

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

86 Homewood Avenue ◆ Hamilton, Ontario ◆ L8P 2M4

905 522 1323 ◆ melrose@melroseunited.ca

◆ www.melroseunited.ca ◆

◆ www.facebook.com/melroseunitedchurch ◆

◆ Twitter: @melroseunited ◆

◆ Instagram: @melroseuc ◆

Youtube channel: Melrose United Church Virtual Service



Minister:

Rev. Sonia Ireson

Music Director:

Alexander Cann

Family Ministries Coordinator:

Meg Chalmers

Custodian:

Kevin Geluch

Office Administrator:

Michelle Millson

◆ **Sunday September 13, 2020** ◆
Fifteenth 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 – *Now Thank We All Our God*

VU 236

*1 Now thank we all our God,
with heart, and hands, and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.*

*2 O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever-joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
and keep us strong in grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.*

*3 All praise and thanks to God
for all that has been given,
the Son, and Spirit blest
who dwell in highest heaven,
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore;*

*for thus it was, is now,
and shall be, evermore.*

WELCOME AND LIFE AND WORK OF THE CHURCH

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: We light the Christ candle knowing that Christ's love shines like a beacon for those of us who are troubled, who are anxious, who are unsure.

All: It welcomes us into the presence of our God, who loves us into fullness.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: People of God, attune your senses to what is around you and discover the glory of God.

All: We notice God everywhere we turn: in the sky, in the world around us, and in the people we meet.

One: People of God, praise God for goodness toward all things and all people.

All: Every day we are aware of the renewed cycle of God caring for us: in the rising of the sun and in the cycles of the moon, stars, and seasons. We are people of God, and we come together to praise our God. Amen.

★HYMN: *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*

VU 334

*1 All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem,
[Refrain:]
and crown him, crown him, crown him,
crown him Lord of all.*

*2 O seed of Israel's chosen race
now ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace [Refrain]*

*3 Crown him, you martyrs of your God,
who from his altar call:
praise him whose way of pain you trod, [Refrain]*

*4 Let every tongue and every tribe,
responsive to the call,
to him all majesty ascribe, [Refrain]*

*5 O that, with all the sacred throng,
we at his feet may fall;
join in the everlasting song, [Refrain]*

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

God of the mountains and the seas, of dry land and living waters, may we always look for you where your Spirit leads us, in truth.

May we always notice you where hope does not disappoint us, because we know that your love has been poured over all.

Amen.

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story: The Unmerciful Servant

Reader: Ian Brisbin

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

One: God of long ago, God of present day,

God in whom the future lies:
We come seeking a word for the day,
A light for our way,
And bread for the journey.
Fill us with your word
And nourish us at your table of grace,
So that we can become the people we are called to be.
Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Exodus 14: 19-31

One: The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers."

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

One: The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: "Stretch out your hand!" - Exodus 14:19-3

Imagine with me that fateful night of the Exodus. Your belly is full from your first Passover meal hurriedly eaten while planning your escape. The wagons are packed with what little you could muster up from your time in captivity. Nothing much you want to keep, just the necessities for travel. The moon is full and lights your way so that you can see the worried expression on your neighbours' faces.

All are moving with swiftness and intent, but very quiet, not wanting to alert the Egyptian captors until they are a safe distance behind. You know you are getting close to the edge of the Red Sea because you can smell the salt air in the light breeze.

What does Moses have in mind? You can hear the hoof beats of the horses approaching, and the excited shouts of the Pharaoh's

army. There is nowhere to go; in front of you, certain death in the sea; behind you, the relentless pursuing army; you will be trapped. It would have been better to stay safely tucked in your bed; you would continue to be unmercifully worked, but you would be safe. Here, you will surely drown or be cut down by a soldier's sword.

"Moses, what are we to do?" And then, you see him, the commanding, stern figure of Moses, hand outstretched with his staff and by some amazing force of nature, the water is parting, and dry land appears, and you are urged forward along with the surge of other incredulous believers. You are trembling both from fear and disbelief at what you are seeing in front of you. You clamber through the dry river bed with its walls of water on each side, and you look back at your pursuers. They are still coming, intent on catching up.

You have reached the far shore and you see Moses once again move the staff and you hear the crashing water as it is released and flowing in torrents behind you. The horsemen, now in its midst, are swept away and your whole group of people are safe. For a moment there are shouts of joy and then you realize the cost of your safety, and you become very quiet.

A God who chooses sides. The Old Testament clearly tells us this is God to a Chosen People. A God who waited for generations to release the people from their exile, to bring them to their new land. A God who used ten plagues to soften Pharaoh's heart, and then after wiping out their first born, decimated the army following.

The Exodus is a story of deliverance, but it is not a pretty story. It is not an easily understood story.

It raises the question of favouritism, of choosing to save one over another, a concept as parents that we cannot fathom.

There is so much more to God that lies beneath the surface, like an iceberg's underbelly that remains inscrutable. God does not fit in to our logic. That is why atheists have chosen to discredit the existence of God, because God cannot be boxed in and explained. And for some that is not enough.

Science and exploration are continually opening up new information and discoveries of ancient civilizations that predate current known ones by thousands of years. We don't really know when civilization began. Archeology continues to unearth old settlements built below existing ones, as well as settlements that have been found many feet below the sea.

Time has buried the knowledge of their existence until now.

Were they people who knew God? Has God watched over their existence as we believe God does with each of us now?

People dream of exploring space as the great unknown, but we have so much right here on our earth that is still mystery to us. One day the dark glass will be wiped clean and I hope we will have an inkling of our questions answered. In the meantime, we trust and walk in faith in the "knowing" that there is a God who loves and watches over us. Amen

PSALM: Psalm 114

When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion.

The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back.

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?

O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,

who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

GOSPEL: The Gospel of Matthew 18: 21-35

One: Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that

same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister.

One: The Gospel of Lord, Jesus Christ

All: Praise be to you, O Christ!

REFLECTION: "The Power of Forgiveness" - Matthew 18:21-35

We are continuing to explore the concept of a church member sinning against another; this time from the perspective of forgiveness. Peter asks Jesus, "how many times must I forgive?" And, Jesus tells him, there is no limit. He tells this story to illustrate his point.

A slave is brought before his king; he owes his master an unimaginably large amount of money, which he certainly cannot pay. The king orders that he and his family be sold along with all his possessions to repay the debt. The slave, trembling in fear, falls on his knees and asks for patience while he tries to repay what he owes. The king, who appeared first to be extremely

harsh, is unusually compassionate, and completely forgives him his debt, and has him set free.

This same slave met up with another slave who owed him a small amount of money. He ruthlessly threatened him and demanded that he repay what was owed. The second slave fell on his knees and pleaded for leniency. But the one who was owed money refused and had him thrown into prison. Other slaves who witnessed this exchange, were alarmed, and reported to the king what had taken place.

The king was naturally incensed because he had displayed an enormous amount of compassion and understanding in forgiving the slave's loan, but that slave did not return the good fortune to another in his debt. "I had mercy on you." Said the king. He reversed his position and removed his earlier ruling and handed him over to be dealt with until he could pay his debt. The passage ends with "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

When may we stop forgiving those who offend us repeatedly? We don't like the answer very much. "Never." God has no limitation on forgiveness with us. How quickly we forget God's mercy when we are dealing with others and we neglect to pass it on.

When we fail to live in gratitude for what we have received, individually or corporately, we are not living in humility and repentance, and we are more concerned with the planks in others eyes, rather than the specks in our own.

It is not only the religious community that is interested in the prospect of forgiveness, the medical community has done studies on the power of forgiveness on health and wellness. Holding on to past resentments deeply affects our emotional health. Long held unresolved conflicts lead to bitterness that fester into deep painful wounds.

Part of the reason we struggle with offering forgiveness is because we hang onto a desire for revenge. The reverse of the "Do unto others as you would want them to do to you." We expect apologies and restitution, and we put conditions on our forgiveness. We forget the generosity and graciousness that has been shown to us.

The purpose of this text is not to instill a sense of entitlement on those who abuse, to be forgiven and taken back. It is specifically set within a communal relationship that involves naming the sin, repentance of the sinner and communal support of the victim. Forgiveness is challenging and does not minimize the sin.

There are misconceptions about forgiveness. It does not mean denying our hurt. It does mean release and letting go. The abused child is not expected to downplay the hurt they received; they acknowledge it and then let it go. One does not forget when one forgives but the wound's power to trap in unending resentment is broken.

A prisoner was asked, "have you forgiven your captors yet?" "I will never do that." "then, they still have you in prison, don't they" was the reply.

Rabbi Kushner tells the story of a woman whose husband left her to raise three young children on her own. She had to work hard to keep them together and her resentment built at knowing her husband was living well with another wife, while she struggled day to day. She said to the Rabbi, "How can you tell me to forgive him?" He answered her "I'm not asking you to forgive him because of what he did was acceptable. It wasn't. He was mean and selfish. I'm asking you to forgive because he doesn't deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter and angry woman. I'd like to see him out of your life emotionally as he is out physically, but you keep holding on to him. You are not hurting him by holding on to that resentment, but you're hurting yourself."

The power of forgiveness means that we are able to live our lives free of shame and regret in our shortcomings, knowing that our gracious God has first forgiven us. We are then able to take that as a model for how we pass on our forgiveness to others who have wronged us. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: Melrose is thankful for your financial support during this difficult time. You help us to continue to carry on a vital ministry in furthering the mission of Jesus Christ.

*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

All: We are called on to forgive many in our world.

One: We want to forgive those who have resorted to violence and warfare to solve problems. We want to forgive those who have oppressed women and children.

We want to forgive those who have looked down on persons of another race or colour.

We want to forgive those who have stolen from the infirm, the gullible, and the innocent.

We are resolved to help bring change. We are resolved to support the process of change.

All: Peter asks Jesus, "How often should I forgive, seven times?" Jesus replies, "Not seven but seventy-seven times."

We are called on to forgive many among the suffering.

One: We know there are those who have stolen to feed their drug or alcohol habit.

We know there are those who have looked down on persons struggling to make ends meet.

We know there are those who treat children harshly.

We know there are those who have treated older persons with a lack of respect.

We know there are those who have discouraged loved ones from seeking the treatment they need.

We know that bereaved persons have been told to get over their grief.

We are resolved to help bring change. We are resolved to support the process of change.

All: Peter asks Jesus, "How often should I forgive, seven times?" Jesus replies, "Not seven but seven-seven times."

We are called on to forgive many in the church:

One: Members and friends who do not see the need for the careful welcoming of newcomers,
Members and friends who see young children as a disturbance rather than a joyful opportunity,
Members and friends who see the practical and financial responsibilities of the church as someone else's task,
Members and friends who do not listen to other views on the pattern or style of worship,
Members and friends who support the local church, but not missions or the wider church.

We are resolved to help bring change. We are resolved to support the process of change.

All: Peter asks Jesus, "How often should I forgive, seven times?" Jesus replies, "Not seven but seventy-seven times."

We need to forgive and be forgiven:

One: To forgive ourselves for inflicting hurt on another,
To forgive ourselves for not venturing out and taking risks,
To forgive ourselves for avoiding controversy when we were called to become involved,
To forgive ourselves for not saying the words of thanks or encouragement,
To forgive others who have gnawed away at our self-confidence,

To forgive others who have poured cold water on our enthusiasm,
To forgive others for ignoring or disparaging our faith.
We will consider fresh insights and be ready for change.

All: Peter asks Jesus, "How often should I forgive, seven times?" Jesus replies, "Not seven but seventy-seven times."

One: We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, for Jeff's daily continuing recovery, for Cheryl's 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, who are travelling away during the summer. 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.

*1 Take up your cross, the Saviour said,
if you would my disciple be;
take up your cross with willing heart
and humbly follow after me.*

*2 Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill your weak spirit with alarm;
Christ's strength shall bear your spirit up,
and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.*

*3 Take up your cross, heed not the shame,
nor let your foolish pride rebel;
your Saviour once accepted death
upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.*

*4 Take up your cross, and follow Christ,
think not till death to lay it down;
for only those who bear the cross
may hope to wear the glorious crown.*

COMMISSIONING

One: As you go from here and carry your daily lives, consider ways that you can reach out a helping hand to make a difference in another's life. You are God's messengers to a fractured world.

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 - Fantasie Impromptu, excerpt

F. Chopin