



UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA MELFORT ETHELTON PASTORAL CHARGE

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Website: www.melfortunitedchurch.com

Worship Time: 10:30 AM

Ministers: All of us

Worship Leader: Gina McAvoy

Music: Jodi Allen Corbett

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Mavis Busby

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Reader:

ORDER OF WORSHIP

January 31, 2021

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – Year B

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:

Take off your dress shoes; you may need to cross a rocky path. Take off your head covering; God may wish to kiss your forehead with a holy breeze. Take off the thing that protects you; feel the warm presence of the people around you. God is in the air, and God is in the space between us. God will make the emptiness into a holy place. Come, let us worship.

OPENING PRAYER: (in unison)

**God, we trust that you are in the holiest of holies.
We also trust that you can make all places holy.**

Guide our understanding of your presence,
so we will find comfort wherever it is available.
Guide our hearts so that we may be drawn toward places
that will challenge our beliefs about what is holy.

HYMN (MV 171) *“Christ has no body now but yours”*

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE: *(in unison)*

O God, we come to the holy places and
can feel like imposters.

You see our shame and care about the way
we feel when we have been hurt.

We seek forgiveness. We seek relief.

Guide us toward grace, mercy, hope, and abundance.

Help us hold the hands of those who want to come into and
through the holy places you inhabit. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God sees what we cannot. God sees the full extent of the struggles
we face. God sees, loves, empowers, and keeps us in grace. God's
forgiveness is ageless and abundant.

PRAYER RESPONSE (VU 686)

“God of Grace, God of Glory”

SPECIAL MUSIC: *“Amazing Grace”*

Soloist: Megan McAvoy

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

HYMN (VU 117) *“Jesus Christ is Waiting”*

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

HEBREW READING:

DEUTERONOMY 18:15-20

God will raise up a prophet after Moses

EPISTLE READING:

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Concerning food offered to idols.

GOSPEL READING:

MARK 1:21-28

A man with an unclean spirit is Healed in Capernaum.

SERMON:

WORDS OF AUTHORITY

These days we are surrounded by ‘authorities’. They fill the pages of magazines. When we sit in front of the TV we are faced with an overabundance of authorities on gardening, cooking, the stock market, sport, diets, the latest news, electronics, global warming, education, and world economics. If you watched TV last night you would have had your fill of authorities on politics as you watched the experts analyse and talk on and on as the election results came in after yesterday’s state election. The media loves to trot out authorities on almost any issue that arises. If the Prime Minister does something that the media thinks is a bit out of the ordinary, they will find an authority somewhere to make a comment.

What makes it interesting is that authorities can disagree with one another. They aren’t interested in listening to anyone else’s ideas. They are often manipulative and don’t care if we take their advice and it all goes wrong. They often forget what humility is and don’t know how to admit that another person might have an equally as good an idea as theirs. And so quite rightly we become sceptical and cynical of authorities, especially our political leaders.

Today’s Gospel reading from Mark tells us about Jesus’ first preaching engagement in the synagogue at Capernaum and immediately he is recognised as an authority. How come this young carpenter from Nazareth was given the job to preach that day in the first place? We need to understand how small synagogues worked. A synagogue in a local town had a “ruler”; someone who would take care of the synagogue, organise meetings, and perhaps teach the local boys the Scriptures but he wasn’t a preacher. That

was left to the lay men who took it in turns. On this occasion Jesus was asked to read and explain the Scriptures.

We don't know what he read or what he said about the Scripture reading but it certainly left an impression. We are told, "*The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught, for he wasn't like the teachers of the Law*". It's clear that the people there that day had heard many people speak about the Scriptures before, and maybe about the very passage that Jesus had read, but there was something different about the way Jesus spoke.

You see when the teachers of the Law and other experts spoke, they referred to other rabbis, elders, professors and teachers of the Scriptures and of course, tradition was important, and quoted them as authorities to back up their explanation of the passage they were reading. They relied on the authority of other people – scribes and teachers of the Law who were very well respected and were held in high honour as interpreters of the Word of God – but Jesus was different. He spoke with authority. *He* was the authority. He didn't need any other experts and authorities.

I would love to know what Bible passage Jesus spoke about that day. I could imagine that he read and spoke it in such a way that the people heard the words as if God was right there in the room with them. Jesus would have had their attention to the point that every mouth was open and every eye wide open as they heard the voice of God speak to them. Jesus spoke to them with authority. Jesus needed no other human authority. He spoke with the authority of God the Father and the Holy Spirit who had pronounced their blessing on him at his baptism. He is God and spoke with the authority of God.

I'm sure there might have been some who were more astounded and shocked than amazed. Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, and what good can come from Nazareth, had just broken the long-held tradition of quoting the much respected teachers of the Torah, but there was no getting around the fact that "*he taught with authority*".

Mark uses that word 'authority' a lot in his Gospel. Here already in chapter one, Mark establishes that Jesus has an authority that is different to every other authority and power, human or otherwise. We heard in the reading this morning about a man who came into the synagogue screaming and shouting and disrupting the gathering. Jesus ordered the evil spirit to come out of the man and

again the people were completely amazed and said, *“This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him”*. We hear the same thing repeated numerous times as Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead and calms storms. Jesus has authority over sickness, death, nature, and even Satan. On occasions when people witness Jesus’ authority, say over the power of a storm they are left asking the question, *“Who is this man? Even the wind and waves obey him”*. They have never seen anything like it before.

What does all this have to say to us today? How do Aussies like us, who are so cynical about authority and people who claim to speak with authority, deal with someone who speaks with such absolute authority in our 21st century world?

I think this can be a real barrier for some people who are not used to someone speaking with such certainty and absolute authority. We live in a society where almost anything goes and to hear someone say, *“I am the only way to eternal life and only those who live and believe in me will live forever”* is regarded as offensive.

But regardless of how offensive this might sound, the truth is the truth and still needs to be spoken. As time went on during Jesus’ time on earth, many were cynical about Jesus’ authority to speak the way he did or to do what he did, but he had so much to tell those who were hungry to hear God’s Word that he couldn’t be stopped.

Jesus said with authority, *“I am the Light of the world”*. Other religious leaders and prophets have claimed to be divine lights shining in our world but only Jesus can back it up with authority.

Only he can give us security;

only he can guide us,

only he can help us through the darkest storms;

only he can light up the path that leads to peace and joy even though everything is going crazy;

only he can show us the path to eternal life;

only he can say it and mean it, *“If you follow me, you won’t be stumbling through the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”*

He says, *“I am the Light of the Word”* because he has the authority to say it. He is the Son of God, once nailed to a cross, now ruling and reigning now in heaven. He is the greatest authority there is in Eternity

With authority Jesus says, *“If you remain faithful to my teachings you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* – you

will be free from fear, nagging guilt, discouragement and hopelessness. You will be free from death and the door will be open to life forever.

Jesus told many parables and talked a lot about the Kingdom of God and what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. Sometimes his words were comforting and gracious reminding us of the goodness and mercy of our heavenly Father, and sometimes he spoke words of warning and judgement, reminding us that it's too easy to forget God's ways and follow the ways of the world.

Sometimes he spoke provocatively and with vivid images to make people sit up and listen like, *"It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"*

His word has come down to us today and it's powerful and comes with the same authority as if he were here speaking it in person.

When you hear the words, *"Your sins are forgiven"* this is true. It's spoken with authority regardless of whose lips are speaking those words.

When you read, *"I will be with you always"* it's true for you, regardless of the state of your mind or body at the time.

When someone reads to you Jesus' words, *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid"* (John 14:27 NLT), this is his word of authority for you. Believe it because he means it.

When you hear, *"This is my body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins"* this is his word of promise to you that what was achieved on the cross is yours. You are God's child, loved, forgiven, an heir of heaven – this is Jesus' word of authority to you.

I think you get the idea and I don't need to go through the whole of Scripture to emphasise that our Christian faith is not some airy fairy wishful thinking but is based on God's amazing words of authority. When Jesus speaks he always speaks with the human condition in mind. He speaks with love because he knows we all need forgiveness and without forgiveness we have no show of entering heaven.

There are times in our lives when we wonder, “Lord, there is so much happening, I can’t cope. I’m going down a fast flowing river in a row boat without any oars. It’s out of control. I’m afraid that around the next bend I’ll be smashed on rocks and go down. The stress and the worry are more than I can handle”.

It’s just at that time we cling to the strong word of Christ. It has authority and power. It promises us the support, the strength, and the ability to endure that only God can give. When we listen to the word and hold on to it no matter how feeble our grip might be, like the people in the synagogue, we too will be amazed.

© Pastor Vince Gerhardy

YouTube Link: https://www.gerhardy.id.au/epiph4_15.html

OUR RESPONSE

OFFERING:

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

OFFERTORY HYMN (MV 191) “What can I do”

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (in unison)

We have entered this holy place without any trepidation.

We now freely leave behind a piece of our treasure, in faith that courage will lead to more courage and we will be amazed by your willingness to provide for us and our willingness to give to those who have less. Amen.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

We know that we can demonstrate your love.

This is why we name aloud those who need us to act as advocates:

For healing of the body, we name those who suffer illness.

(Pause.)

For healing of the spirit, we name those who suffer complacency or ambivalence.

(Pause.)

For healing of the mind, we name those who question their intelligence or need companions in the work to take every thought captive.

(Pause.)

For healing of war-torn countries, we name those places where holiness has been ignored in favour of control.

(Pause.)

For healing of the planet, we name the ecosystems that suffer when we are selfish consumers.

(Pause.)

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

SENDING FORTH

HYMN (MV 90) *"Don't be afraid"*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

Peace be with you.

Righteousness be in you.

Comfort be among you.

Faithfulness be around you.

Go out into the world

Reminded of God's steadfastness

Revealing God's glory

Redefining this season of waiting into preparation for the dawn of God's holy light.

CHORAL BLESSING (MV 221):

"I am walking a path of peace"

PRAYER RESOURCES:

**Seasons of the Spirit – SeasonsFUSION 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 (February 7, 2021) READINGS

*Isaiah 40:21-31
1 Corinthians 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

Wednesday, February 3rd –

@ 4:40 – Worship Committee Meeting

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!

UCW Pie Crust for Sale

The UCW is selling frozen, ready to roll, pie crust left over from
the meat pie sale. This pie crust was purchased from the
Golden Grain Bakery and could be kept frozen for another two to
three months. It is individually wrapped and has been stored in
plastic bags in the freezer. Costs are: \$1.00 per rolled crust
and \$1.25 for crusts not rolled.

Phone Gale Strachan at 752-4750 – leave a message which
crusts you want and your name and phone number.

Pick up times will be February 2, 3, & 4th from 1:00 -3:00 and

February 5th from 10:00 – 1:00

Bring correct change and your own carrying bags. Covid rules will be followed.

Stewardship Seconds

In what way can good stewardship practices bring light to your congregation?