

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ **Sunday April 11, 2021** ◆

Second Sunday of Easter

Holy Humour Sunday

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Eternal Ruler of the Ceaseless Round O Gibbons

OPENING HYMN – *Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain* VU 165

*1 Come, you faithful, raise the strain
of triumphant gladness:
God has brought forth Israel
into joy from sadness,
loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke
Jacob's sons and daughters,
led them with unmoistened foot
through the Red Sea waters.*

*2 'Tis the spring of souls today,
Christ has burst his prison,
and from three days' sleep in death
as a sun has risen;
all the winter of our sins,
long and dark, is flying
from his light, to whom we give
laud and praise undying.*

*3 Now the queen of seasons, bright
with the day of splendour,
with the royal feast of feasts,
comes its joy to render;
comes to gladden faithful hearts,
who with true affection*

*welcome in unwearied strains
Jesus' resurrection!*

*4 Neither could the gates of death,
nor the tomb's dark portal,
nor the watchers, nor the seal
hold him as a mortal:
for today amid his own
he now stands, bestowing
God's true peace which evermore
passes human knowing.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: The Spirit of Christ is alive and at work in our world.

All: We see him in the weathered faces of the poor on the streets.

One: We look for him in the playground, amongst the laughing children.

All: We feel him in our places of business where integrity and honesty prevail. Christ is alive and shines his light into the crevices of our world.

....Christ candle is lit.....

HYMN – *This is the Day*

MV 122

*This is the day that God has made;
we will rejoice and be glad!
This is the day that God has made;
we will rejoice and be glad!
Singing hallelu, singing hallelu,
singing hallelu! We will rejoice and be glad!
Singing hallelu, singing hallelu,
singing hallelu! We will rejoice and be glad!*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Arise, shine! Embrace laughter's light!

All: Even in the midst of challenge, we should laugh?

One: Come and embrace God's gift of healing – mirth within the shadows of life.

All: Surely you jest, for life demands our sombre best.

One: Come to chuckle at the overwhelming irony of living.

All: To laugh in this place of holiness and of reverence?

One: To laugh, and in the laughter to share, and in the sharing to care, and in the caring to love one another.

All: Glory to God through all our relations! Glory to God as we meet our call within Christ's mission.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Loving God, who created a world of slugs that leave silver trails and kittens and bunnies and geckos and snakes, worm castings and butterflies, wrinkles and cuddles, why is it so hard for us to accept the wondrous presence of your risen life? Could it be any stranger than the unwinding of strands and coils of genetic stories encrypted in our DNA? Bless our doubting souls. May our questions draw us closer to you as we peek into your empty tomb and stick our fingers in your wounded hands. Laugh with us when we realize that you always answer our questions with more questions. Why? How? When? By your grace, you always give us just enough to taste the goodness of the next question and to know your answer will be a new question that draws us deeper and closer to the eternal mystery and the tender welcome of your love. How wondrous that this is the very best answer. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

One: God loves us through laughter and tears; forgives and watches over us throughout our years.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (said together)

Written by Gord Dunbar adapted from VU 112

O God, how we have wandered and hidden from your face. It seems to laugh is foolish within your gift of grace. Yet even in the wilderness, while tempted left and right, was Jesus served by angels in heavenly delight.

His painful contemplation was not devoid of joys. So, too, we find that laughter love's ministry employs. The healing in our giggles - shared ironies of life - enfold our deepest sorrows and heal the widest strife.

So, let us dance and chuckle as in our sorrows we discover through our laughter a place where we're set free! It is the balm of healing that opens wide our hearts to know that God is loving by where God's hope imparts.

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story: After the Tomb

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Meghan Webb

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: Loving God, your word comes to us through the ages and reminds us that, though the details may change, your will is timeless. You call us to be a people whose love knows no bounds and whose service to others overcomes all barriers. Form us by your word, this day. Amen.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: Acts 4: 32-35- Sharing

One: Now the whole group of those who believed were of one

heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

One: The Word of the Lord!

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: Living in Community! - Acts 4:32-35

A return to the early church of Christendom for today's society would be nearly impossible. We live in a materialistic age with all the trappings of individual wealth and luxury. There is, of course, no comparison to the standards of living with our modern technology, advancement in science and medicine, education and transportation. Acts, written by the Apostles, sets out the beginning cohesiveness of the community that came together to carry on the Way of Jesus.

Community was their spirit, their reason for being, their mode of operation. Everything they did in their lives reflected who they saw themselves to be, disciples of the living Christ. They each took their households, their goods, their property, their time and their talents and they generously transformed them for the use of all their members.

The modern-day kibbutz which was started in Israel in 1909, is patterned in a similar manner. The reason for the existence of the Commune was to further and promote community agriculture by

sharing accommodation, work duties, meals, education of the young and similar values and life style preferences.

The early community drew together with one purpose, mission and set of values, centered around the core teachings of Jesus Christ. Luke says “one heart, and one soul,” a rarity in the human story, as well as in the church. They were a living witness in their community, graced by the Holy Spirit.

“One mind and soul” has come to be a diversified section of bickering souls spread out through many denominations, yet still representing the one body of Christ.

Can you envision a world in which all share possessions and no one is in need? Caravans of people would not need to make their way to cross unreceptive borders; vaccines, instead of being over supplied to richer countries, would share with those poorer nations who have little funds and must wait until the more powerful nations are fully satisfied; the people who beat down my doors every month just to obtain a small food voucher to help with a meagre portion of their groceries would be able to count on a minimum guaranteed living wage; Indigenous peoples living on lands would be ensured of clean and available drinking water; our homeless, living on the streets, would have warm and dry enclosed rooms for safety and peaceful living; our mentally ill would be regarded and guaranteed the same consideration as those who are physically ill. In essence, we would become “our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.”

The early Christians became the “living sermon” and embodiment of Jesus’ message to the world. Given that land, food and prosperity are the gifts of God to the world, it is an

affront to God's way of providing for us that properties command over six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) over asking prices to satisfy rich desires, when there are people who will never afford to buy a piece of land to call their own.

We, in our churches live for "back in the day" when things were rosy, longing for the good old days when Sunday Schools were full and every pew was occupied. However, as in everything our remembered past does not always equate to reality. In the early 60s, unrest was beginning to manifest in our treatment of non-whites; our churches were really limited to middle class white Anglo Saxons with little diversity seen within their walls.

The early community is hard for us to visualize, because it is so foreign to our way of life. The Resurrection of our Lord led the early people to want to be transformed, to take their broken lives in society and blend them into a community where all were cared for and sustained. God's reign which was believed to be imminently upon them, was to heal and restore and lift up and make new.

Do you suppose that the Resurrection of Jesus still has the power to transform? And if it does, what might it look like today? There is a clue in today's passage in the words "there was not a **needy** person among them." The work of Resurrection is clearly not only about praise; it is about recognizing the economic structure of the communities that surround us. The church's mission has grown out of the fundamental imperative to care for one another.

We will hear how as time passed, the intention of the early church followers became lost and while the proclamation continued, the

embodiment of the original intent to care for one another was downplayed and cast aside to accommodate individual preferences.

The mission of the early churches to care for one another is still our imperative today, but it gets lost in the noise of entitlement, rights, and success, at all costs. Our attention to Jesus' message requires us to find a balance between our own needs and those of our neighbours. The viability of sustainable communities can be achieved by many means other than pooling and living together. It does require a conscious effort on our part to care for both the environment, and the people of the earth. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 133

One: How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the LORD ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

GOSPEL: John 20: 19-31 - Jesus Present to all but Thomas!

One: 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.”

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: Jesus Comes, Through Locked Doors! -John 20:19-31

We are now entering the 50 days of Easter leading up to the day of Pentecost. As you will see, John conflates the time of Holy Spirit power to Jesus breathing the Spirit into the disciples during this passage. Jesus makes two appearances. The first to all the disciples except Thomas and the second includes Thomas.

I don't like that Thomas is relegated to second class amongst the disciples. He has become known for his doubting the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, he is rather my hero. He was not

present when the rest of the disciples, who were hiding out in a locked room, were privileged to have the Spiritual Jesus pass through the walls into their midst. They saw for themselves; they had the incredulous news of the resurrection confirmed in their presence. Thomas would not believe until Jesus was standing in front of him and he could place his fingers in the nail holes.

Jesus' second appearance included Thomas and this news was confirmed for him as well. His immediate response without even placing his hands in the nail holes, was "My Lord, and My God." I love Thomas. He mirrors the reaction of most of us and allows us to raise our doubts throughout our Christian formation of faith. There are no easy answers to hard questions of faith and we are always seeking more proof to bolster up our mustard seed of faith.

Jesus floats through doors and walls with ease, challenging the locks on doors to meet us wherever we are. Jesus refuses to let anything come between him and his love for us. Our lack of faith does not block his love. It is interesting that the disciples did not recognize Jesus on several of their encounters until he committed a familiar action, or spoke a name. Perhaps, we also do not recognize him when he is right in front of us.

Jesus' appearance may change from moment to moment. He may come to us dressed in beggar's rags or a worn shawl of a wise old grandmother who holds us as we weep, or in the innocence of a child. In those surprising moments, we feel only peace and love.

The peace that Jesus brings to the disciples is not an easy peace. It involves a new status and responsibility. They are no longer just disciples, they have now become apostles and given the task to go

out into the world. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." To augment their work, he breathes the Holy Spirit into them encouraging that they come out from behind closed doors.

We too, are sent wherever lines are drawn in turmoil of injustice or family illness, wherever need is present; we are empowered by the Spirit to proclaim God's forgiving, transforming love to all of human existence. It begs the question, are we staying safely tucked behind locked doors in our churches as pre-Easter people, without fully engaging in the world outside the door.

Jesus offers himself over and over again to people who long to see him. The miracle of Easter recedes and fades and it is the work of the church to help it unfold in the lives and stories of the generations of disciples as Jesus' grace continues to wash over us. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: You are invited to bring your offerings towards Jesus, your tears of repentance, your gifts of money, your time and talent in helping to make others smile or laugh out loud; all your gifts are welcome. Melrose appreciates all that you have to offer, no matter how great, or how small. Thanks be to God for loving and responsive people working together in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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.*

Anatomy of an Illness by Norman Cousins

In 1964, Norman Cousins was diagnosed with a terminal illness. His chance for recovery was given at 1 in 500. He reviewed his life and saw that worry, depression and anger had played a large part in bringing him to this state. He thought "if illness can be caused by negativity, can wellness be created by positivity?" He began experimenting on himself. Laughter was one of the most positive activities he knew. He started watching funny movies - Keaton, Chaplin, Fields, Marx Brothers; he read funny stories and he enlisted his friends to relate anything funny that they had heard. His pain was so great he could not sleep. He found that 10 minutes of laughter relieved the pain enough so that he could go to sleep. He fully recovered from his illness and lived another 20 happy, healthy and productive years.

Some people think that laughter is a waste of time. It is a luxury, a frivolity that serves no purpose. But nothing could be further from the truth. Laughter is essential to our well-being and our aliveness. It can help us get well. It can change our mood in an instant. Give yourself permission to laugh whenever anything strikes you as funny. Watch the face book pages for proof. When one begins to laugh uproariously on a train, it isn't long before all those around are also fully engaged in delightful laughter with no thought as to why.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

One: Be honest, express your doubts. "Unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe."
I wonder if: those who live on the streets will get the attention and protection they need;

I wonder if: those who have an abundance of wealth will share their resources with those who do not know from where their next meal is coming from?

I wonder if: the world leaders will agree on a compassionate way to look after refugees.

All: Jesus said, do not doubt, but believe.

One: I wonder if: prisoners will ever know a system that seeks education and rehabilitation of those who languish in jails.

I wonder if: the mentally challenged will ever find the community acceptance that they deserve.

I wonder if: the dying will ever have the freedom to choose the time of their death.

All: Jesus said, do not doubt, but believe.

Jesus Christ is risen today Hallelujah. We will believe.

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, and all our shut ins, and for all who are still grieving loss of their loved ones.

Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs.

Quiet reflection - followed by The 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.

*1 This joyful Eastertide,
away with sin and sorrow!
My love, the crucified,
hath sprung to life this morrow.*

Refrain:

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
ne'er burst his three-day prison,
our faith had been in vain:
but now has Christ arisen,
arisen, arisen, arisen.*

*2 My flesh in hope shall rest,
and for a season slumber,
till trump from east to west
shall wake the dead in number. [Refrain]*

*3 Death's flood hath lost its chill,
since Jesus crossed the river:
lover of souls, from ill
my passing soul deliver. [Refrain]*

COMMISSIONING

One: We have made the journey, uphill, and down into the valley.
The tomb was empty. We have noticed. We have discovered.
We have understood. Christ is risen and lives within each of
us. Let us go in the power and knowledge of this God-
shaking Resurrection event in our lives.
Thanks be to God!
Go Now in Peace.

MUSIC - Go Now in Peace

Besig/Price

BENEDICTION

One: 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