular most profound words of professed witness stated in the New Testament.

Fear drew the disciples to the sanctuary of the Upper Room. They locked the door to close out the outside world. Their future was uncertain and grim. Jesus meets their needs without criticism, blessing them right where they are in their own spiritual development.

We, modern day Christians, however, were not there. We have come to believe because it is written down. We were not able to see or touch. We were told the story in such a way that we walked in to it, accepted it, believed it and then chose to live it.

We have lived through many Easters, holy celebrations with upraised voices and merriment. The party is over, everyone has gone home and we are back to the task of living. The Sunday following Easter is typically a low point, much like the Sunday after Christmas. We are done in with celebrating. Lets move on, get back to ordinary life.

That washes well with us on this month long isolation, tucked safely in our homes, amidst fear and anxiety. We celebrated Easter to the best of our ability, alone, or with a few family members, and for a short while we tried to let the reality slide from our view. But now, it hits us full force, it has come back into focus and it drains us as it demands our attention.

For over two thousand years the early days after Easter have come and gone, yet its newness never fails to capture our hearts with joy. Jesus still has the power to give us what we need.

John's Gospel makes a point to outline how seeing transforms into comprehending. This is an overriding theme throughout the gospels in how they present the disciples as obtuse in understanding Jesus' ultimate mission.

Today's scripture unfolds with Thomas who had missed the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples, now face-to-face and able to see for himself. Doubting Thomas as he has become known is a misnomer. There were no immediate believers, not even Mary

Magdalene who was the first to witness Jesus' resurrection. She was unable to translate the significance of the empty tomb until Jesus stood in front of her and called her by name.

The disciples could not allow themselves to believe when they first heard the news and only came to accept it when they too were face-to-face with Jesus. So why poor Thomas has been singled out as the doubter is somewhat strange.

The full realization of Jesus standing before him, led to Thomas' response of reverence and awe. None of the disciples had dared hope. All of them had been told prior to Jesus' death that he would rise again. But none of them were able to grasp its significance. Their hopes and dreams had all evaporated.

The human mind craves order in order to analyze, organize and comprehend the information that comes into our awareness. We are like mystery writers and detectives trying to put the clues together to form our interpretation of a case. Our faith takes us on a similar journey. Things do not always make sense but we follow them until we come to a logical conclusion. For Christians, Easter becomes our greatest mystery. It is the hardest one to understand and take in.

We have no problem with death. It is a certainty. But for Jesus to have been raised from death to new life challenges the laws of nature, and the logical progression of our instincts. Each of the Gospel writers offer a different tact on their portrayal of this incredulous event. Mark revels in mystery. He has Jesus performing miracles and then telling everyone not to tell what they have seen. Everything is presented in parables, so that they

may listen and understand... John, on the other hand provides a clear message so that we might get right to the truth.

The fact that he presents Thomas as skeptical is probably drawn as a mirror to how the reader would react. If something sounds too good to be true, then it most probably is. So John provides evidence so that we might come to know the truth.

The human mind needs convincing. We want evidence. It moves beyond Thomas and beyond John's Gospel to the power of the Holy Spirit to convince and reassure that the mystery of resurrection is conveyed to us through the grace of God.

In the end there are only two choices, either Jesus is risen or he is not. On the face of overwhelming evidence, our cry rings out. "Jesus Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

* 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

One: The cries of "He is risen! He has risen indeed!" are fading into the distance. The dawning of new awareness and what this means to us as Easter people is settling in. Oh God, do not let us become complacent or take for granted the true meaning of your gift of grace, the new life in Jesus Christ.

The risen Christ challenges us to consider our troubled world: calls us to work with those who point to the inequalities on our planet; calls us to work for protection for refugees and dispossessed; calls us to work for food and clean water and shelter for the developing world; Christ is risen! Is the heartfelt sign of change.

The risen Christ challenges us to consider the suffering ones among us: those who cannot get the medical treatment they need; those who are overworked with the care and needs of Covid-19; those who are suffering from Covid-19 and their families; those who live in fear of the current situation, or even within their homes from abuse; those whose mental illness is ignored; those who cannot get to see their loved ones due to isolation; those who have lost a best friend or family member through death, conflict, or distance.

Christ is risen! Is the heartfelt sign of change.

The risen Christ challenges us to think about our faith community, our church of Melrose; to support our wider United Church in their mission and oversight; to share in worship that speaks to feelings as well as intellect; to reach out and talk to other church members, friends and neighbours, sharing in joys and offering support;

Christ is risen! Is the heartfelt sign of change.

The risen Christ challenges us to be good to ourselves: to take the time we need to self-care, to relax and refresh and breathe; to hear the encouraging words that others speak to

us; to build up our spiritual health through prayer, praise and the reading of inspirational books; Christ is risen! Is the heartfelt sign of change.

In this time of unsettled and fearful news help us to walk on level ground, to reach out to you for our balance. Guide our leaders that they may take approaches that are designed to help us navigate physical, economic and mental challenges for the good of all.

Rise up your prophets to spread your word telling us where change is needed and how we might find other ways to care for our planet.

We pray for our church community – for Loretta, who is lonely and isolated from her family, for Flo who is gravely ill in St. Peter’s Hospice, for Fred who is recovering at home with his family, Linda and Shari, for Vic, also isolated from his family, and for Cheryl and Tim in the illness and isolation of Cheryl’s mother. 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)

Followed by Our Lord’s Prayer (said together)

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 - *Thine Is the Glory*

VU 173

*1 Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son:
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment
rolled the stone away,
kept the folded grave-clothes
where the body lay.*

[Refrain:]

*Thine is the glory,
risen, conquering Son,
endless is the victory
thou o'er death hast won.*

*2 Lo, Jesus meets us,
risen from the tomb!
lovingly he greets us,
scatters fear and gloom.
Let the church with gladness
hymns of triumph sing,
for the Lord now liveth:
death hath lost its sting. [Refrain]*

*3 No more we doubt thee,
glorious Prince of life;*

*Life is nought without thee:
aid us in our strife;
make us more than conquerors,
through thy deathless love;
bring us safe through Jordan
to thy home above. [Refrain]*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: Travel the road of life with love.

Journey the paths of God.

Travel the road of life with faith.

Journey with the risen Christ.

Travel the road of life with hope.

Follow the Holy Spirit wherever it may lead.

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 – Var VI, Allegro, Piano Sonata #11, KV 331

W.A. Mozart