

# ◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Minister:

Music Director:

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Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday January 17, 2021 ◆  
Second Sunday after Epiphany

## MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

### ◆ GATHERING ◆

#### PRELUDE

\*OPENING HYMN – *As with Gladness Men of Old* VU 81

*1 As with gladness men of old  
did the guiding star behold,  
as with joy they hailed its light,  
leading onward, beaming bright,  
so, most gracious Lord, may we  
evermore your splendour see.*

*2 As with joyful steps they sped,  
to that lowly manger bed,  
there to bend the knee before  
Christ, whom heaven and earth adore;  
so may we with eager pace  
ever seek your throne of grace.*

*3 As they offered gifts most rare  
at that manger rude and bare,  
so may we with holy joy,  
pure and free from sin's alloy,  
all our costliest treasures bring,  
Christ, to you, our heavenly King.*

*4 Holy Jesus, every day  
keep us in the narrow way;  
and, when earthly things are past,*

*bring our ransomed lives at last  
where they need no star to guide,  
where no clouds your glory hide.*

*5 In the heavenly country bright  
none shall need created light;  
you its light, its joy, its crown,  
you its sun which goes not down;  
there forever may we sing  
hallelujah to our King.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: We light this candle to remind us that the light of Christ  
shines upon us each and every day.

**All: We worship the God revealed through Jesus the Christ, in  
spirit and in truth.**

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

One: Do you notice the voice of the Holy One?

**All: We experience the gentle nudgings of God's Spirit!**

One: Are you aware of the hand of the Mysterious One at work?

**All: We are surrounded by hints of the Divine. May we be  
open to God's presence and answer God's call.**

HYMN – *Teach Me, God, to Wonder*

VU 299

*1. Teach me, God, to wonder; teach me, God, to see;  
let your world of beauty capture me.  
Praise to you be given; love for you be lived,  
life be celebrated; joy you give.*

*2. Let me, God, be open; let me loving be;  
let your world of people speak to me.  
Praise to you be given; love for you be lived,  
life be celebrated; joy you give.*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

**Sit beside me, My Friend, and share in a moment.  
Sing and share our heart song, hymns that tell of our deepest sorrows,  
and songs that remind us to laugh and dance, melodies and harmonies that move our hearts.  
Sit beside me, My Friend, and listen: Your word shared to remind us of your beautiful presence,  
stories to help us understand what we need to do. Please sit with us as we celebrate your Holy Presence today.**

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US  
Story: Seeing into the Heart

**◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆**

Reader: Dianne Coons

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: God of all the ages: as we open the scriptures this day, let us take heart, for you are calling to us.

As we seek your will for us, free our spirits to receive the truths that you have for us today. Amen.

THE WISDOM OF ISRAEL: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20

One: Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli.

The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' Then the LORD said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfil against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house for ever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever.'

Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said, 'Samuel, my son.' He said, 'Here I am.' Eli said, 'What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.' So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, 'It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him.'

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD

One: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God!**

PSALM: Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18

One: To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue,

O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them – they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end – I am still with you.

REFLECTION: You Have Searched Me and Known Me! - Psalm  
139

Greek and Jewish philosophers have always been at odds with describing the complex attributes of God. Greek theology tends to characterize God as being removed, unchanging perfection, aloof and static, far removed from the cares and affairs of human beings. Jewish theology, on the other hand presents a personal God intimately involved and profoundly concerned with his creatures. The psalmist offers this beautiful narrative in the Jewish tradition.

Here is a view of God as a constant companion who cannot be ignored, escaped, or fooled. God is both at the farthest reaches of

the universe and as close as breath in the depths of the human heart. This unyielding presence could be perceived as threatening or claustrophobic but it is not. It is not fear, but trust that it evokes, not guilt but praise, not judgment but grace. Our utter dependence on God is both comforting as well as demanding.

God is at our beginning and God is at our ending. There is nothing that can separate us from this determined God. Paul takes up this same theme as the psalmist in his address to the Romans. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In this meditation on life the psalmist is able to capture God's presence in our lives in agreement with the fundamental message of the gospel. We belong body and soul to God. The conviction that we are autonomous, self-determining individuals is an illusion brought on by our pride. Our destiny is in the hands of God. Our singular being and the universality of God go hand in hand, thus we are dependent on and trust in God.

This psalmist makes the case that whether we are aware of God or not, we are known completely by God. God knows our every thought, word and deed before they are uttered. There are no moments, distant or dark in which God is absent. No pain, hurt, abandonment, rejection, or loneliness are unknown to God.

There is a tension between our desire for privacy and sharing ourselves with others. Contrary to all our efforts to protect ourselves, God invades our privacy and knows us better than we know ourselves. God's knowledge of us is both a source of



comfort and discomfort. For those who long for God's discipline, it is comfort; for those who desire to be left alone, it may bring discomfort. One of our greatest needs is to get past the façade, to be understood and experience empathy with others. Human limitations and selfishness get in our way.

One theologian makes the point that God did not send Jesus to know what it was like to be human. God already knew. Rather, knowing what it was like to be human, He sent Jesus. God's incarnation was for our benefit not God's.

God supremely values humans. This is of profound significance to the one who can find no semblance of self-worth. "I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." It is not only the teenager who struggles with the concept of their identity. It occurs again when children leave home and parents become empty nesters; when the retiree wakes up the one morning and has no place to go; when the caregiver whose spouse or parent has died after a long illness is suddenly left without direction. It is also evident in the man or woman who struggles with their sexual identity. At one time or another, we all ask, what is the meaning of life and who am I? Nevertheless, in those moments of self-doubt, we are fully known and eternally loved.

The value of our worth cannot be taken away from us by others or ourselves. It does not come from what we achieve or we possess, or what others may think of us. It comes from God who knows and names us. We are not devalued by the entertainment industry which sets standards of human perfection; we are not diminished by the comparison of able bodied to disabled; we are not doomed by the disparities of money and power to the vulnerable and poor. Society sets those standards. God does not.

Even when our comprehension of God fails, God is still present with us.

We are not alone! We are constantly in the watchful eye of this God who loves us and will not let us go. Amen.

THE GOSPEL: John 1:43-51

One: The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

One: The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ

**All: Praise to you, O Christ!**

REFLECTION: Jesus, The Fulfilment of Hope! - John 1:43-51

"Come and Follow Me!" says Jesus. I invite you to step into the shoes of Philip or Nathanael for a moment. Jesus, unknown to you approaches and requests you to follow him. At this point, he has performed no miracles, shown no signs, engaged in no

teaching, nor presented any proclamation about the reign of God. Jesus appears to be an ordinary man. It is highly unlikely you would be drawn to want to cast aside everything and follow him. He comes from an insignificant little village, the son of Joseph, the carpenter, a simple Jew. The Messiah would certainly have come from a prominent family in an important town. While the reader knows of Jesus' true identity, the people who lived amongst him, did not. They could not see beyond his appearance. John highlights this as one of the great tragedies of the gospel. It was a far different response by his disciples because Jesus chose them "out of the world." We might well ask how our encounters with God broaden our horizon and help us to see the divine in new ways.

We are not told what it was that excited the imagination of Philip. However, when he tries to encourage his friend Nathanael to come along, Nathanael scoffs at Jesus' humble beginnings and clearly has not felt the magnetism that drew Philip. And then Jesus, in the manner of the all-knowing God, is able to "see" Nathanael in place before their personal meeting. Jesus' depth of perception alone, is sufficient for Nathanael to understand that Jesus is remarkable and divine.

John places great emphasis on Jesus' genuine humanness, and at the same time the forecasted messianic hope of the people of Israel. Philip simply hears the command to "Follow" and does so; Nathanael has need of greater assurance. He must see a sign in order to move him to respond. Theologians have commented that following Jesus was not an individual's deliberation or choice. Confessing Jesus seems to merely follow the actions of "come, see, hear" and then lead to spontaneous following. It is the sheer presence of Jesus that propels them to act. This

initiation of the disciples leads through an unfolding of the narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is only in the accomplishment of these events that God's glory be revealed for all to see.

Our journey into discipleship confirms our willingness to walk with Jesus, to learn who he is and what it means to follow him. Our church guides us along this pathway through our prayers, our favourite hymns and the story that is told in our beautiful stained-glass windows. Above all, we undertake to be gospel people to spread the news that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's hope for a world that has lost its way.

We are caught in the struggles of light versus darkness and Jesus is claimed to be the guide on both sides. Anger and hate and fear set us apart and can keep us from seeing what is right. It is not only the wildly contentious conspirators, but also many well-meaning Christians who challenge government authority and liberal points of view. When we are trying to understand how we might uphold our discipleship, we are confronted with asking how Jesus would have responded to each situation. He wasn't always meek and mild and often stood at odds with the established religious authorities and power structures of his day. We need to be careful in our analysis to not lose sight of his willingness to confront injustice and turn on end some of the norms that were taken for granted as part of everyday life. Our mandate is **to love God and love one another**. Everything else must evolve out of that. We have the benefit of realizing the entirety of Jesus life, death and resurrection, unlike Philip and Nathanael, in their days of call, thus we are expected to follow and act with a much greater understanding of the role of Jesus as

the fulfillment of God's hope for all people, as we continue in the work of bringing in the kingdom of God. Amen

## INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: This siege under Pandemic continues to be a long-term event and the end is not yet in sight. You, the people of Melrose have continued to hang in there with your offerings and support in spite of not being able to gather in person. Melrose appreciates your ongoing support in making possible the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

\*OFFERING HYMN - *Grant Us, God, the Grace*

VU 540

*Grant us, God, the grace of giving,  
with a spirit large and free,  
that ourselves and all our living  
we may offer faithfully*

### A Thought-Provoking Story!

#### "Inspirational Porn!"

Bekah Andersen is a writer, student and disability activist living in the states. She has written an interesting and thought-provoking article calling us out on how we hold up accomplishments by people who are disabled, as inspirational. She calls them "Inspirational Porn." This was certainly an eye opener for me as I have been guilty of the kind of thinking she portrays without an understanding of how it impacts on the disabled community.

We, preachers, love to use examples in our stories highlighting how people overcome great odds and succeed. Stella Young, an activist says that "people with disabilities are called inspirational solely, or in part on the basis of their disability." This involves stories that would be everyday occurrences if "normal" people did them, but become "inspirational" when they are done by disabled.

When accomplishments are framed as highlighting the success of disabled people without any examination of the biases inherent in it. For example. Inspirational porn sets an able-bodied standard of “normal” as exceptional for disabled people, and therefore, assumes that they are expected to do “worse” at any given task than their non-disabled peers. This has the potential to hurt people who aren’t poster perfect. Some disabled people can’t or don’t want to live their lives the “normal” way. Many of them are highly accomplished but you never hear about them because their ways of moving, talking, or interacting make able-bodied people uncomfortable. When we focus on people who are “disabled pretty” at the expense of those who are not, we lose a lot of amazing stories. There are many who are trapped by institutions, poverty, over-protective families, lack of assistive services, lack of useful education, and many other factors that are part of an insidious force called ableism.

Our stories holding up disabled as special, tell people that they are smart, courageous and never give up on their dreams, but there may be other extenuating circumstances like whiteness or money that are not available to other disadvantaged people, so that the assumption is that disabled people who do not succeed are not smart enough, brave enough and give up too easily and therefore are not worthy of our attention. She says this is a lie. And we are not to forget about the people in understaffed group homes, the mentally ill black men behind bars, the children in Special Ed. classes. She says she is no better than them, she is just privileged. We are asked to listen – listen to the voices that are slurred, or through a computer, voices that have been effectively silenced, and honour their loss. Their voices too, are sacred.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**All: You See us clearly, Graceful God, and you call us to**

**recognize the needs of our world.**

One: The despair of the homeless. The fatigue of the overworked. The despair of the prisoners. The frustration of the illiterate. The heartache of the powerless. The loneliness of the friendless.

**All: And you ask us to ask ourselves - have I a role to play in meeting their needs?**

**You see us clearly, Graceful God, and you call us to recognize the needy in our community.**

One: The anguish of those who cannot control, their gambling habit. The desperation of those who cannot control their spending. The frustration of those who have to wait for medical care. The frustration of persons who increasingly lose their mobility. The sadness of those estranged from family and friends. The hopelessness of the bereaved.

**All: And you ask us to ask ourselves - have I a role to play in meeting their needs?**

**You see us clearly, Graceful God, and you call us to recognize the needs found in our church.**

One: The need for fresh, energetic leadership in our congregation. We think of our Worship Committee in need of a Chair; and our Ministry and Personnel Committee in need of members and a Chair.

The spiritual needs of non-churchgoers. Helping disadvantaged persons in partnership with community resources. Vital mission projects, as well as local ones.

**All: And you ask us to ask ourselves - have I a role to play in meeting those needs?**

**You see us clearly, Graceful God, and you call us to recognize the needs that are ours alone.**

One: Being ready to put past mistakes and troubles behind us.

Believing we have been forgiven. Making an agonizing difficult decision. Saying the words that need to be said. Taking action not just talking. Helping a friend in trouble. Facing up to our most threatening situations.

**All: And you alert us to your sustaining presence at our most crucial times.**

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, and all our shut ins, for those who are still grieving loss of their loved ones, for those whose incomes have been reduced through the pandemic, for those who are afraid or unable to go out, for those who are feeling the isolation of separation from family and friends.

We pray for those in our circle who are recovering from illnesses, who are struggling with imperfect relationships, who are filled with anxiety and despair.

for those that we are not even aware that there is a concern, and for all those that we hold in our hearts we raise up to you for their safekeeping.

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 – *I, the Lord of Sea and Sky*

VU 509

*I, the Lord of sea and sky  
I have heard my people cry  
All who dwell in dark and sin  
My hand will save*

[Chorus]

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night  
I will go, Lord, if you lead me  
I will hold your people in my heart*

*2. I, who made the stars of night  
I will make their darkness bright  
Who will bear my light to them?  
Whom shall I send?*

[Chorus]

*3. I, the Lord of snow and rain  
I have borne my people's pain  
I have wept for love of them  
They turn away*

[Chorus]

*4. I will break their hearts of stone  
Give them hearts for love alone  
I will speak my words to them  
Whom shall I send?*

[Chorus]

*5. I, the Lord of wind and flame  
I will tend the poor and lame*

*I will set a feast for them  
My hand will save  
[Chorus]*

*6. Finest bread I will provide  
'Til their hearts be satisfied  
I will give my life to them  
Whom shall I send?  
[Chorus]*

#### COMMISSIONING

One: We have been healed and fed by God's grace, by God's Word, by God's people. Let us go forth to heal and feed, knowing that we are never alone, knowing that we abide in the shadow of God's wings, knowing that our God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter, goes with us each step of the way.

#### 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