

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday July 5, 2020 ◆
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Prelude Variation #7, Goldberg Variations J.S. Bach

*OPENING HYMN – *Jesus Shall Reign* VU 330

*1 Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun
does its successive journeys run;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

*2 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.*

*3 Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
and prisoners leap to lose their chains;
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.*

*4 Let every creature rise and bring
peculiar honours to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud Amen!*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

All: Our candle dances with the presence of the Spirit, reminding us of the warmth of community in which God calls us to gather and the light that shines with wisdom, insight, and clarity for us in our time of worship.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: You could be in one of a hundred places right now, in bed with the covers over your head, gardening or hiking or drinking coffee on the deck, but you are here in community with God and your hearts and spirits are with one another.

All: What is it that calls you here, week after week, or for the first time?

One: Is it lifelong habit?
A quest for holiness?
An expectation, or an easy choice?
Are you seeking? Are you asking?

All: God has found us here. Thank God for the blessing of the divine presence, for as promised, where we gather, Jesus himself is among us.

* HYMN – *New Every Morning*

VU 405

*1 New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life, and power, and thought.*

*2 New mercies, each returning day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

*3 If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still of countless price
God will provide for sacrifice.*

*4 The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask,
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.*

*5 Only, O God, in your dear love,
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Holy Spirit, blow through the doors of our homes.

Holy Spirit, blow through the doors of our hearts!

**Where the dust of the years covers the joy of God's love, blow it
away!**

Where the shutters are nailed down,

Keeping us from experiencing the sunrise, blow them open!

Where life has burned us, burdened us,

Broken us, blow into these bones,

That we might live, as Christ's people again!

A TIME WITH CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

The Mouse and the Lioness

The lioness, as we know, is fierce, proud and tends to look down upon smaller animals. One such lioness was once skirting the jungle when a thorn pricked her paw. Being proud, the lioness decided not to ask for help. She went around the jungle, getting weaker and bleeding.

One day she chanced upon a humble mouse. The lioness was in a lot of pain. The mouse, though quite scared, was courageous enough to offer help. The little mouse after much effort, managed to pull out the thorn from the lioness' paw and freed her from pain.

Even though the lioness was so big and powerful, and mouse was so tiny and humble, it was the mouse's kind gesture that saved the lioness' s life.

God creates all kinds, the powerful and the weak. We may see this as a prescription for Evil, but the lesson for us is to be humble in power and confident in weakness for we are all able to help one another.

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: Life-giving God, open our hearts and minds, that we will receive and then act on your message of love, hope, and grace in your living Word, Jesus. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 145:8-14

One: The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

GOSPEL: Matthew 11:16 – 19, 25-30

One: “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ.

EPISTLE: Romans 7:15-25a

One: I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

One: This is the word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: "The Concept of Evil!"

I have chosen 5 philosophical topics for the summer reflections, that I have found interesting, which are not covered by specific lectionary scriptures. Today's is on *Evil*, to be followed by *Purpose and Direction, Spiritual Growth, Wisdom and Patience*. Evil was by far the hardest one to do. It took the longest time to research and it was difficult to face because it looks at the negative aspects of personality that do some pretty significant damage to the rest of God's creation.

I mentioned in one of my congregational letters about growing up on Grimms Fairy Tales. They are chock full of evil characters. One might think that they are too harsh for children to hear, but it turns out that children actually crave scary stories. They learn from a very early age that evil exists and they need to hear how good triumphs over evil. "Understanding that goodness can prevail offers a sense of reassurance and can ultimately guide a child's actions when he or she is faced with their own inner conflict over doing what is right as opposed to what may be beneficial."

The Dictionary defines *Evil* as profoundly immoral and wicked, an action intended to cause sorrow, distress, calamity, fact of suffering, misfortune and wrongdoing in an individual or groups of individuals.

Understanding evil has been analyzed from a moral, theological, political and legal viewpoint in order to try to explain the various atrocities and horrors such as genocides, terrorist attacks, mass murders, tortures and killing sprees of psychopathic serial killers.

Two concepts of evil exist: – natural – a bad state of affairs, such as twisters or hurricanes, versus moral – which has intention and negligence through human intervention. The existence of evil is not questioned. What gives rise to many opposing schools of thought is whether or not it renders an overriding watchful God to be *nonexistent*.

Some have argued that the statement - God exists; God is omnipotent; God is omniscient; God is perfectly good; Evil exists – is incompatible. If we state that Evil exists and God exists, then how do we reconcile these two unseemly untenable outcomes?

One would assume that a perfectly good being would want to prevent all evil; and that an all-knowing and all-powerful God that has both the power and the knowledge on how to prevent evil, would *want* to prevent the existence of that evil. And yet, evil exists. And we believe God exists. So, this presents a quandary for us.

The study of evil is mainly a theological argument. In monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity, there is a need to tackle this from a perspective of justification. Each of these religions already believes that God *exists, and, is good, and powerful*, thus there is a need to explain away God's inactivity in responding.

Jewish interest only became focused in evil after the Holocaust. They generally move along three veins: evil exists for the purpose of soul making, to allow the greater good to surface, or, it is balanced in the after life.

Islam believes that evil is impossible to understand, unless there is a deeper explanation in the after life.

Christianity has studied evil judiciously throughout the centuries and posits many different arguments. None of them are terribly satisfying or definitive, because when it comes right down to it, we do not know the mind of God

Many theologians come at this from the concept of free will. God chose in creating us to give us the ability to make choices. We have been given a conscience to weigh right and wrong, but it is ultimately our decision to do what is right, or to give in to the

temptation to do what is evil. Given a choice, most people would choose to do what is right. Psychologists argue that there is something lacking in conscience when the evil pathway is chosen.

Free will scholars state that the nature of evil has a necessary role to play in God's plan for a better world. Evil is thus a consequence of free will.

There is also a school of thought that holds that God allows evil to happen in order to encourage a response that will lead to the greater good. We see this played out in the epoch story of Joseph. He was trapped by his brothers and sold off to traders in Egypt where he eventually rose into political power under the Pharaoh. When he was faced with his brothers' need for famine relief, he welcomed them saying "You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good."

Several theologians argue that God became the "Great Companion and Fellow-Sufferer" in the crucifixion of Jesus. God, in great love for God's creation, became one of us in order to understand our suffering.

The Greek philosophers were great believers in fate. They attributed evil to being outside human control and designated by a supernatural power.

Many fundamental Christians believe that evil is God's discipline or punishment allotted to a wicked generation. They see ills that befall humanity as a strike against different sexual orientation, abortion, or the general debauchery of society. They are quick to lay blame for moral depravity as a reason for God's punishment

in the form of natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, or the current pandemic.

A poll taken a few years ago in North America found that about 7 out of 10 people believe in hell, thus fear of divine punishment is a driving factor in moral behavior. Those who believe in hell see God as a punishing God; those who believe in heaven see God as a benevolent God.

Pollsters have found that recording this belief is a strong predictor of national crime rates (assault, homicide, rape and theft). The greater the belief in hell, the greater we will see the decrease in crime rates.

Thus, we are prompted to ask the question: What is religion's role in human character? How does it relate to fear of retribution versus unconditional piety?

While society's norms change over time, humans are the only species that have the ability to be shamed for bad behavior. Being seen by another and reported is a check on selfish behavior. Recent events have brought this to our attention. Racism has existed forever and yet, the unacceptable and horrendous acts have not been as visual until we began to see them in their reality on TV.

Other explanations for evil began with the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve let down humanity by their inability to follow God's rules. Evil is seen as part of natural laws, or divine punishment for moral evils done by humans.

Some hold that fallen angels under the leadership of Satan are at work in the material world. They have free reign until the rule of

Jesus in the Second Coming found in Revelation. Others would nix the idea of a supernatural power at work and would say that there is a potential for evil in all of us.

Similarly, there is another belief that the universe is caught in a warring faction of two co-equal beings – God and the Prince of Darkness who are locked in constant battle for supremacy. The material world provides the platform for the forces of good against the forces of evil.

The Old Testament places the Satan right at the beginning of biblical history in the Garden of Eden in the guise of the serpent, tempter of Eve. The Satan was a divine being that was an adversary to God. His thrust was to entice followers to turn their backs on God

The New Testament clearly depicts Satan as the tempter offering worldly power and recognition to Jesus if he will bow down to him. As you can see from these many theories, people who study “evil” are very divided in their explanations.

Evil arises in the absence of love; it flows from a consuming hate, and a fear of difference. Its damage can be felt whether it is acted upon or thwarted. Knowledge of the intent to commit evil can be enough to adversely effect society causing a scurry for protection. It can also be an insidious creeping in without the intended victims even being aware of its existence until the damage is done.

A short story on closing to illustrate the damage of evil intent, by Zahid Hussain:

Once upon a time, there were three good friends, who were as close as friends can be and their names were Oge, Em and Uoy. They were content and inseparable and they never fought. They spent their days foraging and telling tales and they rarely strayed from their village. Their favourite haunt was a gnarled old tree stump, where they spent many hours idling away, swinging their legs and talking.

In that ancient village, there was a man called Natiash, who was silent and withdrawn and whom everyone knew as a loner. He took to watching the three friends from afar. The three friends noticed him, but they didn't pay him any attention, after all, he never did them any harm and although it was strange, he never said or did anything.

Natiash watched the three friends and a feeling slowly grew in his chest. That feeling turned into loathing. He hated that he was alone, and the three friends looked so content and inseparable and that they never fought. That feeling grew stronger and like a fruit that has outgrown itself, the feeling grew rancid and poison filled him.

One day Natiash saw that Oge was alone and an idea overcame him. In the distance, he saw one of the two other friends approaching and quickly, Natiash motioned to Oge. "What do you want?" Oge asked.

Natiash motioned Oge to come closer still. Oge reluctantly walked towards Natiash. "What do you want?" he repeated.

Instead of replying, Natiash shrugged and walked away leaving Oge confused. When Oge returned to the tree his friends asked him, "What did he want?" "Nothing," Oge replied. Em frowned.

A few days later the scene was repeated with Uoy, who returning to his tree told his friends. "He wanted Nothing."

A few more days passed. Every now and then, Natiash would motion one of the friends over and when the friend approached, he would shrug and walk away. Soon, local people could hear the three inseparable friends arguing. They argued in the daytime and they argued deep into the night.

No one knows how the fight started, but later witnesses say that Em struck out at Oge and then Uoy struck out at Em and the friendship was in tatters. And when the three friends had gone and were friends no more, the loner, Natiash walked over to the tree stump that had been the root of their friendship and he sat down on it and smiled a secret knowing smile.

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: We pray, Oh God, for peace of our world, may it seep into the corners where people cower in fear, where children cry themselves to sleep at night, where abuse and violence and neglect prevail.

May it gather up momentum and spread to the streets where angry protesters clash, where rage in motorists rises up, where negative, vile comments are posted in social media, where hearts are stone cold.

All: Give us your peace, O God, the peace that passes all human understanding.

One: May peace be among those who are suffering: the sick and the depressed, the alone, and the fearful.

May peace overflow in our medical professions who are overworked and burned out, in our hospitals, and in our nursing homes.

May peace settle in after such a long time of pandemic fear: in our homes, and our places of work, in our recreation, and our relationships.

May peace come and bring change to how we see one another as human beings, for all are worthy in God's sight.

All: Give us your peace, O God, the peace that passes all human understanding.

One: What we seek, O most caring God, is peace in our faith community: a peace that penetrates to the root of our fear, a peace that renders fear impotent, harmless, and irrelevant.

We seek an end to the various forms of evil that keep us from being a loving, caring society of humans that you created.

All: Give us your peace, O God, the peace that passes all human understanding.

One: We worry about our families: children, grandchildren, parents, and friends. We worry about our life's direction, our ability to live out our dreams. We worry about our world and its fragility and recovery.

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 – *Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life* VU 681

*1 Where cross the crowded ways of life,
where sound the cries of race and clan,*

*above the noise of selfish strife,
we hear your voice of life again.*

*2 In haunts of wretchedness and need,
on shadowed thresholds, dark with fears,
from paths where hide the lures of greed,
we catch the vision of your tears.*

*3 The cup of water given for you
still holds the freshness of your grace;
yet long these multitudes to view
the strong compassion of your face.*

*4 O Master, from the mountainside
make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
among these restless throngs abide,
and tread the city's streets again,*

*5 till all the world shall learn your love
and follow where your feet have trod,
till glorious from your heaven above
shall come the city of our God.*

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: You were called here to worship, and now you are
just as surely called into the world to share your love
of God with all you meet.

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 - Solfeggio in C Minor, C.P.E.
Allana Stevenson, piano

Bach