

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Music Director:

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Office Administrator:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

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Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday August 30, 2020 ◆

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Tarleton's Resurrection
Chris Palmer, guitar

J. Dowland

*OPENING HYMN – *O Worship the King*

VU 235

*1 O worship the King all glorious above,
O gratefully sing God's power and God's love;
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.*

*2 O tell of God's might! O sing of God's grace,
whose robe is the light; whose canopy space;
whose chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
and broad is God's path on the wings of the storm.*

*3 The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
has stablished it fast by a changeless decree,
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.*

*4 Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

*5 Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;*

*your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: "Take up your cross and follow me."

All: The way of Christ is not easy; it requires sacrifice, giving up some of our comfortable habits. To walk in the light of Jesus means we become the light bearers of the light of the world.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Send your Spirit upon us this day, O God.

Touch us with the unending burning flames of your love.

All: Stir us with the power of our word.

One: Keep us strong in faith and grounded in truth.

All: Bring us into this time of worship, fill our souls, then, send us out in the power of your Spirit to share the love of Jesus with everyone. Amen.

★HYMN: *O Love, That Will Not Let Me Go*

VU 658

*1 O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.*

*2 O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.*

*3 O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.*

*4 O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Creator God, we compare, we measure, we worry, we work, we judge, we compete, and we rush through this race of life. You have given us a great gift in the Sabbath, a time set apart to be with you. You send us messages in surprising and confusing ways. The stranger has much to teach us if we are open to listening. Help us to notice your Word for us in every encounter and everyone we meet. Amen.

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story: Situational Awareness

You are travelling on a beautiful country road in the height of the fall colours, the trees are swaying in a gentle breeze and a doe and her fawn cross the road in front of you. You are too busy looking at your iPhone to notice one of God's majestic moments.

You sit down to eat a wonderful supper that has been prepared for you, the taste and aroma usually fill you with joy, but winning the computer game is your only focus.

You fleetingly catch some movement in the field beside you, but you are in a hurry to get to your destination, and you miss a rare sighting of a beautiful bald eagle.

You are in the playground at school and one child sits alone at a bench, forgotten and avoided, but you are surrounded by friends and you carry on.

You are at work and it is five o'clock. Your colleague is struggling to meet their deadline, but you have a train to catch and an evening to enjoy.

You miss God's chosen moments when you are unaware of your surroundings. Carolin's church at Ebenezer does a weekly moment for God sightings. They are usually simple experiences of how one feels God's presence in the beauty of nature. Your mindfulness and awareness of each situation you are in, adds to your appreciation and experience of God in your everyday life. Stop, you are standing on "hallowed ground," Open your eyes, it is all around you!

Reader: Ian Brisbin

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: Gracious God, help us to recognize as we stand before you awaiting your Word from today's Scripture, that we are indeed standing on Holy Ground. Your Word is both lamp and light to bring us into Your Holy Presence. Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Exodus 3: 1-15

One: Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of

Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

One: The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: “Standing on Holy Ground”

Moses is tending sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. He brings them to this mountain every day for the lushness of pasture. He passes this bush each time he makes the climb. It has always appeared ordinary, insignificant, and not something he would dwell on.

But today, is different, in spite of his attention to ensure that sheep do not wander, and finding them new grazing grass to enjoy, he is drawn to this particular bush. Angels have a way of making themselves known. One would expect your attention to be diverted by an angel standing in the middle of a burning bush. Moses could have missed this epoch moment, but God intended to get his attention. Not only was he given a front row seat to an amazing fire show, God called him by name.

“Moses, Moses!” “here I am,” said Moses.

“Don’t come any closer, remove your sandals from your feet. You’re standing on holy ground.”

This was a life-changing moment for Moses, the adopted prince of Egypt, where his own people were being held in captivity as slaves in a foreign land. God is about to place a yoke of leadership upon his shoulders and he feels utterly unqualified for the job.

The story of Moses has much to teach us. Where we are standing right at this moment is “hallowed ground.” Physically, emotionally, spiritually, however advanced, or stunted our growth, it is all “hallowed ground.” Our relationships with our family, our home, our friends, our workplace, our health, our God, **All** are holy ground.

You influence all the various intersections of your environment without even realizing it. You have been chosen by God as an instrument of God’s Holy Plan. You are called to tell others of the difference God has made in your life.

Moses was not a fluid smooth talker, he had a stutter. Moses was filled with dread at the thought of having to speak on God’s behalf. He could have chosen to walk on by, musing that the burning bush was interesting, but of no import to him.

This was his moment of decision. You are faced with many moments of decision in your life and perhaps, something is holding you back. God sees your struggles, your indecisions, your attempts and failures, and God desires to have you live in freedom. God will provide an aide for you just as he offered Aaron as Moses’ voice.

Your moments of decision are “hallowed ground.” They are the link between you and your Creator. The great “I am” seeks your attention, cries out for relationship with you, and wants you to live an abundant life.

Wherever you are, whatever moment you find yourself in, it is all hallowed ground. It is the ground of our being that is centered in the God of our being, and there is no greater moment in time.

God made God’s credentials known to Moses: “I am the God of your father.” And many fathers before that. God is aware of the plight of the Israelite people and he is naming and supporting Moses as their deliverer. “I will be with you.” Certainty of accomplishment is what God offers.

We cannot but help envision the striking command performance of Charlton Heston in the Ten Commandments, as we hear the powerful voice of God commanding: “Let my people go!”

The concept of Hallowed ground began at the foot of the burning bush, but it continues throughout the adventures of Moses’ life. Hallowed ground is not confined to one specific location or point in time, it remains with us wherever we go.

Amen.

RESPONSIVE PSALM: Psalm 105:1-6.23-26.45c (Parts 1 & 3 - VU 828-829)

828 PSALTER

Psalm 105

Refrain

John Medley
arr. Willis Noble 1995



Bless God, my soul. Hal - le - lu - jah!

Arrangement copyright © 1995 Willis Noble

Part One (1-11)

Give thanks and call on God's name.
Make known to the nations what God has done.
Sing, O sing the songs of praise;
tell of all God's wonderful deeds.
Exult in God's holy name;
let those who seek God be joyful in heart. **R**

Turn for help to the One who is your strength;
seek God's presence continually.
Remember the marvels the Most High has done,
the wonders and judgements God has given,
O children of Abraham and Sarah, God's servants,*
O offspring of Israel, chosen of God. **R**

You are the eternal God,
your justice reaches every corner of the earth.
You are ever mindful of your covenant,
the promise you gave to a thousand generations,
the covenant you made with Sarah and Abraham,
the oath you gave to Isaac.
You confirmed it for Jacob as binding.
To Israel your everlasting covenant you declared,
"To you I give the land of Canaan,
as your appointed inheritance." **R**

Part Three (23–26)

When Israel came to Egypt,
when Jacob settled in the land of Ham,
there you made your people fruitful,
stronger than their foes.
But when you turned their hearts to hate your people,
to deceitful dealing with your servants,
then you sent your servant Moses,
and Aaron, whom you had chosen. R

GOSPEL: The Gospel of Matthew 16:21-28

One: From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here

who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: “Our Identity as Followers” – Matthew 16: 21-28

“If any of you want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Jesus is not only laying out the arduous journey of following after him, he is also inviting his disciples to realize their identity in being co-participants in the future establishment of the kingdom of God with him.

Jesus is making a pronouncement on his radical love for God and us. This is not a choice of cross as a self-denial suffering intentionally seeking out martyrdom by a punishing, abusive God. This is pure love. The cross is not an occasion to condone suffering or oppression - one’s cross to bear. It is a call to follow Jesus through the risk of suffering and the blessing of redemption and resurrection. To deny ourselves is not to neglect or do without, it is to lose ourselves in the compassion and life of the body of Christ.

This is one of the most stringent statements of Christian discipleship in the entire Gospels. Jesus teaches the cost of discipleship is self-denial and readiness to die for his sake. Death is not a requirement, but one must be prepared to sacrifice one’s comfortable life for the gospel. He has already told us in previous scripture that when choosing to follow him, one must be prepared to inflict the dismay of human relationships, even family. The implication is that relationships must be discarded if they stand in the way of discipleship.

If we are to enter into true discipleship, we must navigate through the narrow gate and go the hard way, even to the cross. Jesus says that if we find our ultimate meaning in our relationships with our loved ones and kin in an absolute sense, then we cannot also devote ourselves to God. This teaching is akin to the admonition that we cannot serve two masters.

Our paths diverge and we choose at each juncture the way forward. Jesus is telling his disciples he has chosen which path he is on and it leads to the cross. It is not an easy lesson for them to hear and Peter, in his humanity, cries out in objection. Peter, the rock, has become a stumbling block, as he both understands who Jesus really is, and at the same time expresses his own human need to keep Jesus from harm.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian and author of “The Cost of Discipleship”, says that following Christ requires faithful and courageous living, which is costly.

The question of who Jesus really is leads inevitably to our own identity and role as disciples. We are directed towards divine rather than human things. Each time we choose to stand up for those unjustly treated, to courageously speak our truth, and to do what is right and good, we are choosing the path of discipleship regardless of what it may cost us.

Like Peter we have trouble putting aside our pursuit of human things. We are independent, self-made, self-reliant and continually struggling in getting ahead. We seek church communities that feed our spiritual needs and the needs of our families. The cross of

Christ does not fit in with our cultural standards. It is an emblem of “suffering and shame,” a sign of weakness and failure.

The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross reveals the depth of God’s love and compassion for us. The power exercised is seen in the weakness, as saving and redeeming. The way through is in self-denial.

John Calvin reminds us that we are not our own, we are God’s. Following Christ is not denying the value and worth of the self as a child of God’s, rather, it is an affirmation that our true worth is found in giving ourselves on behalf of others. True discipleship at this level seems beyond most of us, but fortunately for us, God sees us as works in progress. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: Melrose is thankful for your financial support during this difficult time. You help us to continue to carry on a vital ministry in furthering the mission of Jesus Christ.

*OFFERING HYMN – *We Give Thee But Thine Own*

VU 543

*1 We give thee but thine own,
whate'er the gift may be:
all that we have is thine alone,
a trust, O God, from thee.*

*2 May we thy bounties thus
as stewards true receive,
and gladly, as thou blessest us,
to thee our first-fruits give.*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

All: The determination to act faithfully comes with a high cost.

One: As those around Martin Luther King found out, prejudice and hatred will not be deflected.

As the friends of Oscar Romero found out, the preaching of the powerful ones does not include "freedom for the poor."

As refugees the world over have discovered, those engaged in warfare have no regard for the civilians in their path.

As local government officials and those who whistle blow on corporations have found, exposing authority figures may cost them their job.

In our own sphere of action and influence,

All: we have faithful choices to make. May we give and not count the cost.

The determination to act faithfully comes with a high cost.

One: Those who stand up against large corporations know this.

Those who have protested against government immigration policies know this.

Those who have been lost among forms, bureaucrats, and voice mail know this.

Those who have been in dispute with health professionals know this.

Those who try to make clear their feelings while lying weak in a hospital bed know this.

Those whose voice has not been heard at the time of personal loss know this.

All: The determination to act faithfully comes with a high cost.

One: Clergy and Faith Community members whose principles are at odds with each other know this.

Church leaders and members who take a stand in the local community against a low minimum wage, the exploitation of immigrant workers, or others less advantaged are aware of this.

The issues of global warming, same gender marriages and the manufacture and use of armaments, have pitted the national church against the government, and there has been a price to pay for their faithfulness to gospel principles.

All: We have faithful choices to make. May we give and not count the cost.

The determination to act faithfully comes with a high cost.

One: We find ourselves taking a stand against popular but costly government policies.

We find ourselves speaking out against racially prejudiced jokes and remarks.

We find ourselves not being able to go along with unethical practices at work.

We find ourselves at odds with family members whose value system is very different from our own.

We find ourselves in dispute with those we count as friends.

All: We have faithful choices to make. May we give and not count the cost.

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, for Jeff, for Cheryl's mother and family. We pray for those outside our church community that have been impacted in many adverse ways from our months of isolation. Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs. We pray for those in our circle who are grieving, who are recovering from illnesses, who are struggling with

imperfect relationships, who are travelling away during the summer. For all those that we hold in our hearts we raise up to you for their safekeeping.

(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 - *Take Up Your Cross*

VU 561

*1 Take up your cross, the Saviour said,
if you would my disciple be;
take up your cross with willing heart
and humbly follow after me.*

*2 Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill your weak spirit with alarm;
Christ's strength shall bear your spirit up,
and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.*

*3 Take up your cross, heed not the shame,
nor let your foolish pride rebel;
your Saviour once accepted death
upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.*

*4 Take up your cross, and follow Christ,
think not till death to lay it down;*

*for only those who bear the cross
may hope to wear the glorious crown.*

COMMISSIONING

One: Lead into your daily lives with the knowledge that you are standing on hallowed ground where ever you are. You alone have the choice to make your actions reflect the holiness of God in all that you think, see or do.

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 - Fantasie Impromptu, excerpt

F. Chopin