

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ **Sunday April 18, 2021** ◆

Third Sunday of Easter

Celebration of Earth Day

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE

OPENING HYMN – *Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Give Thanks* VU 179

Refrain:

*Hallelujah, hallelujah. Give thanks to the risen Christ;
hallelujah, hallelujah! praise to God's name.*

- 1. Jesus is the Lord of all the earth, firstborn of all creation.
Refrain.*
- 2. Spread the good news o'er all the earth: Jesus has died and is
risen. Refrain.*
- 3. We have been crucified with Christ, now we shall live
forever. Refrain.*
- 4. Come let us praise the living God, joyfully sing to our
Saviour. Refrain.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Our Earth is alive with the sounds and colours of spring

All: We see it in the earlier morning light

One: Fresh from Easter, Jesus brings us the light of the world.

All: The Risen Christ's light fills our hearts with hope.

Behold, He is here amongst us.

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

HYMN – *The Glory of Our King*

VU 162

*1 The glory of our King was seen
when he came riding by,
and all the children waved and sang,
"Hosanna, King most high!"*

*2 The glory of our King was seen
when, with his arms stretched wide
to show his love to everyone,
Jesus was crucified.*

*3 The glory of our King was seen
on the first Easter day,
when Christ rose up, set free from death,
to love, to guide, to stay.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: To the God of Earth,

All: we come as creatures of Earth.

One: To the God of the cosmos,

All: we come as beings made of stardust.

One: To the God of mystery and making,

All: we come to the One who is our source and home.

One: We come to worship and seek wisdom. May it be so.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

God of the universe, who is the origin of what is and what will be, we thank you for the wondrous planet Earth and its placement among galaxies, stars, and planets. We thank you for its abundance of life: for the plant life draped green and flowered over the globe, for all the creatures that swim through

the seas, for the astounding range of animal life, and for the ways you are seen and sensed in creatures of Earth.

We thank you for our creation that is part of the fabric of this world, and for the blessing of being inhabitants of Earth.

God of the universe, we thank you for the beauty of this island that is our home, for flowers and birdsong and chorusing frogs, for the stewardship of all who have come before us, and for all who care of the land in our time.

We thank you for the gifts of water and air, and for the sustaining food that soil and human labour yield, and for Earth's provision of all our needs. We thank you for this world imbued with beauty, for the abundant generosity of your gifts, your world.

God of the universe, we thank you. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

One: God wants us to try to do better, to improve and grow. God is a forgiving God, and time and time again, forgives us for our foolish ways. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (said together)

God of all the suffering Earth, forgive us for wasting the world we are given, for our failure of empathy for our animal and avian kin, for closing our eyes to human poverty and hardship, for our unwillingness to listen to voices that remember the wisdom of land, for squandering the legacy of coming generations, and for our refusal to honour your body, your world. Turn us back to the ways of your life. Create in us hearts that are filled with love of the earth. Show us our vocations as guardians of this planet. Give us courage to do the work of our time. Align our lives with you and with creation that we might walk humbly with you here now and always. Amen.

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US
Story: Celebrating God's Creation

◆ **SERVICE OF THE WORD** ◆

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION – *read by Meg Chalmers*

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 3:12-19 – Peter preaches in Solomon's Portico – *read by Matthew Winner*

One: When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you." And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets,

that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,
One: The Word of the Lord!

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: Do overs! - Acts 3:12-19

Peter, a Jew himself, travels with John, and addresses his audience of Jews, the very ones who a few days before incited violence in mob frenzy, shouting for the crucifixion of Jesus. Imagine, for one minute, if you were in that crowd, guilty of not recognizing, not believing, and righteously demanding that the imposter be put to death, only to find out that you were dead wrong.

“You killed the Author of life” says Peter. You rejected the very one who came to save. I’m sure there were hard core disbelievers in his listening audience, but what if you were one who belatedly realized your mistake? Like the soldier at the cross, “truly this was the Son of God!” Like Pilate, who knew Jesus was not worthy of a criminal’s death, “I find no wrong in him.” Yet, to appease the crowd and protect his standing with the emperor, he went along with what the murderous voices demanded.

Peter offers them a way out. “In your ignorance” he says, you put to death the Messiah. “Repent” and turn back to God, asking for forgiveness. From the cross, Jesus called out to God, “Forgive them for they know not what they do!”

Scholars believe that Acts which was written later maybe beginning of the second century held a writer bias that was not present when Peter spoke. It was not so much an anti-Jewish condemnation as a general call for repentance of their uniform

rejection. Paul, also a Jew, became a persecutor of the Christian Way, and then in dramatic fashion, came to believe and reverse his stand.

Peter, who understood failure and guilt in his denial three times of his Lord, knew the oppressive attitudes towards Jewish leaders through the powers of Rome. He loved his people. This was not a denial and condemnation of the Jewish race by outsiders, for they were all Jews, including his beloved Jesus. Jesus came through the strain of Jewish roots of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus came to help us transform the violent and destructive ways we direct toward each other, into pathways of peace and understanding.

Peter leveled his criticism against evil. Anyone is complicit in evil, not only by carrying out the act themselves, but also by standing by, turning their backs, walking away, and acting in ignorance, refusing to do anything to stop it. The most recent example is the Asian woman who was viciously attacked and security guards closed the shop doors so they didn't have to deal with it. Sometimes, we regret momentary decisions that we have made, from not wanting to get involved, or going along with a crowd, and we long for an opportunity to "Do Over," to make things right. Peter offers a choice, of acknowledging their sin, choosing to repent and begin again.

People flocked to hear Peter who stood in one of the entrances to the city of Jerusalem at Solomon's Gate. It was the site of dramatic healing of a crippled beggar, and a repeat by Peter and John. Perhaps, they had come to receive their own miracles because they knew their association with Jesus, the One who had healed so many. Undoubtedly, they were not expecting a stern

sermon, but they were expecting that Peter and John were the source of the power. Peter redirects them. "You got it wrong." The power does not reside in us. It comes through Jesus, the one that you rejected.

Scriptures tell us again and again how the disciples failed to capture and understand the message of Jesus. Now Peter berates his listeners for the same ignorance, their inability to discern Jesus as God's chosen One. We are removed many generations from the site of Solomon's portico, yet Peter's words are also directed at us.

We fail Jesus daily in our treatment of one another. We do not live up to the simplest of commands to "Love God, and Love one another, as I have loved you." Peter's words call us to repent and humbly ask for a "do over." Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 4 – Answer me when I call, O God. – *read by Mckenna Rankin*

One: Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? Selah

But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Selah

Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.

There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!"

You have put gladness in my heart more than when their
grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone,
O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

GOSPEL: The Gospel of Luke 24:36b-48 Jesus invites his disciples
to touch him! – *read by Sandra Winninger*

One: While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood
among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They
were startled and terrified, and thought that they were
seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened,
and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands
and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a
ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I
have." And when he had said this, he showed them his
hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving
and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything
here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he
took it and ate in their presence. 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.

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: Need for Proof! - Luke 24:36b-48

What just happened? Chaos, confusion, fear, frustration, guilt, grief, doubt, anxiety, suspicion, distrust, restlessness, despondency and terror – all were party to the aftermath of the disciples' relentless emotions. Then came Jesus!

Jesus, resurrected, in the flesh, is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. Is it any wonder it takes us time to absorb the reality of new life in Christ, when the disciples who stood in the very room with him had trouble believing what they were seeing? Jesus' expression of hunger and call for a meal of fish puts to rest the idea that his body is purely spiritual. His humanity is essential to human salvation.

The disciples had been given plenty of warning. Before death, Jesus told them that he would return in three days. The women encountered the empty tomb and told the disciples that Jesus had risen, as he said. The two disciples walking on the Emmaus Road also reported that they had encountered Jesus and told them what he had said. Nevertheless, they were not prepared for his appearance in front of them in the locked room in which they chose to hide away.

Jesus responds to fear with "Peace be with you." Why are you freaking out? He, both understands and challenges, their fear. He invites them to move beyond, to understand that death is not the final word. The power of this resurrection is the power to

plant the seeds of transformation. Minds are opened. Security is not restored, but peace is given.

The gathering of friends was an attempt to put together their understanding of what had happened. They had numerous confirmations of Jesus resurrection, but they had a deep need for proof. "Look at me" Jesus said, confirming that he was not a ghost. He ate. He opened their minds, and he told them they were witnesses. Luke uses the progression to establish credibility. Fear and confusion are addressed; they are engaged in Scripture and understand that it has been fulfilled according to God's intention. And now that they have seen and understood, they are named as witnesses. Their proof has been affirmed in order to make them witnesses to the truth of the resurrection and to share it with the world.

We are creatures who need proof. We want to see something confirmed in black and white. We usually have difficulty taking something on face value. Think back to what it was that has been your defining moment of belief. Were you raised in the faith to parents who lovingly taught you about God's love and the stories of God's relationship with God's people?

Were you introduced to Jesus during a Christian Camp experience, or a Crusade, or a Gospel meeting? Did you read something that captivated you and led to your wanting more and you began to study and explore and came to believe? Were you nudged by the Holy Spirit into an unexplained revelation that brought Jesus into your life? Did this feeling grow on you gradually, or in one swoop instant where your life was never quite the same again?

We are all sojourners on this earth at different levels of understanding and growth. If we listen to people who have experienced Near Death Experiences, we will come to realize that there is no need to fear death. All who have undergone this experience, describe it as overwhelmingly peaceful and a time that has removed all fear of death and a moment when their life changed forever, giving them a greater understanding of their purpose to love and care for one another.

God's love transforms our doubts. God's hope gives us the impetus to go on when we are sorely in need of lifting up. Sometimes, our proof just needs to be taken on faith. We are hesitant believers, who desire to experience the presence of the risen Christ! Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: All of earth was created by God. It is our home to share with plant and animal and human life. God created in wondrous diversity each living thing. How could we not, in awe, and thanksgiving, give back a portion to God for benefit of this wondrous creation. Thanks be to God for loving and responsive people of Melrose 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.*

IMPROVING OUR WORLD!

Jadav Payang planted a tree in India every day for 40 years stopping erosion and creating a sustaining forest of 1,360 acres. This incredible forest is now home to elephants, rhinos, bears, reptiles and birds. This earth-friendly man says, "nature is God." The city of Kwinana in Australia installed drainage nets over their storm sewers at the point of entry into the ocean. 815 pounds of plastic were prevented from entering and polluting the waterway over a period of 4 months.

Saltwater Brewery in Florida changed the formula for their plastic six pack rings to make them biodegradable and safe for animals to snack on. This greatly helped to reduce the deaths of some million seabirds and 100,000 marine animals per year.

Japan is turning electronic waste into recycled medals for the Olympic and Paralympic games helping to curb the pile of dumped electronics as the fastest growing waste problem in the world.

How can we care for our Environment?

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle; Volunteer for Clean-ups in our communities; Educate ourselves on how to protect our environment; Conserve water; Choose sustainable products; Shop wisely; Use long lasting light bulbs; Plant a tree.

God said to have "dominion" over the earth; to care for in stewardship, not exploitation; to ensure that it remains for succeeding generations to enjoy, each in turn with the ongoing responsibility to enhance and nurture.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

One: We pray for the earth and hold in our hearts the planet that holds us. We pray for all who suffer from a disrupted climate: for those who endure famines and floods, droughts and wildfires, hurricanes and heatwaves; those who face

hunger, thirst, and disease; those displaced by climate and resulting conflicts. We pray for our sisters, brothers, and siblings all over the earth. We pray for our animal kindred and kin: for each species shrunken, threatened, extinct, for the plants and animals struggling in our time to adjust to a swiftly changing world. We pray for reconciliation, people to people and people to land.

We pray for ourselves, that we, in our words, our choices, and our actions, would be true and faithful to Earth and to you, Creator God. We pray and seek the wisdom of Sophia to guide us – Sophia, who danced with you at the beginning of creation. Amen.

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.

CLOSING HYMN – *Be Thou My Vision*

1 Be thou my vision, O joy of my heart;

naught be all else to me, save that thou art,

*thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*2 Be thou my wisdom, my calm in all strife;
I ever with thee, and thou in my life;
thou loving parent, thy child may I be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.*

*3 Be thou my battle shield, sword for the fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, thou my high tower;
raise thou my heavenward, O power of my power.*

*4 Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*5 Great God of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.*

COMMISSIONING

One: May we be blessed by air and water, by earth and fire, by land and sky. May we be a blessing to all that blesses us. May we go with the brightness of Earth in our blood, attuned to the sacredness of the world where we live and listening for our parts in the healing of the planet. May we go as kindred of tree and seal and deer, of moss and flower, eagle and orca, as kindred of all the living world. May we go to love and serve God of Creation. 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 - Easter Song