



UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA MELFORT ETHELTON PASTORAL CHARGE

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

Website: www.melfortunitedchurch.com

Ministers: All of us

Worship Leader: Gail Forsyth

Music:

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter:

Scripture Readers:

ORDER OF WORSHIP

May 17, 2020

Sixth Sunday after Easter, 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:

Come, let us gather in praise of the one who shows us the way:

The way of Christ is love.

Let us gather in thanksgiving for the one who teaches the truth:

That we were all made in God's image and called good.

Let us worship the one who gives us life.

Blessed be our God, source of all creation.

OPENING PRAYER:

Our God is within and beyond.

God of all Creation, out of your being all

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things were made,
yet in all things your being is uncontained.
Help us to see you within all things, within all people.
Help us to know that you are beyond our understanding,
beyond our imagining,
from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE:

God of all, whom we have learned to see in the person of Jesus the Christ, open our eyes to your presence around us. Open our hearts, that we might see your incarnation continuing in the living and growing of your Creation.

For we confess that we see you more easily in those who look like us, think like us, act like us. We confess that we can struggle to see you in those who are different – in the diversity of Creation; we confess that we do not always see that you are more significant than we are, more diverse than we are, more inclusive than we are. We confess that in refusing to see you in all our neighbours, we have refused to love you as you have loved us.

Forgive us, we pray.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God of grace, you invite us to love one another as you have loved us. And so we remember your abiding love. We remember that you did not wait until we were ready but sent Jesus the Christ to guide us in your way. For your grace is poured out upon us before we even ask, calling us always back to you.

By your mercy, we are beloved. By your grace, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: *“You Raise Me Up (traducao)”*

- Josh Groban

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/mMgooG96P5c>

WE LISTEN FOR GOD’S WORD TO US

SERMON: Calm in the Storms of Life

Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd –

Westworth United Church, Winnipeg, MB

June 24, 2018

Mark 4:35-41; I Samuel 17:57-18:5, 10-16

Storms can blow in at a moment's notice. Prior to the days of cellphones, those of us who are old canoe trippers could only forecast the weather by reading the clouds. This has led to many a surprised, storm-stayed change of plans. Waves can build up quickly. My partner and I have learned how to paddle through 2 ½ foot waves and negotiate 90° turns right at the millisecond when the canoe is balancing on the peak of a wave. We've had more practice at that than we would have liked.

Being in a little boat in big waves can be terrifying. When I read of the disciples' terror, I'm right with them in their boat, casting an accusing eye at a serenely-sleeping Jesus. "Do you not care that we are perishing?"

The storms of life are just as terrifying. Life can spin out of control in the flash of a moment—the loss of a job, a doctor's pronouncement, an accident. Sometimes storm clouds gather on the horizon, giving us a bit more notice of what's to come, but when those storms eventually arrive they are no less terrifying. In the midst of these storms, we may feel abandoned by God. "Do you not care that we are perishing?"

Jesus' response is less than reassuring. As the waves tower behind him, he asks: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" Ouch. Let me try to defend Jesus' questions (you can tell me how successful I am!). Last week we talked about how anxiety pushes out faith. Well, the root of anxiety is fear. In Jesus' questions, he is suggesting that the disciples' fear is blocking out their faith. Jesus didn't say that there was nothing to be afraid of. Clearly, they were in danger. Jesus' comments weren't a dismissive platitude of, "There, there my child. Nothing's the matter." Instead, he was trying to help his disciples not be afraid even in the midst of the storm. When the storm was over, their fear was not diminished. If anything, it was heightened after observing Jesus' power over

nature. The Greek reads that the disciples then had a “phobon megan”—a mega fear. Jesus correctly identified that their biggest challenge wasn’t the storm—it was their own fear.

A fear of “what if” can be paralyzing. It can muddle our thinking, cloud our judgements, block our ability to listen, to be attentive, to attend to the now. Fear actually inhibits the very abilities that we need to calm it. When I most need the British motto of “keep calm and carry on” is when it’s most difficult to do. I have learned some meditation techniques specifically designed to reduce the adrenalin flow that fear pumps out. If (and it’s a big if) I can force myself to focus and stay with this particular energy routine and meditative prayer, I can usually feel that fear or anxiety or even sleeplessness begin to subside. Then, even if the storm-tossed waves haven’t subsided, my little canoe of faith has a better chance of riding them without capsizing. But if that thunder starts rumbling, I just need to get off the lake. There are times when we need to listen to fear.

The novelist Emily Brontë lived through tumultuous times with her mentally ill father and alcoholic brother. In spite of this, she wrote, “No coward soul is mine, no trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere. I see Heaven’s glories shine, and faith shines equal, arming me from fear.”^[1]

There was an additional source of fear for the disciples in this story that most of us miss. Not only did Jesus invite the disciples to set out in the evening as a storm was brewing, but he also asked them to “go across to the other side.” What was on the other side of the Sea of Galilee? It was where the Gentile Gerasenes lived, who were considered foreigners, even enemies of the house of Israel. By crossing over to the other side, Jesus was making it clear that his message was not only for his own people, but also for strangers and those considered dangerous. As soon as they arrived on the other side, they encountered yet more challenges when they were met by a Gerasene who was also tormented by mental illness and self-harm. The storms continued in a different form.

The familiar story of David and Goliath is framed by a larger story of stormy relationships, boundary-crossing love, fear and mental illness. Young David has just killed the giant Philistine and King

Saul inquired as to his identity. While David was introducing himself to Saul, Saul's son Jonathan was present and the souls of David and Jonathan bonded together. Saul sent out David to lead the army and David's success and popularity caused King Saul envy and jealousy. Saul then began to be tormented by mental illness. Sometimes he was soothed by David's music on the lyre and other times he became outraged, trying to kill David. Jonathan was torn between his love of David and his allegiance to his father.

There are so many storms we encounter in our lives. The most difficult involve unstable relationships. It is then that we most need the blessing of Jesus, "Peace. Be still, even in the midst of the storm." You'll notice that I titled this sermon "Calm in the Storms of Life" not "Calming the Storms of Life". Sometimes the storms themselves can't be calmed. Relief can only be found through inner peace that can carry us through the storms.

There are times when we don't know if we can continue; when we can no longer risk going to the other side. We long for safe harbour and glassy seas. We do need those retreat days, but we can't stay in that safe harbour forever. Jesus continues to point to the other side. As Frederick Buechner once preached, "Go...Go for God's sake, and for your own sake, too, and for the world's sake. Climb into your little tub of a boat and keep going...[because] Christ sleeps in the deepest selves of all of us, and...in whatever way we can call on him, as the [fishers] did in their boat, to come awake within us and to give us courage, to give us hope, to show us, each one, our way. May he be with us especially when the winds go mad and the waves run wild, as they will for all of us before we're done, so that even in their midst we may find peace, find him."[\[2\]](#)

Near the end of John Bunyan's novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian has to cross a great, fearsome river and he is terrified. He begins to wade into the waters with his companion, Hopeful when he cries out, "I sink in deep Waters; the Billows go over my head, all His waves go over me." Hopeful replies, "Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good..."[\[3\]](#) Sometimes the water is not as deep as we fear.

There is a photograph that was taken of New Orleans just after Hurricane Katrina struck. It shows the devastation of a cemetery with trees toppled, debris strewn and several burial vaults smashed open. But in the midst of the destruction stands a statue of Christ, untouched by the storm, with his hands extended in a benediction of calm amidst the chaos.

When the storms hit us, Christ stands with open arms and says to us, "Be not afraid. You do not walk alone, for I am with you." Peace be with you Amen.

[1] Emily Brontë, "No Coward Soul Is Mine," January 2, 1846.

[2] Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*.

[3] John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), p. 1, sec. x.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

RESPONSORIAL READING:

**Psalm 66: 8-20 (VU pp. 784-785
Parts Two and Three)**

God preserved us.

APOSTLES READING:

Acts 17:22-31

Paul points the Athenians to "the unknown God."

EPISTLE READING:

1 Peter 3:13-22

Do not repay evil for evil.

GOSPEL READING:

John 14:15-21

The Advocate, the Spirit, will be with you.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

God of all, we have gathered here to praise and worship you because we have known your power and movement in our lives. We have felt your love surrounding and upholding us. Your Holy Spirit, the Advocate, has walked beside us through celebration and grief; a gentle, constant reminder of your presence.

God of mercy, we commit ourselves to be your church together because we know that you will not abandon us or leave us orphaned, but will be our sustainer forever. We commit ourselves to be a community that shows forth your abiding love to those who have felt abandoned by this world.

And so we pray this day: for all of those who are struggling in these difficult times, for those who are grieving, and seeking a new way forward; for those who are experiencing housing insecurity, hunger, or food insecurity; for those with health concerns, mental or physical, that keep them isolated or unable to live into the fullness of who they could be; for those who have been rejected by their families or communities; for those who have been blamed or shamed by those who were supposed to give support or accountability; for those who are living with violence and trauma as part of their daily lives.

Holy God, we know that the hurts of this world are not what you want for us. We know that you are with us, our comfort and consolation, even in hard times. Help us to come alongside each other, as well. Help us to be the tangible presence of your Holy Spirit, the hands and feet of your love in this world.

Help us, O God of grace, to love each other as you have loved us. **Amen.**

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.**

SPECIAL MUSIC: *"The Lord's Prayer"*

- Jackie Evancho (from Dream With Me In Concert)

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/Vg2AsS4CErM>

SENDING FORTH

COMMISSIONING & BLESSING:

Let us go out from this place with our eyes or ears, our hearts wide open to the movement of the Holy swirling around us. Let us go out from here prepared to see our God,

even in the most unexpected times and places.
Let us remember that God will not leave us,
even though we might leave this space.
May the love of God, the peace of Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit abide with you now,
and in all your days. **Amen.**

PRAYER RESOURCES:

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

NEXT WEEK'S (May 24, 2020) READINGS:

*Acts 1:6-14;
Psalm 68;
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11;
John 17:1-11.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH:

Church Office Hours:
Wednesday & Thursday – 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

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 Deadline for May

The next FundScrip deadline is Thursday, May 28th. The gift cards will be ready for pickup on Thursday, June 4th.

Stewardship Seconds

Stewardship is a respectful journey with fellow travellers, knowing we will never arrive at the way the world "should" be but that we all have much to contribute on the trek.