

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ Sunday July 26, 2020 ◆
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE -

* OPENING HYMN - *For the Beauty of the Earth*

VU 226

*1 For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,*

[Refrain:]

*God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*2 For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light, [Refrain]*

*3 For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild, [Refrain]*

*4 For each perfect gift sublime
to our race so freely given;
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven. [Refrain]*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Jesus opens the Word to us through parables and story.

All: He lights the way to understanding because He is the light of the world. We, too, are filled with this light.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: These summer months offer us much-needed time for rest and renewal.

All: Let us take this time of worship to desire to find rest and renewal for our souls.

One: Let us come as the sun shines, as the warm rains fall, as the earth ripens, that we might praise God together.

All: So be it.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Word of God Made Flesh, bless us with wisdom and send us to our tasks.

Clothe us with the holiness of your son.

Creating God, teach us to listen to the language of our hearts; make us your scribes.

O Holy Word Incarnate, Word Made Flesh, dwell among us. Be in the vein, in the marrow, in the bone.

O Holy Word Incarnate, in you we live and move and have our being. In you, is life. Amen.

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

There were three fish living in a pond. They were friends and practically did everything together.

One day a fisherman came across the pond and was delighted to see the fish. He made plans to cast a net and catch them

The wisest of the fishes made plans to find a different pond. While one of the fish agreed, the other one denied, saying that the pond was home and he shall not. The third fish further said that there had never been any danger in the pond. "I don't see the point of leaving this pond I think it is cowardly."

The first two fish were unable to convince their friend, and so they decided to part ways.

The next day the fisherman came and cast his net, the first two fish had escaped. However, the third one got caught. He had been unable to identify and act upon the problem and was now paying the price of neglecting danger.

God has given us intuition and wisdom for us to use when facing problems. We remember that each of our problems is different and therefore, we look for different solutions.

◆ 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.

THE WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Genesis 29:15-28

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your

wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" Laban said, "This is not done in our country – giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

One: The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 128

One: Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.

You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of
Jerusalem all the days of your life.
May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:31-33, and 44-52

One: He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ

REFLECTION: "Wisdom"

My topic today is Wisdom.

I begin with a short story - "an autobiography in five very short chapters " by Portia Nelson

Chapter One - I walk down the street. There's a hole in the sidewalk. It is a very deep hole. I fall in...I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter Two - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I *pretend* I don't see it. I fall in... *again*. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter Three - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it there. I still fall in... it's a habit, but my eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter Four - I walk down the same street. There's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter Five - I walk down another street.

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Five books in the Old Testament are considered to be Wisdom writings: - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. Each are chock full of examples of wisdom writings. The Bible has three different types of wisdom - the first is village or folk wisdom. These are short, pithy statements - the most of these are found in Proverbs.

The second is Royal wisdom; it instructs on palace politics.

And the third is theological wisdom and deep reflection; it covers controversial topics such as: Is there a God? And if so, why do such awful things happen?

Sages, or wise men, were responsible for the wisdom sayings. They believed that God wove important principles into the fabric of the universe and that careful observation could discern. Prophets, on the other hand believed that God gave specific persons divine knowledge through dreams, visions, ecstasy and divine appearance. Sages were always at odds because the universe often did not make sense, in spite of the fact that they believed that it should.

Wisdom is one of many virtues, a characteristic that is to be desired and an outward sign of good judgment. It is something that one is not born with nor taught. As in the case of the little tale I began with it, must be learned over time through life experience. When we see glimpses of it in the very young, we are surprised and attribute it to an old soul existing in a young body.

Rene Descartes, a famous French Philosopher said that: It is God alone who has perfect wisdom, complete knowledge, and the truth of all things. Human beings become wise as they begin to approach the truths known only by God.

What does wisdom look like? It shows up in honour, non-selfish actions, truth, peace-loving, merciful and good traits.

It is developed through gaining new experiences, stepping outside our comfort zones, being open minded to new cultures, new activities and new people.

It is learned through education, wise mentors, reading and realizing that everyone is fallible.

We put wisdom into practice by being humble in situations where we think before acting; we act only out of our values; we learn from our mistakes; and we share our wisdom with others by leading as an example.

The author of the Book of James tells us that wisdom comes from God, is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, sincere, impartial and full of good fruits.

The Greeks believed that Sophia, a feminine aspect of the divine, was the breath and the power of God. Stoics understood wisdom as a crucial underpinning for the goal of a moral life.

Elaine Pagels is a modern-day theologian who writes many books for theological studies. She says that “you want to know God, but when you really get there, you’ll understand that first, you can’t know God because God is bigger than you are. And second, you understand that you live in *it* and you’re dependent on *it*.”
(meaning God)

The world longs for wisdom. The Bible says: “it is more precious than rubies. Nothing you desire can compare with her.”

King Solomon, son of King David is our earliest illustration of biblical wisdom. He prays to God not for riches or fame, but to be made wise. His deepest desire was to be smart and knowledgeable, but more valuable beyond that, to have the wisdom to apply it appropriately.

The story that illustrates his wisdom involved two prostitutes with babies. A child of the one of the women died, the other mother accuses her of stealing her baby during the night. They come before the wise king to ask him to determine to whom the baby belongs. Solomon, in essence, says it is an impossible task to decide who is telling the truth, and is the rightful mother. He takes out his sword and offers to cut the baby in half so that they each have a portion. One woman speaks up quickly and says, “no! no! Let her have the baby “. He immediately knows that she is the true mother, the only one who really cares about the life of the baby.

There are so many lessons in that story. The wisdom to apply what we know appropriately to get to the truth involves an element that we all need for us to be able to live truth-filled lives.

Each day we hope to grow and improve on the day before. We are always striving, or becoming. Our lives are a life long process of growth, in obtaining wisdom, and insight that point towards a hope-filled future.

Our thirst for happiness within this world is insatiable. If we do not have the wisdom to seek it in God, then we will find whatever poor substitutes we can from the material world.

Happiness is camouflaged through the acts of terrorists who ideologically destroy people for their own beliefs; in executives who ruthlessly climb the corporate ladder at the expense of others; in athletes who, to the exclusion of all else, break world records; in scholars whose only drive is to publish books to make a name for themselves; in gamblers who spend their days in the

casino; in musicians who sell their souls to become top record producers.

All the excesses of drinking, drugs, sex, eating, and suntans that happiness brings, is fleeting. Unsatisfied, incomplete, knowing there must be something more, those addicted choose to live in the glamour of success, apart from God.

Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but it is a misnomer to think that we need to cower in fear of God's justice. The fear is more in not running away from God, in not seeking refuge and joy in God, but in choosing to look for other avenues than God

Wisdom is characterized by humility through a renewing of the mind which is able to examine and approve the will of God - Knowing and doing the commandments of God and hearing and doing God's Word.

When it comes to acquiring spiritual wisdom, the truth is that while many desire it, there are probably few who know what it really is. It is more than knowledge. If you want to be wise the choice is simple.

- Choose wisdom – Just act on it.
- Trust your instincts – The late Wayne Dyer has said that intuition is more than just a hunch. It is a form of guidance by way of inner insight and it should never be taken lightly or ignored.
- Set boundaries – once you choose wisdom, the rules for how you live your life will change (ie. Is it wise to eat junk food at 10 p.m.? Is it wise to move about alone in a bad

neighbourhood after dark?) Guarding your soul, your heart, your desires, is a path that leads to great spiritual wisdom.

- Surround yourself with wisdom – people who are wise, counselors, wise books.
- Learn from your mistakes – Having once failed at a particular action, change the pattern.
- Learn from other people's mistakes – Watch and observe others.
- Choose wisdom daily – Every moment teaches you about yourself and your environment. You add to yesterday's wisdom with new information to keep the spiritual evolution going.

Self analysis is the key to spiritual wisdom. In order to reach beyond yourself, you need to know where you are now and self-correct.

We all need correction and that can be very hard to accept. We listen to advice and accept instruction so that we may gain wisdom in future. One of the key components, is to know when to speak, or when not to speak at all. We only learn when we are listening and when we are not talking. For some this is very difficult because we are prone to preparing our reply even before the person has finished speaking, thus missing the tail end of their conversation.

A closing story –
The Wise Woman's Stone

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry and the wise woman opened her bag to share

her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said, “I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me something more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.
(Author unknown).

Native wisdom says “Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”
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 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: The kingdom is a treasure – God’s treasure. We will search for it in our world.

Where there is reconciliation among enemies, the treasure will be found.

Where nations give money to help countries who face natural disasters, the treasure will be found.

In prisons, where the inmates are seen less as persons to be punished, and more as humans who have potential for good, the treasure will be found.

In schools, where talented students actively support the struggling ones, the treasure is found.

All: Count us among those, O God, who search carefully and persistently for the kingdom.

One: The treasure is found where those who live hectically take the time they need to read a good book or creatively work in the garden.

The treasure is found among those who lovingly look after elderly dependants or challenged young persons. The treasure is found where advisors and counselors work tirelessly to enable persons to find jobs that meet their skills and abilities.

The treasure is found when the sick person is treated holistically, not just for the physical symptoms.

The treasure is found among persons who stay beside those who feel the loss of a loved one acutely.

All: Count us among those, O God, who search carefully and persistently for the kingdom.

One: In a community where a newcomer feels at home and each child is nurtured, the treasure is found.

Where the church consistently dialogues with the local community and is open to its needs, the treasure will be found.

Where local churches work together and search out ways of serving those most vulnerable in the area, the treasure is found.

All: We are members of the faith community. Count us among those, O God, who search carefully and persistently for the kingdom.

One: We find the treasure in a breathless early morning beside the lake.

We find the treasure as we experience the love and friendship of those close to us.

We find the treasure as we become aware of the unrealized gifts of those we meet and give them confidence to use their gifts.

We find in our spiritual life God's treasure beyond price.

All: Count us among those, O God, who search carefully and persistently for the kingdom.

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 - *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise* VU 264

*1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.*

*2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.*

*3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life. thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
then wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.*

*4 Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.*

COMMISSIONING

One: Wisdom resides all around us, in the eyes and hearts of the aged who have experienced many things in their lives and long to share it with all who will listen;
In the child who appears as an old soul as they astound with their perception and understanding;
In the rocks and trees, and the wind and the sun, and the flowers and the bees, we have only to open our eyes to grasp it.

BENEDICTION

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