



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

Music: Jodi Allen

Music Director: Mavis Peters

Office Administrator: Denise Todosichuk

Caretaker: Faye Greier

Today's Greeter: Gale Strachan

Scripture Readers: Chris Corbett

ORDER OF WORSHIP

September 13, 2020
Fifteenth after Pentecost, Year A
(Creation Time 1)

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 into worship, remembering the land and the place where you drew your first breath
(name places of birth and family origin).

Come into worship, acknowledging the lands and places which have and continue to break open the gift of God's presence
(name places where sacred presence is experienced).

Come into worship, trusting and anticipating those places where God may yet bring you

(name landscapes you hope to see one day).

Come into worship, companioned
by these lands of origin and revelation and hope.

OPENING PRAYER:

What does God hear when listening to the land?

I am land, crying out, soiled by pollution.

**I am land, crying out,
stained by the shedding of blood.**

**What have we done to the land,
O God, what have we done to you?**

I am land, crying out, torn apart by hatreds.

**I am land, crying out,
used up and discarded without thought for the future.**

**What have we done to the land,
O God, what have we done to you?**

What do we hear when listening to the land?

I am land, crying out...

HYMN (MV 130) “*Rise Up, Rise Up*”

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE:

In holy presence, we gather:

We come with the land –

pebbles strewn

sweeping fields

craggy mountains

time-worn valleys

as those who draw life from God.

We lift our voice with the voice of the land:

seeking from God what makes for life,

crying out for the violence that has been done,

longing and working for creation’s redemption.

We listen with the land

for vibrations of God’s presence,

grounding all in the deep assurance

that God is and will be in this place.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE:

God hears the cry of land – and God hears the cries we raise.

**Let us cry out for an end to the violence –
done to the earth, done to one another.**

**Let us cry out – and let us work for –
a renewed commitment to Earth’s healing.**

God forgive us...

God empower us...

God help us...

for the sake of the land.

SPECIAL MUSIC: “*Amazing Grace*” - Chris Tomlin
Soloist – Chris Corbett

WE LISTEN FOR GOD’S WORD TO US

MINUTE FOR MISSION:

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

RESPONSORIAL READING:

EXODUS 15: 1b-11, 20-21 (VU
p.876)

*Miriam and Moses sing the Song
of the Sea.*

HEBREW READING:

EXODUS 14:19-31

*God parts the sea for the
Hebrews.*

EPISTLE READING:

ROMANS 14:1-12

*Whether we live or whether we
die, we are God’s.*

GOSPEL READING:

MATTHEW 18:21-35

How many times must I forgive?

SERMON:

AWE AND WONDER

BIG BANGS AREN'T BORING. Dinosaurs aren't boring. Coral reefs aren't boring. Elephants aren't boring. Hummingbirds aren't boring. And neither are little kids. Evolution isn't boring. Magnetism and electricity aren't boring. $E=MC^2$ might be hard to understand, but it certainly isn't boring. And even glaciers aren't boring, although their dramatic pace is at first quite hard for us to perceive. And God, whatever God is, must not be boring, either, because God's creation is so amazingly, wonderfully, surprisingly fascinating.

The first and greatest surprise – a miracle, really – is this: that anything exists at all, and that we get to be part of it. Ripe peach, crisp apple, tall mountain, bright leaves, sparkling water, flying flock, flickering flame, and you and me...here, now!

On this, the first pages of the Bible and the best thinking of today's scientists are in full agreement: it all began in the beginning, when space and time, energy and matter, gravity and light, burst or bloomed or banged into being. In light of the Genesis story, we would say that the possibility of this universe overflowed into actuality as God, the Creative Spirit, uttered the original joyful invitation: *Let it Be!* And in response, what happened? Light. Time. Space. Matter. Motion. Sea. Stone. Fish. Sparrow. You. Me. Enjoying the unspeakable gift and privilege of being here, being alive.

Imagine how uncountable nuclei and electrons and sister particles danced and whirled. Imagine how space dust coalesced into clouds, and how clouds coalesced into galaxies, and how galaxies began to spin, sail, and dance through space. Imagine how in galaxy after galaxy, suns blazed, solar systems twirled, and worlds formed. Around some of those worlds, moons spun, and upon some of those worlds, storms swirled, seas formed, and waves rolled. And somewhere in between the smallest particles and the largest cosmic structures, here we are, in this galaxy, in this solar system, on this planet, in this story, in this church, at this moment – with this chance for us to breathe, think, dream, speak, and be alive together.

The Creator brought it all into being, and now some fourteen billion years later, here we find ourselves: dancers in this beautiful, mysterious choreography that expands and evolves and includes us all. We're farmers and engineers, parents and students, theologians and scientists, teachers and shopkeepers, builders and fixers, drivers and doctors, dads and moms, wise grandparents and wide-eyed infants.

Don't we all feel like poets when we try to speak of the beauty and wonder of this creation? Don't we share a common amazement about our cosmic neighborhood when we wake up to the fact that we're actually here, actually love, right Now?

Some theologians and mystics speak of the Creator withdrawing or contracting to make space for the universe to be...on its own, so to speak, so that it has its own life, its own being and history., Others imagine God creating the universe within God's self, so the universe in some way is contained "in" God, within God's presence, part of God's own life and story. Still others imaging God creating an "out there" of space and time, and then filling it with galaxies, and then inhabiting it like a song fills a forest or light fills a room or love fills a heart. Interestingly, some scholars believe the Genesis story echoes ancient Middle Eastern temple dedication texts. But in this story, the whole universe is the temple, and the Creator chooses to be represented by human beings, not a stone idol.

The romance of Creator and creation is far more wonderful and profound than anyone can ever capture in words. And yet we try, for how could we be silent in the presence of such beauty, glory, wonder, and mystery? How can we not celebrate this great gift – to be alive?

To be alive is to look up at the stars on a dark night and to feel the beyond-words awe of space in its vastness. To be alive is to look down from a mountaintop on a bright, clear day and to feel the wonder that can only be expressed in "oh" or "wow" or maybe "hallelujah." To be alive is to look out from the beach toward the horizon at sunrise or sunset and to savor the joy of it all in pregnant, saturated silence. To be alive is to gaze in delight at a single bird, tree, leaf, or friend, and to feel that they whisper of a creator or source we all share.

Genesis means "beginnings." It speaks through deep, multilayered poetry and wild, ancient stories. The poetry and stories of Genesis reveal deep truths that can help us be more fully alive today. They dare to proclaim that the universe is God's self-expression, God's speech act. That means that everything everywhere is always essentially holy, spiritual, valuable, meaningful. All matter matters.

If you ask what language the Creator speaks, the best answer is this: God's first language is full-spectrum light, clear water, deep sky, red squirrel, blue whale, gray parrot, green lizard, golden aspen, orange mango, yellow warbler, laughing child, rolling river, serene forest, churning storm, spinning planet.

A psalmist said the same thing in another way – the universe is God's work of art, God's handiwork. All created things speak or sing of the God who made them. If you want to know what the Original Artist is like, a smart place to start would be to enjoy the art of creation.

Genesis tells us that the universe is good – a truth so important it gets repeated like the theme of a song. Rocks are good. Clouds are good. Sweet corn is good. Every river or hill or valley or forest is good. Skin? Good. Bone? Good. Mating and eating and beathing and giving birth and growing old? Good, good, good. All is good. Life is good.

The best thing in Genesis is not simply human beings, but the whole creation considered and enjoyed together, as a beautiful, integrated whole, and us a part. The poetry of Genesis describes the "very goodness" that comes at the end of a long process of creation...when all the parts, including us, are working together as one whole. That harmonious whole is so good that the Creator takes a day off, as it were, just to enjoy it. That day of restful enjoyment tells us that the purpose of existence isn't money or power or fame or security or anything less than this: to participate in the goodness and beauty and aliveness of creation. And so we join the Creator in good and fruitful work...and in delightful enjoyment, play and rest as well.

So here we are, friends. Here we are. Alive!

And this is why we walk this road: to behold the wonder and savour this aliveness. To remind ourselves who we are, where we are, what's going on here, and how beautiful precious, holy, and meaningful it all is. It's why we pause along the journey for a simple meal, with hearts full of thankfulness, rejoicing to be part of this beautiful and good creation. This is what it means to be alive. Amen.

McLaren, Brain D. (2014). *We Make the Road by Walking*. New York, Jericho Books. p. 3.-6; [ISBN 978-1-4555-1400-7](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781455514007).

OUR RESPONSE

OFFERING:

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

HYMN (MV 191) *“What Can I Do?”*

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: *(in unison)*

**Giver of life, we are but sojourners living
on Earth for a while. May our gifts of our hands, hearts,
and tears contribute to the flourishing of your
creation and your larger vision for life and wholeness,
for this generation and for those to come. Amen.**

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE:

Introduction

We come to this time of prayer as those who live in memory and hope of the story of creation, where God draws us up from the soil into life. With that memory in mind, we come now to pray to the God who works re-creation and redemption from the ground up.

Prayer

Hear our prayers, O God, for all grieved by death – whether a loved one held dear or strangers we have never met who have perished in conflicts or natural disasters. We pray for comfort and strength as remains are returned to the earth in hopes that life will be drawn up from the earth as you have in Christ.

Hear our prayers, O God, for all who wander across many lands in search of home. For refugees fleeing war or famine; for the homeless, cast off by the loss of a job, or struggles with mental illness. May our prayers for such ones be joined in commitment to minister to and with them.

Hear our prayers, O God, for all who work to protect Earth against the ravages of natural disaster, or greed-driven indifference, or acts of violence in warfare without regard for what becomes of Earth beneath the weapons and the destruction and the chemicals. Stir in us a willingness to speak and act beyond the safety of study groups for the sake of your good creation.

Hear our prayers, O God, for the faithfulness of the church. For the church, too, is caretaker of the land we hold – even as we are called to be harbingers of the land and realm you promise. May our practices of and relationships with the land, as individuals and congregations, be in keeping with the values of your commonwealth.

Hear our prayer, O God, for eyes and spirits open to your presence – especially in the places where we may feel you distant or removed, even in the places where we might try to flee from you. Even in those shadowed lands, you accompany us upon the way. You bring healing. You wait upon us. You love us with a love that will not let us go.

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

HYMN (MV 160) *“There is a River of Life”*

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION:

May we walk gently and be close enough
to hear you when you speak.

May you drink in the rain

and be nurtured by the critters within you.

May the sun and wind befriend you

and may you be held forever in God.

PRAYER RESOURCES:

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

NEXT WEEK'S (September 20, 2020) READINGS:

Exodus 16:2-15;

Psalms 105;

Philippians 1:21-30;

Matthew 20:1-16.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIS WEEK AT MELFORT UNITED CHURCH

Tuesday, September 15th

@ 7 pm – Women Alive

Wednesday, September 16th

@ 7 pm – 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!

Looking for Volunteers

We are looking for volunteers on a couple of committees: for help on the committee to reopen for rental (short term volunteer), men and women for the Property committee and someone for M&P.

Call Don Neher (306.921.4130) or the church office (306.752.2288) if you can help us out!

FundScrip for September

The next FundScrip deadline is Thursday, September 24th. Your order will be available for pickup on Thursday, October 1st.

Stewardship Seconds

As stewards, what we give is not as important as that we give.