

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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Photo by Ralph Moulton

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Custodian:

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Meg Chalmers

Kevin Geluch

Michelle Millson

◆ **Sunday October 18, 2020** ◆

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH

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

◆ GATHERING ◆

PRELUDE – Bourée 1, Cello Suite #3
Chris Palmer, guitar

J.S. Bach

*OPENING HYMN – *I Sing the Mighty Power*

VU 231

*1 I sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad,
and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day;
the moon shines full at God's command
and all the stars obey.*

*2 I sing the goodness of the One
that filled the earth with food;
who formed the creatures with a word
and then pronounced them good.
O God, your wonders are displayed
where'er I turn my eye;
if I survey the ground I tread,
or gaze upon the sky!*

*3 There's not a plant or flower below
but makes your glories known;
and clouds arise and tempests blow,
by order from your throne;
while all that borrows life from you*

*is ever in your care,
and everywhere that I may be,
you, God are present there.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Whether we turn to the right or to the left, whether we are
in darkness or light,
Whether we are alone or surrounded by others,
The light of Jesus Christ drops away the illusions and
shows us the truth. May it always be so.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: If our day begins with trial or sorrow, Remember God's
love - and give your praise.

**All: When toiling in a weedy garden or when under a new
deadline yet to be reached - let us sing God's praise.**

One: The parking space that opened up, the traffic light that
made us stop, again sing God's praise.

**All: The joyous music that we hear or perform, give praise.
The squeaky violin practising, let us give praise.**

One: All that breathes upon this good earth rejoices in your
praise.

All: We praise, you, O God, our Creator and Redeemer.

★HYMN - *My Faith Looks Up to Thee*

VU 663

*1 My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Saviour divine.
Now hear me while I pray;*

*take all my guilt away.
O let me from this day
be wholly thine.*

*2 While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide,
bid darkness turn to day;
wipe sorrow's tears away;
nor let me ever stray
from thee aside.*

*3 May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire.
As thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire.*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Spirit, life, and soul of Creation, in moments of change, when everything we know starts to fade away and yet, before we know what is coming, bless us with confidence in your wisdom and guidance.

Remind us of the glory of the earth as the leaves begin to change.

Help us to let go of what is no longer needed.

Free us from holding tightly to old ways and habits when your Spirit calls us to a new day and a new way in creation.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who shows us the way. Amen.

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story:

Reader: Ralph Moulton

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: We are truly accustomed to hearing your Word and sometimes minds wander and we wonder what that was all about. Dear God, give us fresh ears and new insights in the hearing of your Word fashioned just for us. Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Exodus 33: 12-23

One: Moses said to the Lord, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth." The Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and

live.” And the Lord continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

One: The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: A Matter of Trust! - Exodus 33:12-23

Moses and God converse together and Moses speaks candidly to God. You told me to lead your people, but you don't let me in on your plans. If I am special to you as you say, let me see you face to face. Are you travelling with us or not? It seems even Moses can feel perturbed with God.

God reassures Moses and offers to pass by in His glory, but in protection of Moses, puts him into a crevice, covers it with his hand when he is directly overhead, and allows Moses to see Him from behind. The force of God carries with it some blinding power that would seem to be detrimental to Moses' health.

We come to this story fresh from the people's falling away in idol worship of the golden calf, fashioned by Aaron for the people to worship while Moses was away obtaining the Ten Commandments. God is not happy. In fact, God's Glory which has filled the tabernacle (a portable tent) in their midst, and has been accompanying the people on their journey, refuses to continue to be present with them in the same manner they were used to. In response to their sinfulness, God is, thus, sending an angel instead as they move towards the Promised Land.

Moses is not satisfied with this arrangement and requests privileged access. He argues through a prayer that holds God accountable, appealing to God's love for God's people. God listens, and changes God's mind and allows a meeting. Moses has won the argument. God's presence will remain with the Israelites. Moses puts to God that it is a matter of trust. God has promised to be with these chosen, special people and God cannot now let them down.

God has come through cloud and fire, and tabernacle, and face to face, and even in betrayal, continues to be with the Israelite people. How fortunate for us that there have been advocates to intervene in divine/human history. Abraham and Moses both had the courage to confront God on behalf of their people, and to remind God of God's promises and intent.

The people continued in faithful obedience knowing that God's presence remained with them. In spite of limits on accessibility, God continues to be present with us today showing goodness, graciousness and mercy. That is a matter we can accept on trust. Amen.

PSALM: Psalm 99

One: The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!

Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity;
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was
among those who called on his name. They cried to the Lord,
and he answered them.

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his
decrees, and the statutes that he gave them.

O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving
God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

Extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy.

THE GOSPEL: Matthew 22: 15-22

One: Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So, they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are

God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: A Lesson in Diplomacy! - Matthew 22:15-22
Matthew's entire book is set up to answer the question, who is this man, the "Son of David?" The very stance Jesus chooses to take inevitably pits him against the ruling Jewish leaders. The Pharisees are good at their job. They are trained in rhetoric and skilled in argumentation. This is one of those moments, the first of three ensuing debates, when they seek to entrap Jesus knowing that either an affirmative or negative answer will place him at odds with the Romans or the Pharisees, as well as the poor Jews who are subject to this tax. Either answer presents a minefield that will get him in hot water for collaboration or treason.

Taxes were harsh on the Jewish people. They paid temple taxes, land taxes and custom taxes, and if that wasn't enough, they were required to pay an imperial tax as a tribute to Rome to support the Roman occupation of Israel. This meant they were paying their oppressors to support their own oppression. It was a tax that was a constant reminder of their humiliation.

What we get from Jesus is a lesson in diplomacy. He refuses to fall into their trap. He poses a counter question. "Whose head is this?" One of the commentaries brought up an interesting point that I had missed many times before - the coins bear the image of heads of state, a prohibition in the Second Commandment not to bear idols or graven images. It has been a custom that we have

long taken for granted, imprinting our coins with the heads of revered and respected humans who have made a mark on society.

The head of Caesar, the emperor on the face of the coin speaks to a kingdom marked by wealth, military strength and brutality. The taxes belong to him. In contrast, what can we say belongs to God? The Psalmist says the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." There is no part of creation that does not have God's imprint on it. God's kingdom carries God's plan for humanity. There is no rival kingdom to this on earth.

There is a subtlety in Jesus' answer. Jesus is calling us to recognize to whom we already belong. It is not solely a matter of division of state and religion. "No one can serve two masters." Matthew's original audience would immediately be reminded, "You shall have no other gods before me"

Jesus implies that there is a hypocrisy with allegiance to the economic and political power of the earthly emperor's kingdom versus the divine, majestic power of God's kingdom. It is difficult for one who makes their home through self-service and importance to enter a kingdom marked by sacrifice and self-giving. It alludes back to his point "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

While Jesus never states that politics and richness necessarily mean that one is excluded from the kingdom of God, he warns of the perils of divided loyalties.

Jesus' answer satisfies both. He does affirm some duty to the emperor. "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's."

We are to give to the emperor (the ruling government or power) what is their due, and nothing more. "Give to God what belongs to God." What happens when these two come in conflict? Loyalty to state and loyalty to God may and do become at odds with one another. When this does occur, it leaves us with the difficult task of sorting out where our loyalties lie.

In Jesus' response to appease both sides, we hear a call to "faithful compromise" as we try to discern what rightfully belongs to the world and what belongs to God. We hear again that we are made in God's image, beloved of our Creator and have been sent into a world that God loves so much. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: We have not been together to worship in person for over seven months, yet that has not stopped you from honouring your commitments to your church. Melrose thanks you for your continued support. May your offerings be a blessing where they are needed for the ministry of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*OFFERING HYMN – *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*

VU 541

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all creatures high and low;
give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word, and Spirit, One.*

A SHORT STORY ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

A story is told about two friends who were walking through the desert. During some point in the journey they had a heated argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who was slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand:

"Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept walking until they found an oasis where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone:

Today my best friend saved my life."

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him: After I hurt you, you wrote in the *sand* and now, you write on a *stone*, why?

The other friend replied:

When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

All: Here is the vision: A world where political leaders look to the needs of this challenged planet and plan to keep it good for the next generation and the ones after that.

One: Here is the reality. The financial interests of a few override the needs of the many. Climate control is sidelined, health care is bargained, justice is unequal, and the gap between the poor and the rich is widened.

All: Here is the vision: No one has to sleep on the streets of our cities; there is room inside for all.

One: Here is the reality. Street people have no place warm and secure to stay. They live in tents, under bridges, in bushes, and on hard pavement sidewalks.

All: Here is the vision. Women have equal rights with men; abuse and job discrimination are at an end.

One: Here is the reality. In Middle Eastern countries women are controlled by fathers and husbands; in the West, “glass ceilings” prevent women from getting the jobs or the pay they deserve.

All: Your vision is for justice and compassion to prevail. O God, help us bring it to reality.

Here is the vision: Older persons and indigenous persons in care homes and hospitals are treated with care and respect by adequate staff, and they are given the prompt and appropriate attention when they need it.

One: Here is the reality: Staff members are in short supply and some are very biased, and the needs of the residents or patients are not always met.

All: Here is the vision: Each one of us ready to speak out for the downhearted and afraid.

One: Here is the reality: we don't quite get around to attending the information meeting or supporting those who need protection.

All: Here is the vision: Each one of us confident and ready to venture out.

One: Here is the reality: A sense of personal doubt, an unwillingness to take necessary risks.

All: Here is the vision for each one of us: strong bonds of love and friendship linking us with each other.

One: Here is the reality: a sense of separation; difficulty in keeping friendships vibrant. Good intentions to call and check up on someone who is alone or lonely

All: You have a vision for each of us, Loving God. Show us that vision and let us embrace your confidence in us.

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, for Jeff, for Cheryl's mother and family, for Chris' mother and family. We pray for those outside our church community that 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. We pray for those in our circle who are grieving, who are recovering from illnesses, who are struggling with imperfect relationships, 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 - *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

VU 326

*1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and king,
the triumphs of God's grace.*

*2 Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;*

*'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life and health and peace.*

*3 He speaks, and listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive,
the mournful broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.*

*4 Hear him, you deaf, you voiceless ones,
your tongues again employ;
you blind, behold your Saviour comes,
and leap, you lame, for joy!*

*5 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of your name.*

COMMISSIONING

One: So much depends on our willingness to trust that God is with us when we are unable to see signs of God's presence. Hold fast to your faith, sift away the seeds of doubt. Go about your days and nights in confidence that God is near and a promising future will unfold in time.

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