



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: Sharon Heavin & Gail Forsyth

Music: Jodi Allen Corbett

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter: Eileen Brooks

Scripture Reader: Eileen Brooks

ORDER OF WORSHIP

November 22, 2020

Twenty-fifth after Pentecost, Year A

[Reign of Christ 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:

Make a glad noise to God, all the Earth. In all languages; with all timbres and textures; let us make a glad noise to God.

God invites us to worship with gladness – to come into God's presence with singing! Let us raise our voices and proclaim our joy as we enter into worship.

God is God! My friends, God is God! God made us; God claims us as God's own; we are God's people.

How wonderful it is to remember and recognize that God is Creator, Parent, Guardian, and Guide.

Let us enter the gates of worship with thanksgiving and praise!

And let us give thanks that God's steadfast love endures forever. We have arrived at the end of the church year, but God's love and the story of God's Son and God's people continue forever.

The circle is never unbroken! The story continues, and the invitation never expires.

Come, all generations, let us worship God!

OPENING PRAYER: *(in unison)*

We live in a world where hunger, thirst, loneliness, sickness, and imprisonment exist for too many people, Loving Parent, you invite us to participate in the ways of healing and wholeness that would change this truth.

In Jesus, the Christ, you came among us to show us how to love – modelling for us the ways of mercy, compassion, and justice.

We hear Paul's words, admonishing us to understand Jesus to be "above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion...and above every name that is named... in every age."

Be with us as we worship, and help us to gain strength for the journey, which continues beyond this day – the journey of choices and forgiveness to which all people of faith are invited as we follow the Christ.

Be with us, and help us to discover your guidance with every opportunity we encounter – the guidance of the shepherd – the guidance of Love Incarnate. Amen.

HYMN (MV 185) *"Ev'ry Day is a Day of Thanksgiving"*

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE:

It is sometimes hard to see beyond the ways of the rulers of our times – the ways of power-brokering, politicization, and competition; It is sometimes hard to speak truth to "authorities" who abuse their privilege and create obstacles to the people. It is sometimes hard to turn away from opportunities to join in the domination and exploitation that bleed into so many aspects of our lives.

It is sometimes hard to resist allowing people of notoriety to claim space in our imaginations and our hopefulness for the future.

We confess we are seduced by ease, access, accolades and ambition, and rarely consider that they may come at the costs of others' wholeness.

We confess that it is often just too easy to succumb to the constant temptations of our privilege and our situations, and proverbially, to walk past the suffering all around us.

Forgive us, Loving Shepherd, and nudge us onto better paths.

Forgive us and guide us into right relationship.

Forgive us and teach us to be like Jesus.

Forgive us, and reclaim us, we pray.

Baaa-men. (just a little humour!)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God desires our participation in the healing of the world. To feed the hungry, offer drink to those who thirst, welcome the stranger, and cloth the naked. But when we fail to do so, in our contrition, God forgives. God's forgiveness is as eternal as God's love. Therefore, let us not only be assured of pardon, but let us reclaim our place among the people of the Liberation Way, and journey on in God's light. **Amen.**

PRAYER RESPONSE (MV 99) *"Stand, O Stand Firm"*

CHOIR ANTHEM: *"Christmas Peace"* - written and arranged by Joel Raney and
"Calypso Lullaby" - based on "Mary's Little Boy Child" - words and music by Jester Hairston -
additional words and setting by Joel Rane

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/H6Ra7jBoM-o>

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD TO US

ESPECIALLY FOR THE CHILDREN:

HYMN (MV 126) *"Are You a Shepherd"*

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

RESPONSORIAL READING:

PSALM 100 (VU pp. 820-824)

Make a joyful noise, all the earth!

HEBREW READING:

ESEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24

God searches for the sheep; God judges between the fat and lean.

EPISTLE READING:

EPHESIANS: 15-23

May God give you a spirit of wisdom, revelation, and hope.

GOSPEL READING:

MATTHEW 25:31-46

When you helped the least of these, you helped me.

SERMON:

Choices – A Sermon on Matthew 25:31-46

I am glad it's so easy and clear-cut for St. Matthew. He continues to draw these lines and has no doubt about who is on which side. He has no questions. It's all pretty simple for him. Feed the hungry. Give the thirsty something to drink. Clothe the naked. Welcome the stranger. Care for the sick. Visit the prisoner. (Matthew 25:31-46)

He's just so sure. He's so clear. But that's not been my experience of life. I wish it were as easy as going through a check list and categorizing people as either a sheep or a goat, those who cared for "the least of these" and those who did not. But it's not that easy for me and I don't think it is for you either.

Last week I was on the way home from running some errands. I stopped for the light at the square and a young man walked across the street in front of me. I recognized him as one of "the least of these." I recognized him as the guy who came by my office just a few days before. I recognized him as the same guy who had come by the

office five or six times in the last week and a half. I recognized him as the one to whom I said, "I will not help you and you need to leave."

So am I a goat? Accursed? Bound for the eternal fires of punishment. I don't know. Because I also recognized him as the same guy who came by the church six or eight months ago and I said to him, "You are always welcome here. Let me get you some food. How can I help you? What do you need?" So was I a good sheep? Righteous? Blessed by the Father? Bound for eternal life? I don't know.

I just don't think it's as easy as categorizing ourselves as either a sheep or a goat. The reality is we are both. I'll bet each of you has a story just like mine; a time when you fed, clothed, visited, cared for one of the least of these, and another time when you drove past, looked away, or pretended not to see the man or woman holding a sign asking for food, work, or some other help.

I could tell you all the reasons I did what I did, why I helped one day but not another. I could defend and justify my choices. All my explanations would be based on this other guy's story, his life, his circumstances. I don't think that's at all what today's gospel is about. It's not about telling the truth about him. It's about telling the truth about my life and your life. It's about getting really real with my story, my life, my circumstances. I might wonder whether he's scamming me, but maybe the better question is whether I am scamming him or scamming God.

The least of these always seem to have a way of revealing to us, most profoundly, the truth of who we are and what our life is about. They do that so much more clearly and directly than do those I consider to be an equal or those I consider to be above me.

The least of these are in all our lives. They do not always fit our stereotyped images. Sure, it might be the guy on the street corner asking for a handout. It might be a welfare mother asking for food or the guy who just got out of prison, again. Sometimes, though, it is one who lives under the same roof as me or sits across the table from me. And it's not always about physical needs. The least of these also have emotional and spiritual needs.

The least of these are in all our relationships. They are the people over whom we have some sense of power and control. They are the ones who have less resources and options than do we. They are the ones overwhelmed by life and underwhelmed by support. They are the ones who feel they are hanging on by a thread and they

look at us as if we hold the scissors. They are the ones we can do what we want to and not really worry about their response. They are the ones we threaten or intimidate simply because of who we are, what we have, what we can do.

Who are the least of these in your life? Some are anonymous. Some might be sitting next to you.

I think we all want to make a difference. We want to make a difference in the life of another, in the world, in the church. Maybe that's why we sometimes struggle with our decisions and the choices we make. It's the reason we ask guidance from others. It's the reason we pray for God's will. Deep down we really do want to make a difference. We want to do what's right.

Well, I have some good news for you and I have some bad news. You don't have to try to make a difference. You can quit trying. You already are making a difference. Every single one of you is making a difference. I am making a difference. Here's the bad news. I don't know if that's for good or ill. We often don't know.

The people gathered for judgment in today's gospel have no idea what difference they are making. They are just going on about their lives. One cared for the least of these and the other didn't. They seem oblivious as to the consequences or effects of their actions. They both ask the same question. "When did we see you?"

Let's not literalize this story. Let's not make this into a search for the least of these so we can be helpful and caring and get to heaven. Let's not start counting and keeping score of how many people we helped and how many we passed by, overlooked, or said no to. How do we measure that anyway? Do we need 70% to pass? Are we plotted on a bell curve? Do we just total up the two columns at the end of our life and see which is greater, cared for or didn't care for?

I just don't think that's what today's gospel is about. That's too easy. We already know we should help and care for one another.

I think this story names the reality in which we live. It's a reality that pulls us in different and sometimes opposite directions. It's a reality in which we often contradict ourselves. It's a reality in which we always have a choice before us and what we choose always makes a difference – for good or ill. It will always matter and always make a difference in someone's life.

Maybe the goat and sheep metaphor worked in Jesus' day but I don't think it makes much sense to us today. We need a new metaphor. We need a new way of understanding what's going on.

Maybe what's really being said is that there are two ways. We are pulled by God in one direction and our humanity in another. Or we could see it as the conflict and contraction between our humanity and our inhumanity. Another way would be to say that we live in the light and follow a path of light and we that we also live in the darkness and follow that path. It's never just one or the other. It always both.

If we are really honest with ourselves, if we look deep within we will see our humanity and our inhumanity. We will see both our light and our darkness, our divinity and our humanity.

What if this story isn't so much about assigning reward or punishment, determining an eternal location? Maybe it's pushing us to look at the truth of our lives, to look at the choices we make, and to be aware that our choices matter.

Those metaphors and the choices they present are always coming to us. Look at the headlines in the news and you can see the choice between light and darkness. Don't you see it in the attack on the Egyptian mosque, over 300 killed? In the allegations and accusations of sexual harassment by powerful and prominent men? In the Sutherland Springs shooting? The Las Vegas shooting? The little guy who walked across the street in front of me. They all present a choice.

You might say that you didn't bomb, harass, or shoot anyone. I don't doubt or dispute that. That's not the point. We may not be guilty but we all are responsible. We are responsible for the choices we make – to choose light, to choose life, to choose the least of these. What does it mean for you and me to choose light in the aftermath of these events? What might that look like in each of our individual lives?

These are not choices that live outside us. They live in each one of us. How we choose begins to set a trajectory and direction for our lives. I don't think any of us get to that final place – whatever it is or however we understand it – overnight. It's not a one time event or a single decision. It's a series of choices and the further down the road we go, whether it is the road of light or the road of darkness, the harder it is and the longer it takes to return. Maybe we even reach that point of no return, a point where we just can't find our way back. That's a judgment on our life but it's a judgment each one of us

makes, chooses, for ourselves. The King, sitting on the throne of his glory, simply names what is, what he sees. What do you see when you look at your life? What are the least of these showing you?

I'm guessing that just like me you see choices of light and choices of darkness. Everyone of you could look at the situations you are in today and see choices being made between light and darkness. These choices matter not just for you but also for another human being, choices that will affect their life for good or ill. We have the ability to open the channels of life, beauty, generosity, justice, compassion, just as we have the ability to block and close those channels.

So don't hear this story as a final judgment on your life. Hear it as a wakeup call. Let it be the chance to see yourself through the eyes of one of the least of these. What do they see? Is that who you want to be? What choices will lead you on the path of light? What choices will help you discover the light and beauty within yourself and within the other? That light and beauty describe who we most authentically are. But I also know that that light and beauty can be cruelly tested by the vulgar, the ugly, the impoverishment, and the violence in our world. And yet the choice remains; light or darkness. Who and how do you want to be? What will we choose?

What if we approached every person, every place, every circumstance, every choice as if we see Christ, and if we don't, if we can't see Christ, what if we approached every person, every place, every circumstance, every choice, as if Christ sees us? Either way there is a seeing taking place. What if we allowed those seeings to push us deep into ourselves to uncover, rediscover, or maybe even discover for the first time, the light that is who we must truly be, and in that light we made our next choice?

What if we made our next choice based not on the truth of the other's life but on the truth of our own life? My guess is that sometimes we would choose yes and other times we would choose no. But every time we would choose in favor of the least of these.

That guy I told you about at the beginning – the one who came to the church, the one I helped, the one I ran off, the one who walked in front of my truck – I don't know the truth of his life, and maybe I don't need to. It's enough that he has shown me the truth of my life. That's what the least of these do for us. They set a choice before us, and it's not just a choice to help or not help. It's a human choice – a choice that has a face, a name, a life, hopes,

fears, needs. It's a choice between our light and our darkness, our humanity and our inhumanity.

A choice awaits each one of us. What will we choose? Who will we be?

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<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2017/11/27/choices-a-sermon-on-matthew-2531-46/>

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 brought ourselves to this worship.

We have brought our resources to this church.

We have offered ourselves in supplication and praise.

And we have offered our hearts and minds to greater compassion and understanding.

Bless them all, we pray, and transform them into food, drink, welcome, clothing, and companionship for all in need.

Amen.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

We know we cannot feed all who hunger – but help us, God, to offer some of what we have to those so much in need.

We know we cannot offer a drink to all who thirst – but help us, Holy Shepherd, to be grateful for the waters all around us.

We know we cannot befriend every stranger, but show us what it means to be a people of true hospitality and grace.

We know we cannot cure all illness or remove all pain, but help us to share words and expressions that can be felt as balms of your compassion.

We know, Gracious Saviour, that we cannot visit all who are imprisoned, but help us to recognize and dismantle the prisons of our social and cultural orders – to unlock the chains of racism, sexism, homophobia, economic injustice, and nationalistic pride that bind and disempower so many in our world.

And we know, Creating Wonder, that the crises of changing climates cannot be addressed in entirety, but help us to live more gently and carefully on this beautiful planet.

We thank you for loving us into being, and we pray to be guided to share that love in return.

And for those who know power, authority, and who rule among us – we pray your wisdom would descend upon them, your insight grow within them, your tenderness flow into them, and your love inspire them.

And when we forget the eternal nature of your forgiving grace, send us messages of encouragement to remind us again that we are your children, beloved and blessed.

And help us to do the same for others, we pray, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

HYMN (MV 1) *“Let Us Build a House”*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

Beloved of God, go into the world and allow the joyful noises of creation to fill your hearts, so that you may be renewed for the journey of compassion and healing to which we are called as followers of Christ. Go in peace. **Amen.**

CHORAL BLESSING (MV 211)

“Go Now in Peace, Guided by the Light”

PRAYER RESOURCES:

**Seasons of the Spirit – SeasonsFUSION Pentecost 2, 2020; The United Church of Canada Pentecost 2020 Year A Gathering Resources for Worship Planners. Used with permission.*

NEXT WEEK'S (November 29 ,2020 – Advent 1) READINGS

Isaiah 64:1-9;
Psalm 80;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

Monday, November 23rd

@ 2 pm – Naomi Unit

Tuesday, November 24th

@ 10:30 am – Finance Committee Meeting

Wednesday, November 25th

Church Office Closed

@ 7 pm - Choir

Thursday, November 26th

@ 7 pm – Church Board Meeting

Friday, November 27th

@ 10 am – Pastoral Care

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!

Sunday, December 6th - White Gift Sunday

Sunday, December 6th is White Gift Sunday.
The Youth Group will be collecting unwrapped
present donations and collecting pajamas.

-12-

Mittens, Mittens, Mittens!

The Naomi Unit is planning another mitten tree for Christmas Giving this year. If you are an avid knitter, hand knit mittens would be wonderful, but any size children's mittens would be gratefully accepted. The tree will be set up in the foyer to display the mittens. Close to Christmas these items will be donated to a worthy cause.

Winter Newsletter

Please submit your report/submission for the winter newsletter by November 26th; either to the office or by email to melfortuc@sasktel.net. Thank you.

FundScrip Deadline for November

The next FundScrip deadline is Thursday, November 26th. Your order will be available for pickup on Thursday, December 3rd.

Stewardship Seconds

*Stewards help to create a new heaven and a new earth
by living as though they are already here.*