



## UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA MELFORT ETHELTON PASTORAL CHARGE

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Website: [www.melfortunitedchurch.com](http://www.melfortunitedchurch.com)

Worship Time: 10:30 AM

Ministers: All of us

Worship Leader: Dorothy Busby, Marion Heavin

Music:

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Readers:

### ORDER OF WORSHIP

**July 5, 2020**  
**Fifth after Pentecost, Year A**

### 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:**

God invites all who are weary to come. Come now with the burdens of work, home, and community. Jesus promises,

**I will give you rest.**

God invites all who are weary to come. Come now with the burdens of illness, of fear, of hopelessness. Jesus promises,

**I will give you rest.**

God invites all who are weary to come. Come now with the burdens of anger, of prejudice, of alienation. Jesus promises,

**I will give you rest.**

God invites all who are weary to come. God invites all who are weary to lay down their burdens. God invites all who are weary to find peace.

**We gather in hope and to rest in God.**

Come, let us worship.

**OPENING PRAYER:** *(in unison)*

**God of Sabbath promise, you created not only work but the blessing of rest.**

**Often we feel exhausted, overstressed, and overwhelmed,  
in need of renewal and refreshment,  
– to be re-created.**

**Help us to take up your invitation of respite for our souls and spirits, of comfort for our bodies and minds,  
of a pause for quiet, for sabbatical, for holiday.**

**Open us to receive your gentling Spirit and your relaxing presence.**

**Amen.**

**PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE:** *(in unison)*

**God of new life, we come to this time and place,  
feeling raw and vulnerable.**

**We know that too often we forget about your constant love;  
we look for love in all the wrong places,  
and we put our trust in life and all the wrong things.**

**And yet, we continue to come,  
bearing the hope of transformation that is only possible in and through you. Amen.**

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

As we dip deep into the well of God's love  
in the sound of water, we hear vibrancy.

In the touch of water, we feel calm.

In the taste of water, we experience nourishment.

God of living water is ever present in our lives,  
offering constant love through vibrant, calm,  
and nourishing encounters. God is a God of  
abundance and relationship.

**And for that we rejoice! Amen.**

**SPECIAL MUSIC:** *"This is the Day of Rejoicing"*

- Joseph M. Martin

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/WCpsqfh-hVs>

**WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD TO US**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS:**

**RESPONSORIAL READING:**

**PSALM 45:10-17** (VU p. 769)

*A song for the anointed ruler.*

**HEBREW READING:**

**GENESIS 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67**

*Rebekah is found as a wife for Isaac.*

**EPISTLE READING:**

**ROMANS 7:15-25a**

*I do not do the good I want to do.*

**GOSPEL READING:**

**MATTHEW 11:16-19, 25-30**

*My yoke is easy; my burden is light.*

**SERMON:**

**How to Train an Ox**

I always welcome an opportunity to learn something new, especially if I can find a use for the information on an obscure topic.

I decided to research the training of oxen.

Yes, oxen!

Oxen are not, as some people think, a separate kind of animal but are, regular cattle that have been trained by a handler, or "teamster" to "work", usually in pairs, by means of a wooden yoke which is designed to make the best use of their strength. I think they are all steers and supposed to be at least 4 before they are fully trained and "qualified" to be called "oxen". The training is best started when they are very young calves but the ones I have seen were at an historic site, were fully trained, very heavy, strong and sedate.

They were obviously used to their work. I guess you couldn't have 2000 pound unpredictable animals around the public.

If I were preaching this sermon 20 or more years ago I would



have found an elderly farmer who knew about working with oxen or gone to one of those historic sites, such as the "Ross Farm Museum", and asked the nice man dressed in period costume all about working with these animals.

However, since Google became a friend of mine, I now ask Google. It's amazing what you can find on the internet these days!

What did I learn? Well, it seems that the first and most important tip in training an ox is this: "Never let the animal realize that he is bigger and stronger than you are". Remember, on average they do weigh about 2000 pounds.

AND the first and most important command is whoa. Other commands can come later.

I assumed that you usually want your oxen to work in pairs, "equally yoked", that is, of similar size and strength, but according to my internet research, there are situations where you want a stronger or larger animal paired with a smaller or weaker one. It is easier to train a green ox while yoked with a mature one, than it is to train a green pair.

In days gone by, a nation would conquer another in war and its captives would be made to parade through a gate, at the top of which was a yoke. Symbolically, it meant that "you have a new boss now!"

Oxen were a common and necessary feature of life in Bible times. In the Bible there are 173 references to oxen and 70 to a "yoke". Many of the references to oxen have to do with liability and compensation with regard to oxen. What happens if you loan your

ox to a neighbour and the ox dies? What happens if your ox gores your neighbour?

And, in some verses the yoke is a symbol of oppression. It was an easily understandable image.

So, back to the scripture. The passage begins with a question posed by disciples of John the Baptizer. The question: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?" When John was preaching he spoke of the prophecy of Isaiah and "the one who was to come". It seems that he continued to preach at least in some fashion or another after Jesus met him that day by the Jordan River. It was his condemnation of King Herod's marriage that got him in hot water and he ended up in prison. "ARE you the one?" It seems strange for John to ask this question since he clearly recognized him as the messiah the day he baptized him. Perhaps he did not like the results. The Romans were still in power. Jesus had led no revolution. The religious leaders were still requiring an adherence to the law that did not "help" the people in any real way!

Jesus simply says: "look at the results". Don't look at what I've done but at what I have. There IS good work being done – feeding, healing, consoling. The proof should be in the pudding.

Wait a minute! Who is this John? You remember John. He was a wilderness preacher who called people to be baptized, in the muddy Jordan! He was also, decidedly, odd. He wore garments made of camel's hair. In case you missed that; that is spelled "ITCHY" with a capital I. He was an ascetic; he did not drink alcohol and lived on bugs and honey. (I won't tell you that the internet also claims that insects will be a major protein source for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.) And the religious leaders complained about him and accused him of being possessed.

Then came Jesus who lived in normal conditions and wore normal clothing, for his time, as far as we know. The problem that the religious people had with him was that he associated with tax collectors and sinners and liked to have a good time. He was dismissed by some as a glutton and a drunkard.

Jesus compares this situation with kids in the local marketplace. Some of them want to play happy games but the others want sad games and the one group will not play with the other. Ya can't win!

Today's passage concludes with Jesus' invitation to take on his light and easy yoke. The people were accustomed to this image when applied to human obligations. They would have had too much experience of the hard and autocratic demands of a brutal Roman occupation. The religious leaders were of no help or comfort. Jesus frequently accused them of laying extra burdens on the backs of the people, without any assistance, and of having too cozy a relationship with the Roman occupation. For the elites of Jesus' day, the letter of the law, and their positions of privilege, were more important than the call to justice.

He says that, by contrast, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Following him is not a hard slog at the whip of a hard taskmaster, it is an easy and light way.

I think it is easy, not because of no standards, not because there is no work, but because there is someone to help. Just as Moses was promised rest in the wilderness in that he would not be alone so too the disciple is promised a light yoke.

A number of years ago, a child took up the offering in church. Were it not for her father's pinkie finger placed just behind her back at the edge of the plate, the money would have been like "magic pennies", rolling all over the floor. She was proud to have accomplished this adult task and he was happy that she was not the wiser for his help.

This is where I get back to training oxen. As individual Christians, we are not expected to do this work of faithfulness, of mission, of outreach, alone – the yoke is designed to help oxen work together.

Perhaps we are yoked with God, the Spirit, Jesus, the power of the holy, or whatever you might call it or perhaps we are yoked in community and Jesus is the teamster.

The first thing we have to do is to answer John's question for ourselves. Is the Gospel of Jesus the answer to the promise of God? Is the gospel the answer to the problems of the world? When we have answered "yes" for ourselves we have to answer Jesus' question. What do the people see when they look at us?

Do they see a group concerned only with maintaining the status quo or do we see a group on a shared journey ready to live into God's vision for creation?

Are we a people who live out God's vision of justice, mercy and faith?

What Do they see? They see regular worship services where good news is proclaimed in word and song.

They see the pyramid of Peanut Butter and the leaning Tower of Paste, the fort of cereal, the response to the Clean Up for Lent Campaign and the any and miscellaneous bags of groceries we leave in the basement or in the bins at the grocery store, to say nothing of the hours spent by some of you AT the food bank, sorting, boxing, carrying, caring for those who don't have enough to eat.

They see the UCW taking caring bouquets to shut-ins and visiting them at other times.

They see food brought to funeral luncheons and to people's houses when there is a death or a need.

They see our doors open to AA on Monday and Friday nights.  
They see our support of young people.

They see how individuals among us try to bring about God's vision for creation.

We could do more.

This fall I'm going to be asking for fresh produce for a garden of plenty. Since produce is perishable, and we don't have any cold storage, it will have to come in on a very defined time-line. More information will be going out later. For now put Thanksgiving Sunday on your calendar as Produce Sunday. Together we'll transform the front of the church into a garden ready to harvest.

We also need to look at ways we can help to alleviate poverty itself. This involves advocacy and placing pressure on governments.

Far from being “political”, in a democracy, it is the way we have to do this part of the call of the gospel.

There is a group in Hantsport seeking to raise money and person power to welcome a refugee family to this community. This is a long term project. This is one area where a small and ageing group such as ourselves does not have the ability to do something like this on our own, but together- with this community all working together it is possible! We can share the “haven of hospitality” with those badly in need of it.

As a congregation, we need to put our heads together to figure out how to support families with young children and provide Christian development in the midst of their busy and demanding lives. It may involve “thinking outside the box” and perhaps the box is “Sunday Morning”. What about a truly all ages program on a weeknight?

This is the work ahead of us. We are not called to do it alone – we have one another and we have the Spirit who goes with us, encouraging, prompting, supporting and gently calling.

Be my disciple.

Make a difference.

Follow me.

I will give you rest and call you to give rest to others.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Amen.

*[Rev. Beth W. Johnston, Nipawin United Church, used with permission.]*

## **OUR RESPONSE**

### **PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:**

Rebekah chose to leave her familial kinship in order to participate in kinship that was more than family. Let us consider the doors of possibility before us, as we pray to move our hearts and our energies beyond the familiar to embrace the reign of God. For all who thirst – whether for water or relationship, for welcome or justice, or merely a place to rest and to be:

**Turn our lives outward in ever-expanding senses of connection and love.**

For all who struggle with choices – choices about the beginnings or endings of commitments; choices whose doors do not yet reveal the vista beyond, or the path it may bring; choices about what to do with one's life, and what to do for the sake of others:

**Turn our lives outward in ever-expanding senses of connection and love.**

For all on journeys, seeking answer to prayer – for healing or comfort, strength in trying times and joy in shared times, and wisdom and love in all times:

**Turn our lives outward in ever-expanding senses of connection and love.**

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:** *(in unison)*

**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 who 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, forever and ever. Amen.**

## **SENDING FORTH**

**COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:**

In worship, we find rest and renewal

But this is not where we stay.

Let us go from this place,

open to embracing love's beauty in the word.

Go – ready to greet the stories of another as opportunities for love.

And ready be transformed by God the Comforter,

God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. **Amen.**

**PRAYER RESOURCES:**

*\*Seasons of the Spirit – Seasons FUSION Lent, Easter 2020; The United Church of Canada Pentecost 2020 Year A Gathering Resources for Worship Planners. Used with permission.*

**NEXT WEEK'S (July 12, 2020) READINGS:**

*Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119;  
Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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**THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH**

Church Office Hours:

The Church Office is closed the week of June 29 – July 3rd and will reopen on Wednesday, July 8<sup>th</sup>.

**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 Over the Summer**

The next FundScrip deadline will be in September.

*Stewardship Seconds*

*According to Paul, as children of God, we can count our chickens before they hatch!*