



UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA MELFORT ETHELTON PASTORAL CHARGE

Office: (306) 752-2288 Email: melfortuc@sasktel.net

Website: www.melfortunitedchurch.com

Worship Time: 10:30 AM

Ministers: All of us

Worship Leader: Judy Meier

Music: Jodi Allen Corbett

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Mavis Busby

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Reader:

ORDER OF WORSHIP

January 10, 2021
Baptism of the Lord Sunday

WE GATHER AS A COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

As we gather for worship today we acknowledge that the land on which we gather is Treaty 6 Territory. We honour the Cree and Métis people for whom this place has been a homeland for thousands of years. We respect the sacredness of our home and the ground on which we walk and we are grateful to gather here in peace and hope.

ANNOUNCEMENTS, ANNIVERSARIES & CONCERNS:

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We have come once again to be in the presence of the baptismal waters, so that we may be reminded that God's love seeps into our lives, washes away our fears, and pours forth for all people.

Come, let us worship.

OPENING PRAYER: (in unison)

**God, we ask that you remind us that you are the source of all
that gives us life:
water, earth, warmth, wind.**

We take these next moments to be still and breathe in your spirit.

As those gathered inhale and exhale speak the following invitation:

As you quiet your heart, notice the depth and length of your breath. Inhale and exhale. As you inhale concentrate on the notion of breathing in grace the way we breathe in oxygen. As you exhale imagine that you can let go of the one thing that you wish to give to God. Set the pace of your breath and set an intention that you can start to offer yourself, your life, to God a little at a time, with every exhale. *(Pause for a time of stillness.)* Amen.

HYMN (VU 375) *"Spirit, Spirit of gentleness"*

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE: *(in unison)*

Spirit of forgiveness, we breath in the fresh scent of your love. We accept you into the depths of our bodies to awaken our desire for change and displace our selfish impulses.

God in spirit, you are all around and within us now. Let us exhale and release whatever we hold within that will keep us from filling our lungs and lives with your love.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

As surely as you continue to draw breath, you can trust that God is entering into your life, one breath at a time, one yawn, one cloud, one breeze at a time.

In the air, as close as the air on your skin and in your body, is where forgiveness resides.

PRAYER RESPONSE (MV 115) *"Behold, behold, I make all things new"*

CHOIR ANTHEM: *"We Are The World"*

- Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie – arr. Roger Emerson

YouTube Link: https://youtu.be/VPQldcQ_Fvo

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

HEBREW READING:

GENESIS 1:1-5

The first days of creation.

EPISTLE READING:

ACTS 19:1-7

Paul baptizes with the Spirit.

GOSPEL READING:

MARK 1:4-11

Jesus is baptized by John.

SERMON:

Change is a Breath Away

The Hebrew reading today is the first five verses of the Bible in which Earth's origins are described as watery and dark. God's power moved over the water and caused there to be light. And the Earth changed from a place of constant darkness to a place with days and nights.

The Epistle reading in Acts tells us that Paul baptized some of the disciples who had previously been baptized by John and the Gospel reading tells us of Jesus's own baptism by John. We often speak of baptism as a "means of grace", that is, one of the ways that God's grace comes to us. Physically it's only a small splash of water, but it marks the beginning of a whole new life – of forgiveness, of the presence of God's Spirit, of our union with Jesus, and our becoming part of the world-wide Christian church.

So what is the unifying theme in these three Scriptures? After thinking about it for a while, I decided that the connection I saw was change. God is a force of change in us and the world.

We do indeed live in a world of days and nights. We Christians are still using the tradition of baptism as a powerful symbol of purification and regeneration. But we often forget that we are a changed people. Let's talk about it.

I found a book last year called Atomic Habits by James Clear. I was pretty excited about reading it because Clear gives simple, easy to follow steps on how to change habits. Not by New Year's Resolutions or other grand proclamations but by changing just 1% at a time. I loved the simplicity of his method. My hope was that I could end my frustrating habits of letting the mail pile up and procrastination.. So Don and I read the book together. That experience of learning how to change via tiny steps started us thinking in new ways about change and we decided to try to learn how to meditate. I had tried occasionally over the years to meditate but it was hopeless. I could never still my mind; thoughts just kept intruding. This time we sought out help with an audio guide. We get comfortable, get still and try to focus on our breath. Of course, my mind still jumps in constantly and tries to distract me but I think I might be getting a tiny bit better at focusing. Here's the very important thing, though. When my thoughts intrude, I'm instructed to not judge my thoughts, just look at them. Every time a thought intrudes, just look at it and focus on my breath. No judgement.

I was mulling over what to write for my sermon a couple of weeks ago so I read the opening prayer for today's service. I was surprised and excited to read the words:

"As you quiet your heart, notice the depth and length of your breath. Inhale and exhale. As you inhale, concentrate on the notion of breathing in grace the way you breathe in oxygen. As you exhale imagine that you can let go of the one thing you wish to give to God. Set the pace of your breath and set an intention that you can start to offer yourself, your life, to God a little bit at a time, with every exhale."

Wow! That's sort of what Don and I had been doing! I interpreted that prayer as a bit of a hint that I might be on the right track talking about this today.

Breathing is something most of us don't think about very often. Why would we think about it? We've been breathing since the moment we were born into this world. But I started really thinking about the act of breathing when I started to learn how to meditate. We all know that breathing is absolutely key to staying alive. But it is more. Every breath you take throughout your day is new. And if every breath is new, every breath is an opportunity for change.

How many of you start each day the same way? Get up at the same time, make your tea or coffee the same way, sit in the same chair, read the same news sources. There is a real comfort from our

little habits and traditions, isn't there? I know I love the sameness of my morning routine. There is a flip side to the comfort of sameness, though. We can also get way too content with the same thoughts, even the negative ones. In fact, it's really hard to change some patterns of thinking.

There has been a lot of really exciting research being done on the brain the last several years. Along with learning that there is a lot more plasticity to our brains than we previously believed, we now understand that our thoughts create neural pathways. When a baby is born, the world is new in every way. The baby sets out on his new life adventure by looking, touching, tasting, throwing, stacking and experimenting with everything put in front of her. Living each day is one big science experiment. No wonder babies sleep so much. If I had to learn as much in one day as babies learn, I'd be sleeping a lot too. All that learning creates neural pathways in the brains of babies and as they grow older, more and more pathways are laid.

Over a lifetime of learning, though, most of us develop some neural pathways that take us down rabbit holes of negativity, fear, anger, worry, anxiety and sometimes even depression. I sometimes think I don't have pathways, I have highways. And those negative thoughts sometimes become a treadmill that we seem to get stuck on. And here's the corker. We believe those thoughts! Have you ever strongly believed your thoughts about an event yet after the passage of time, you thought very differently about the very same event? Hmmm. What's that all about?

Dale Carnegie said: "Remember, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday." How many of our thoughts right now are not focused on right now but something that happened a few minutes ago or yesterday or last year? How many of our thoughts right now are worries about tomorrow or next week or next year? How many of us are present right now?

What I'm talking about is becoming mindful. When you learn how to become mindful, you learn how to get off the destructive mental treadmill. But it's certainly not easy. We've spent many years building that treadmill. Andy Warhol said: "They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself." Mahatma Gandhi said:

"We must be the change we hope to see in the world." Vincent Norman Peale said: "Change your thoughts and you change your world." Gautama Buddha said: "Your mind is a powerful thing. When

you filter it with positive thoughts, your life will start to change.” And finally, Mahatma Gandhi said: “Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values.”

We all want peace for ourselves and for others. We all want to learn to accept ourselves and others, regardless of differences. I do believe that. I do believe that if our thinking wasn't clouded by neural pathways of negativity and fear, we would be changed people. We all want to learn to love ourselves and others. And we can find that peace, love and acceptance. Let's start by focusing on our breath and looking at our thoughts. My son Ian told me last week that his work partner says about every chore he does, “I get to do it.” Not “I have to do it” like the majority of us say but “I get to do it.” Wow! A change of one word completely changes the thinking about doing a chore. Such a simple thing but it has such a profound impact on our thinking. One word!

Changing your thinking is simple but difficult. Start with your breath.

I'm going to finish this by reading something that was sent to me by a friend. It doesn't completely line up with the theme of today's sermon but it is such a positive message, I really want to share it with everyone.

You may think that you are completely insignificant in this world.

But someone drinks coffee from the favourite cup that you gave them.

Someone heard a song on the radio that reminded them of you.

Someone read the book that you recommended, and plunged headfirst into it.

Someone smiled after a hard day of work because they remembered

the joke that you told them today.

Someone loves themselves a little bit more because you gave them a compliment.

Never think that you have no influence whatsoever.

Your touch, word and good deed which you leave behind cannot be erased.

OUR RESPONSE

OFFERING:

(Please use the offering box at the front/back of the Sanctuary as you exit. Thank you!)

OFFERTORY HYMN (VU #541) *“Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”*

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: *(in unison)*

**God who moves in, around and through the waters,
we remember you are near and dedicate a gift of gratitude
to you, for your use.**

We have worked to collect and recollect abundance.

We have toiled and felt the weight of futility.

**But we come now in earnest hope and faith to offer what
we have,
do what we can,
and let go of the outcome. Amen.**

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

God speaks as we speak to one another of our joy and sorrow.

God moves as we draw closer to one another.

May we speak aloud of love and pain, offering up the names or
circumstances that remind us we belong to one another and God.

(moment of silence)

May we remember that we can give and receive,

bles and be blessed as we come near the cleansing waters,
kiss away tears and drink from the fountains of grace. Amen.

SENDING FORTH

HYMN (VU376) *“Spirit of the Living God”*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

And now we share in a common practice of blessing
one another. Please join in as the words of the blessing become
familiar. We will repeat it two times.

**We may fail; God does not.
We may end; God does not.
Bless and be blessed. Amen.**

CHORAL BLESSING “*My Peace*” – K. Routledge

PRAYER RESOURCES:

**Seasons of the Spirit – Seasons FUSION Advent • Christmas • Epiphany 2020–2021; The United Church of Canada Advent • Christmas • Epiphany 2020-2021, Year B, Gathering Resources for Worship Planners. Used with permission*

NEXT WEEK'S (January 17, 2021) READINGS

1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

Wednesday, Jan 13th @7pm – Choir

Pastoral Care – Contact Information

Should you need emergency pastoral care please call Ron Nielsen @ 306-921-7794 or 306-752-4119.

Transfer or Applying for Membership

If you wish to transfer or apply for membership in our church, please contact the church office or a member of the Membership Committee.

Changes to Contact Information

If you have changed your address or phone number, please advise the Church Office so that we can keep your information current. Thank you!

FundScrip for January

The FundScrip deadline for January is Thursday, January 28th. It will be ready for pickup on Thursday, February 4th.

Stewardship Seconds

All gifts are gifts of the one Spirit. Our job is to find the best way to use what we have been given.