

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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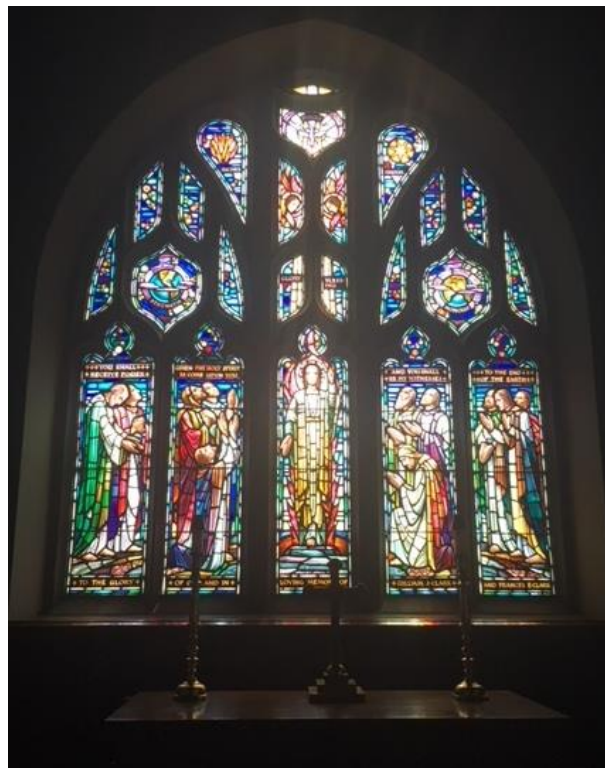
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Minister:

Music Director:

Family Ministries Coordinator:

Custodian:

Office Administrator:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Alexander Cann

Meg Chalmers

Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ Sunday November 22, 2020 ◆

Reign of Christ Sunday

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Courante, *Cello Suite # 2*
Chris Palmer, guitar

J. S. Bach

*OPENING HYMN – *Crown Him with Many Crowns*

VU 211

*1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.*

*2 Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing,
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.*

*3 Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a sceptre sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end;*

*and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of Paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.*

*4 Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds yet visible above,
in beauty glorified.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me:
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: You are the light of our heart, our Lord Jesus; you clear
away the shadows and gather us in.

**All: Your pure love flows over us in the sacred places of our
lives. Your message of love and transformation flood us
with your illuminating light.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come to worship this morning, some with joyful hearts,
and some with hurting souls.

**All: Christ is already here, wherever we are, ready to
celebrate, ready to heal.**

One: We come to worship at whatever time we choose this day,
some of us tired, some of us full of energy.

All: Christ is here, giving us strength and giving us purpose.

One: We come with questions; we come with faith.

All: Christ is here, present in doubt and present in assurance.

*1 I danced in the morning
when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon
and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth;
at Bethlehem I had my birth.*

[Refrain:]

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the dance, said he,
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

*2 I danced for the scribe
and the pharisee,
but they would not dance
and they would not follow me;
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John;
they came with me
and the dance went on. [Refrain]*

*3 I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame;
the holy people
said it was a shame;
they whipped and they stripped
and they hung me high,
and they left me there
on a cross to die. [Refrain]*

*4 I danced on a Friday
when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance
with the devil on your back;
they buried my body
and they thought I'd gone,
but I am the dance
and I still go on. [Refrain]*

*5 They cut me down
and I leap up high;
I am the life
that will never, never die;
I'll live in you
if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord
of the dance, said he. [Refrain]*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

O Creator and wondrous God, you love us in spite of our frailties,

Your voice we sometimes fail to notice, yet how we long to sense your loving presence.

We ask of you to cut the tangled web of our fears, to lighten our daily burdens,

And to temper our anxieties, that we may float in the awareness of your love for us,

And savour the limitlessness of your compassion.

May we truly learn to trust in your love forever.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US
Story: The Least of These

◆ **SERVICE OF THE WORD** ◆

Reader: Dianne Coons

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: In these life-giving Words help us to see the underlying message that we are loved, even when we don't feel lovely. Help us to ingest your Words so that they become our gift in action with one another. Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24 – Reign of Christ

One: For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and

shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

One: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: Step aside, Let Me show you how it is done!

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

“I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them justice.

In today’s passage, Ezekiel is condemning the leaders of Israel who have not taken care of the people. Using the shepherd as a metaphor for God’s care of the flock, God is saying, watch me, this is how it is done. You use and abuse them for your own gain, but you do not nourish them. I, on the other hand, will consistently nourish, rescue, and provide safe haven. My goodness and mercy will flow abundantly. It is a comforting vision until we reach the point where God shifts gears and says, but there are those I will destroy; the bullies, the unjust powerful, the disobedient, I will take down. God is patient and forgiving and loving, but God is not without correction. We struggle with this concept, in particular how to interpret when bad things happen to people. Is it a sign of God’s disapproval and punishment, or like a concerned parent, is God always teaching, leading, and correcting?

Shepherds, as a biblical image abounds in both the Old and New Testaments. The shepherd is seen as a tender leader who nurtures and protects, but when provoked, can lead to committing violence in protecting his flock. This passage equates in some measure to the Twenty-Third Psalm. They share common imagery – rescue from darkness, provision of food, fertile green pastures, nearby water and the euphoria of goodness and mercy. There is no hesitancy in saving the lost, nor is there any hesitancy in destroying those who have abused them. God is in action here. This text suggests that the shepherd is a king and the king is a shepherd. This is why this text has been chosen to sit alongside that of the Gospel for today, which features the last judgment, the separation of the sheep and the goats. Ezekiel's tone is of a parent who is teaching rather than disciplining. Those who are to be outcast will be fed with justice leading us to ask, Is there a potential for a transformation here?

Ezekiel is speaking to an audience that is in exile. He is giving them hope for their future. He is critical of the leaders of Israel for looking after themselves at the expense of the people. And he is stating that God will bring about their restoration through the unconditional reestablishment of the Davidic king in a covenant of peace.

Jesus as King, is first and foremost seen in the image of a shepherd. Shepherds keep watch and so they are “keepers.” They are also “searchers” because they look for good pastures for the best care of their sheep. And finally, they are “accountants” because they personally are held accountable for the nourishment and growth of their flock.

This passage, however, being in the Old Testament is not about Jesus, it is about God, as the Great Shepherd. It is about God's expectations of obedience and faithfulness.

It is a bit more difficult for us to easily slide into the visual of sheep in pastures and those who tend their care, for we are so far removed from this setting. Modern day equivalent could see us using the current Pandemic with its front-line medical workers as those who are providing the care and nourishment of the flock. In the course of their work, they daily lay their lives on the line in the midst of an insidious, contagious virus that has claimed widespread lives. The theaters they operate in are not green pastures with still, quiet waters, they are white, stark chambers with intrusive, life-saving medical devices. They do not turn their backs on their charges, choosing to save themselves, as Ezekiel accused the Israelites of doing. Just like the shepherds of antiquity, they get down and dirty into the thick of their care. The images of exhausted medical team sitting on the floor with head in hands, some with tears on their faces, aligns with the compassionate, unconditional care and love of God who seeks to save the lost and the hurting. This is a picture of love and compassion for another living person, to the point of self-sacrifice. This example sets the stage for our church to step out of our comfort zone, reach beyond our four walls to effectively minister to those who need it regardless of where they are. Because of this immense love, we are shown how to enact our responsibility to share God's gracious gift and compassion with others. Amen.

PSALM - Psalm 100

One: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

THE GOSPEL - Matthew 25: 31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited

you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: Choose your Side! -Matthew 25:31-46

The entire liturgical year culminates in The Reign of Christ Sunday. It was a recent adaptation by Pope Pius the XI in 1926. This is the day we celebrate Christ's role as Lord of all and we think about the ways that we know and experience Christ in our lives, in our churches, and in our world. We began the story of Jesus' ministry with his call to his disciples. Peter and his brother, Andrew who were fishing. Andrew had come to know Jesus through John. Peter was the one who came to know Jesus most profoundly and is the one who states: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Paul was not a disciple, in fact, Paul was an official persecutor. Peter believed Jesus to be fully human; Paul believed Jesus to be fully God. We, as Christians, have come to know Jesus as both and it presents a tension for us to wrap our minds around. We celebrate God's reign in the entire universe, yet still to be

realized in every heart. We pray for its eventuality when we pray our Lord's Prayer - "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven."

Jesus introduced this Kingdom to us and He laid out the criteria for membership. We followed His teachings and proclamations throughout the year and today our scripture looks beyond into the time of completion and return. We are told that this is a time of profound glory. He, "the Son of Man" will come from his throne surrounded by angels and he will separate people from one another. Those on the right will be blessed, whereas those on the left will be cast out. This extreme dividing line will be determined by the compassionate or heartless actions of the people, that is you and I.

Opposing sides - those that give food and drink to the hungry, welcome the stranger, cloth the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison - to the least of the members of Jesus' family, do so as though it was for Jesus. But those, who walk on by, who ignore the plight of those in need, the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the isolated, it is as if they are ignoring Jesus. Jesus really meant "Love God, and Love your Neighbour." We ignore this command at our peril. We are saved not merely by grace, nor by accepting the gospel, but how we treat our fellow humans. Choose your side, carefully!

We are reminded that we all are "the least". We are both recipients and witnesses to the gospel; we are both believer and unbeliever; both in care of and in need of care; judged and identified in weakness through our failures to pursue justice and at the same time saved by grace. Thus, certain scholars would say, we are both the goat and the sheep.

There are many homeless in our city. There are destitute on street corners. There are families who cannot afford to feed their children. Their cries may be loud screams for relief, or they may be quiet, invisible suffering. We are overwhelmed by their need. We cannot help them all. What can I do? There are some who take advantage, who look for an easy way to live. How can I know which ones are in need of my help? Elaine Pagels, a current day theologian says that "Jesus' words are the basis for a radical new social structure based on the God-given dignity and value of every human being." Jesus calls us to high standards. Jesus tells us that God is here with us in the messiness of life. God is here in our neighbour in need. There is no theology here, no doctrine, creed or religious zeal. This is purely about seeing the face of Jesus in the need and your willingness to respond in love.

The idea of separation and damnation is frightening. One author offers an analogy. He goes to the doctor's office annually for a physical exam. All avenues are checked to ensure wellbeing, physical exam, questioning, lab tests, etc. The checkup could save his life if anything is found which could be a problem. He says that Matthew's judgment is similar to a wellness check. Its purpose is not to scare or condemn but to provide a snapshot of overall health and lead to learning and growth. The call of this narrative is to do right at all times.

Distancing ourselves from others is one of the most dangerous cancers of followers of Christ. Misguided actions and choices cannot happen because we know better. There are clearly consequences to our actions.

The righteous are surprised to discover that in their simply sharing who they are and what they have done, without calculation or

expectation, they are admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven. Similarly, the unrighteous are shocked that they missed the opportunity to show love to the King. We may not like it when we are faced with divisions because of our actions, but we are forced to relook at how we choose to spend our lives. Choose your side wisely. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: In this community of Jesus Christ there is commitment; the faithful gather their talent, time and money to share in the gospel of good news.

There is hospitality and acceptance; there is suffering and those who help; there is despair and fear; and there is comfort and understanding. Each continue to offer their gifts for the ongoing work of Melrose. We thank you for your continued support.

*OFFERING HYMN -*God of All Good*

VU 539

*1. God of all good, our gifts we bring to you,
Use them your holy purpose to fulfil;
tokens of love and pledges brought anew
that our whole life is offered to your will.*

FEEL GOOD STORIES OF HELPING KINDNESS

1. Bubie to the Rescue - A young mother took her 3-year-old to Florida to see the grandma. While waiting to board the plane, the baby boy fell asleep. She had him in her arms, while juggling his stroller, the diaper bag, and carry-on luggage. Out of nowhere a little old lady came up to her and said, "My darling there you are! Let Bubbie help you with the baby!" There she was with her blue hair, tattoos and piercings, and a sleeping child and this Jewish grandma came to save the day.

The young mother hugged her and thanked her and handed her, her sleeping son so they could board together. When they got to their seat, the woman asked the man in the next seat if he would mind changing. He quickly got up and gave her his seat. The young mother said to her in Yiddish, "This was meant to be. The woman smiled and said "yes, it was." Two very different Jewish mothers, and a little boy on a flight to Florida.

2. A hug and a braid to remember – A young girl remembers her days in high school and tells this story. She was struggling badly with depression and anxiety. One day she left class because she started having a panic attack. She was crying in the bathroom alone, when a girl came in. She didn't know her, but the girl hugged her hard and let her cry, and then the stranger re-braided her hair which had come undone when she was crying. It was such an act of kindness when she was at such a low point, that it lifted her spirits and remained with her for years.

Our world is filled with little moments of pure joy when someone sets aside all their cares and worries and steps into our need and pain and eases our load. It can be small bursts of financial help when we most need it, a smile, or a kind word. When we do these things for another, we are mirroring the love and compassion of God. We are truly living out being made in God's image. If we were together in person, I would ask you to share a kindness that has remained with you. Instead, please think of moments when your world has been made brighter by someone who took an interest in you.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

All: Come Christ and reign among us!

One: In the midst of crisis, you bring listening, reconciliation and peace. You instruct us to feed the hungry, to care for the sick, to visit those in prison.

You ask us to embrace the diversity in humanity and nature. You call out to us to comfort in times of uncertainty and pain. You listen to our laments and our anguish.

All: O Risen and Just Christ, help us to loyally support your rule.

Come Christ, be among us!

One: Tear out our reluctance to assist those who cannot afford basic clothing, food, or shelter. Encourage us to raise our voices to offer hope to those who are physically and mentally ill, and those who are despairing from personal loss.

All: O Risen and Just Christ, help us to loyally support your rule.

Come Christ and reign among us!

One: You who love beyond our understanding, bring a willingness to welcome stranger, to use our talents confidently, to dedicate our time ungrudgingly, to receive a new vision of faithful discipleship.

All: O Risen and Just Christ help us to loyally support your rule!

Come Christ and reign among us!

One: When we would put off or delay the act of kindness, give us the willingness to begin.

When we feel the need to conform to the standards of our age, show us compassionate gospel alternatives.

When we hold back from speaking out against unjust power, give us courage and persistence.

In the midst of our current uncertainty, give us a willingness to be the voice for those who feel stigmatized, bullied, minimized or ignored.

All: O Risen and Just Christ, we loyally support your rule.

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.

We pray for our loved ones, the safety and wellbeing of a grandfather in a home where there is an outbreak of COVID-19, the healthy development and growth of a baby born early, those suffering from immune system disorders, bronchial, heart and diabetic complications, 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 – Rejoice the Lord is King*

VU 213

*1 Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your risen Lord adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing
and triumph evermore:
[Refrain:]
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice; again I say, rejoice!*

*2 Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our sins,
he took his seat above. [Refrain]*

*3 God's kingdom cannot fail;
Christ rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell
are to our Jesus given. [Refrain]*

*4 Rejoice in glorious hope,
for Christ, the Judge, shall come
to glorify the saints
for their eternal home:
We then shall hear the archangel's voice;
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice!*

COMMISSIONING

One: Let us lift up to God our hopes and our dreams for a better world.

We lift ourselves up as part of God's holy dream.

May God bless us and fortify us to go forward to make a difference in the world,

As we work together to bring about God's reign here on earth.

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 - *She Comes Sailing on the Wind*

Celine Cascanette, mezzo-soprano

VU 380