

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

86 Homewood Avenue ◆ Hamilton, Ontario ◆ L8P 2M4

905 522 1323 ◆ melrose@melroseunited.ca

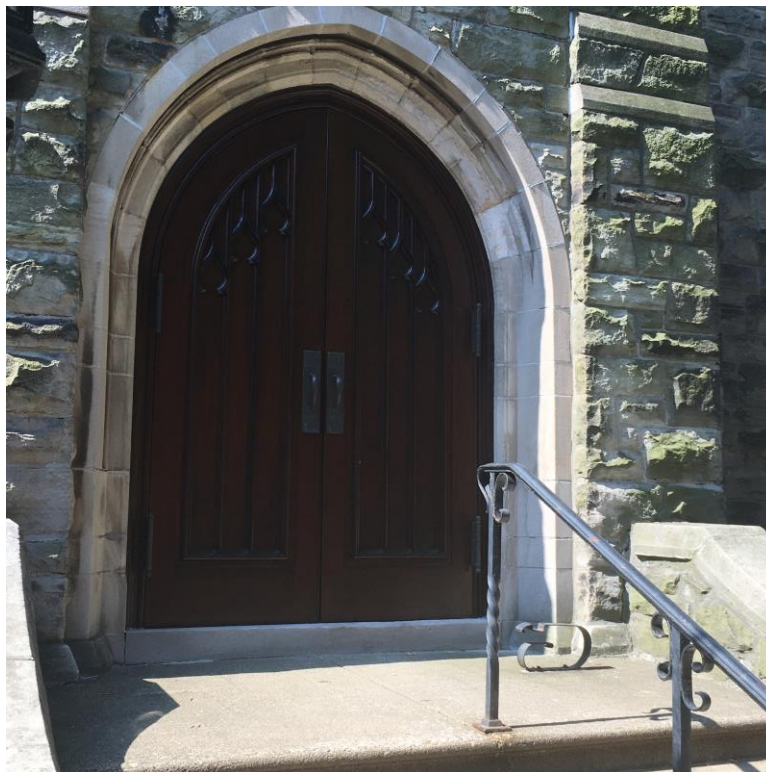
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Minister:

Music Director:

Family Ministries Coordinator:

Custodian:

Office Administrator:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Alexander Cann

Meg Chalmers

Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday July 19, 2020 ◆

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Basse et Dessus de Trompette L.N. Clérambault

*OPENING HYMN – *Jesu, Joy of Our Desiring* VU 328
Allana Stevenson, soprano

*1 Jesu, joy of our desiring,
holy wisdom, love most bright;
drawn by you, our souls aspiring
soar to uncreated light.*

*Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
with the fire of life impassioned,
striving still to truth unknown,
soaring, dying round your throne.*

*2 Through the way where hope is guiding,
hark, what peaceful music rings;
where the flock, in you confiding,
drink of joy from deathless springs.*

*Theirs is beauty's fairest pleasure;
theirs is wisdom's holiest treasure.*

*You, forever, lead your own
in the love of joys unknown.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: We have a dream for peace, love, shelter and food for all in
a world in which we share rather than hoard.

All: We are to bring the light of Christ into the midst of all we do, multiplying and magnifying its effect until all God's children are included.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: All God's children are welcome and wanted here, no matter our need.

All: God will give you rest from your weariness, comfort from your pain, balm for your soul, food for your mind, and hope for your tomorrow.

One: God's ability to tend and nurture, calm and inspire, knows no bounds and never ends.

All: Let us open our hearts and minds to God's loving kindness and welcome.

Let us be God's loving kindness and welcome for each other as we worship together.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

God of Hope, wise, gentle, strong, you open a heavy door to reveal what is beyond. You prepare our trust account for when the material world collapses, freeing us from the need to know why things happen as they do, and building the bridge of humility we must cross to you. Dear God, may hope bring us a new day. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Once there lived two neighbours who used to grow the same plants in their respective gardens. One neighbor was fussy and took extreme care of her plants. The other neighbor did what was required, but left the leaves of the plants alone to grow as they pleased.

One evening, there was a huge storm, accompanied by heavy rainfall. The storm destroyed many of the plants.

The next morning, when the fussy neighbor woke up, she found that the plants had been uprooted and destroyed. However, when the more relaxed neighbor woke up, she found that her plants were still firmly rooted in the soil, having weathered the storm.

The plant of the relaxed neighbor had learnt to do things on its own. So, it had done its bit of work, grown deep roots, and made a place for itself in the soil. Thus it had stood firm even in the storm. However, the fussy neighbor used to do everything for the plant, thereby, not teaching the plant how to sustain itself on its own.

God has created us to learn and grow. Sooner, or later, you have to let go and allow your children to become independent. Unless you stop fussing, nothing will grow on its own.

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: What do we do, Gracious God, with stories that stretch not only our imaginations but, even more, so, our scientific minds? What do we do with walking on water and miraculous healings? What do we do with dreams that need interpretation, and Parables that lay out different scenarios and cause us to reflect? These are your words to us, O God. What do they mean? Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Genesis 28:10-19a

One: Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

One: The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 139

Refrain

Hal H. Hopson 1989

God, you have searched me, you know me through and through.

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O God, you have searched me and known me.
 You know when I sit down and rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
 You discern my path and the places I rest;
 you are familiar with all my ways.
 Before a word is on my tongue, you know it, O God, completely.
 You guard me from behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.

It is beyond my knowledge; it is a mystery; I cannot fathom it. R

Where can I escape from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I lie down in the grave, you are even there.

If I take wing with the dawn and alight at the sea's farthest limits,
 there also your hand will be guiding me
 your powerful hand holding me fast.

If I say, "Let the darkness cover me and my day be turned to night,"
 even darkness is not dark to you: the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you. R

It was you who formed my inward parts;
 you fashioned me in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully, wonderfully made.

Wondrous are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was being fashioned in secret,
 intricately woven in the mystery of clay.

Your eyes saw my substance taking shape;
 in your book my every day was recorded;
 all my days were fashioned, even before they came to be. R

How deep your designs are to me, O God! How great their number!

I try to count them but they are more than the sand.

I come to the end – I am still with you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my thoughts.

Watch closely, lest I follow a path of error
 and guide me in the everlasting way. R

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43

One: He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ.

All: Praise be to you, O Christ.

REFLECTION - "Spiritual Growth"

My topic today is Spiritual Growth.

A Cherokee native tale about a youth's rite of passage.

At twelve, the father takes him into the forest... blindfolded... and leaves him... alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night... and not take off his blindfold until the ray of sun shines through it. He is all by himself. He cannot cry out for help to anyone.

Once he survives the night... he is a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience. Each boy must come into his own manhood.

The boy was terrified... he could hear all kinds of noise... Beasts were all around him. Maybe even some human would hurt him. The wind blew the grass and earth... and it shook his stump. But he sat stoically... never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could be a man.

Finally, after a horrific night... the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he saw his father... sitting on the stump next to him... at watch... the entire night.

We are never truly alone; even when we do not know it. God places our family and our friends to watch out for us... sitting right there on the stump beside us.

We Christians believe that we are first and foremost spiritual beings living in a human experience. We emigrate from our true

home in the spiritual world and we are given an allotted time to experience physical life. When that time comes to an end, our souls return into the spiritual world and rejoin the divine realm of God's creation.

What could be God's purpose for placing us in this playground of life? Is there something here on earth that we either need to learn or experience that is necessary to our spiritual growth? Could it be time out for good behavior, a break in our "heavenly" routine? Is it the interaction with others that helps us to learn and grow? Is it because we are intended to help others or to experience a particular weakness and obtain a certain perspective on life?

Once we are here, we seem to have this innate desire to grow, not just in stature, but also in reason, wisdom, compassion, and knowledge. We are forever seeking ways to stretch and expand ourselves in many fulfilling areas.

Spiritual growth seems to be an activity that is ingrained in our lives from birth. As we learn and grow in the ways to become good human beings, we are taking in the world around us, sifting through its best parts, making decisions, and leading our lives based on our daily choices. Many teachers are placed in our pathways to assist in our spiritual growth. They guide, mentor, and encourage us to follow our own path.

The Christian's guideline and formation is first and foremost the Bible. We, in the United Church put some frame of reference around the teachings of the Bible. We believe, for the most part, that it is not the exclusive writing of God, it is influenced by the writers' biases and environment of the time.

The Bible contains truths and illustrates the evolution of the relationship between God and God's people, beginning with the "chosen" Jewish nation. In Jesus, the awareness and accessibility to the one true God opened up to include all peoples across all nations.

As we develop, we learn and become actively involved in prayer, a conversation with God in which we lay out our praise for God's works, our petitions for the world, our community, and more specific then, for our family and friends. We place our hopes and dreams before God and we ask for God's guidance in everything we do to become better humans, more compassionate, more loving, more patient, more kind and more like Jesus in our every day lives.

Some people are converted to Christianity in an instant and spend their lives building on that moment. Some have been steeped in their Christian beliefs from the time they are born into a family who already are believers. In both cases, spiritual growth is a choice, a decision that the individual makes to further their understanding and knowledge in the Christian way of life. It is as well, an attempt to appreciate how they personally fit in to this world, and how they can make a contribution to make it better.

There is a Chinese proverb that says: "the gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials." Discipleship is a means of working through this perfection. As disciples, we are learners who are steeped in the Word, love others, bear fruits of the spirit and are willing to place Christ first.

God chips away at our qualities that are not Christ-like, molding us through the Holy Spirit into the beings of light. God uses our trials that we face, to help us develop endurance and determination, and to provide us with many opportunities for growth.

Being a Christian is not only a Sunday affair. On Sundays, we come to the well to renew and augment our continuing knowledge, to build up our faith, to learn new perspectives, to reinforce ways in which the Bible provides a model for our behavior, and to hear stories of how writings of antiquity can be relevant for today.

But then, having gained all this knowledge, it is up to each of us, to take that knowledge, to add to it, to question, to analyze, to reflect, and to build it into our own internal system of behavior.

The individual who does nothing with what they hear or read withers and dies; our lives are intended to grow and blossom. Like gardens that mature and bear fruit when tended, so too, our minds expand and we produce the beautiful fruit that God intended when we were put here in the first place.

Philippians 2 tells us “Be even more careful to put into action God’s saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.”

All living things grow. The maturing process is a journey towards independence. Our spiritual journeys move in the opposite direction to our physical growth. We start off at a rebellious stage where we think we are fully independent from

God. Spiritual maturity comes about, when we let go of that thinking, and go through a process of realizing our complete dependence on God and we begin to rely on God rather than ourselves.

Following Jesus is a daily process of growth. We learn more about God and Jesus through our continuing relationship with the divine. We begin to dig deeper, to struggle with the questions that arise and we are willing to move beyond the spoon-feeding from the one in the pulpit, towards feeding ourselves.

When we are willing to develop an understanding of the Word, we move into the role of teachers who share and help others to grow in their understanding.

We learn to live into a state of grace by sharing the heart of God. We move beyond a desire for justice and retribution for those who wrong or anger us, to be able to respond with forgiveness and grace, even to people who don't deserve it.

Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." We grow in faithfulness and obedience, not out of duty, but out of that love for Him.

Paul talks in Galatians about the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Take an honest look at your life to see how you exude these qualities. Some may be easier than others; some may be entirely lacking needing conscious development in order to be evident, for all to see. "They will know we are Christians by our love...."

We engage in a community of like-minded believers to draw support from one another, to learn and grow together and to encourage, uplift and spread God's love through our actions to a world that is in great need.

One writer equates the Gospel to a gym: the more we get, the more it shapes our lives. Our love of Jesus should compel us to grow in our knowledge and our understanding of Him so we can become more like Him.

Angela Holton writes: All spiritual growth requires living with spiritual integrity. That means being honest and having strong moral principles. It comes when we align our choices with our highest, most authentic self. Our difficult choices reflect our truth and our integrity and they bring peace and harmony when they represent our innermost being, in spite of the rewards or deprivations.

The life of Peter, the disciple, is a lesson in spiritual growth. His greatest failure was his three time denial of Christ. He immediately realized what he had done and wept bitterly at his weak choice. He repented and moved on as a strong leader in The Way becoming Jesus' "rock" of faith and action.

One of the hardest things for a person to do is to let go of ways and ideas that do not serve their growth. Our calendar system is designed to let people start over. Nothing comes to a stop. It just recalculates and starts again.

If you have come to a point in your journey where you feel you are not moving forward, you have not lived up to your own expectation and you are falling short of where you would like to

be, take stock of the emphasis you are placing on your values. Has career and money taken priority over time and attention with family and friends and church? Has the gain of status and wealth become more important than the sick, the elderly or the poor?

Have the world's expectations and standards overrun your own desire for wholeness? Then it is time to work with a new game plan.

Jeremiah 29:11 says "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

It is never too late to wake up, to change, to set off in a new direction. Your spiritual growth is a gift that stays with you until you draw your last earthly breath. It determines your stature as a truly spiritual being. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: It is indeed a privilege to share in God's mission and to adapt to the needs around us. We are reminded to continue our gifts as we are able in the service of the ongoing work of our church.

OFFERING - Allegretto
Chris Palmer, guitar

M. Giuliani

*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

One: In our world there are those who sow the good seed.

They sow the seeds of practical help for those who do not know where the next meal is coming from.

They give seed loans to those who are starting off in business, and money to people whom the banks won't talk to.

They sow seeds of hope for parents trying to balance the challenges of home life, work, their social lives, and activities for their children.

They sow seeds of peace for persons confronting each other in local government and national leaders in conflict.

All: We support those who sow the good seed. God is with them, and God is with us. With joy we await the harvest.

One: Among the troubled there are those who sow the good seed.

Social workers bring understanding to those going through the storms of life.

Child care workers bring relief to parents and calm to disturbed children.

Sensitive family doctors get the confidence of their troubled patients.

Ministers, counselors and funeral directors bring peace and a new reality to those who mourn.

We remember those who are sick, troubled, and those who are bereaved.

**All : We support those who sow the good seed.
God is with them, and God is with us. With joy we
await the harvest.**

One: Within the church there are many who sow the good seed.
We give thanks for all who preach, teach, and offer
pastoral care to the downhearted.

We give thanks to those who encourage and challenge
children and youth to serve others and to have confidence
in their own abilities.

We give thanks for those who advocate for the powerless.
We give thanks to those who call us to look beyond our
local faith community to the needs of those in distant and
developing countries.

**All: We support those who sow the good seed.
God is with them, and God is with us. With joy we
await the harvest.**

One: We have the chance to inspire and challenge those around
us.

Our family members need a listening ear, and our friends
need us to build them up.

Our social groups look to us for support, and to do the jobs
no one else wants to do.

We know if we walk or exercise regularly others will
follow our example.

Our faith community relies on us to worship and give
regularly and take an active part in the life of the church.

And there are other areas where we are called to sow the good seed.

All: God is with us as we work as God's seed sowers; there will be a joyful harvest.

One: We pray for our community of Melrose. We pray for those outside our church community who 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. 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 - *In Christ There Is No East or West* VU 606

*1 In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great family of love
throughout the whole wide earth.*

*2 In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;*

*his service is the golden cord
close binding humankind.*

*3 Join hands, then, peoples of the faith,
whate'er your race may be;
all children of the living God
are surely kin to me.*

*4 In Christ now meet both east and west,
in him meet south and north:
all Christ-like souls are one in him
throughout the whole wide earth.*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: Our Spiritual Growth inclines when we listen and ponder the stories of Jesus, and when we share our inspirational stories with one another. Take the time to intentionally grow your spirit, feed it, nourish it, and watch its glorious growth as we build up the community of God.

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.