

Hazley Bay Worship Celebration for September 13th, 2020 Achieving Critical Mass

Welcome

Well today was supposed to be our first Sunday back, worshipping together at our annual picnic celebration. But it was not to be. A couple of weeks ago I asked that those of you who prayed for rain earlier in the summer to please tone it down a bit but whoever it is has definitely not been watching these videos since the first of August as it seems like it has rained every Sunday since then. So, although we are unable to gather in person today I am hoping we can now come together for a moment and reflect on why we are here in front of our computer.

Call To Worship

But I think we all know why we are here.

We are here to worship the God who calls to the lost, the least, and all those who long for community; A God who calls to us when we wander from the path chosen for us and we are unable to navigate the road ahead. A God who calls us and welcomes us back to worship this day; let us celebrate and rejoice in God's loving presence;
Come let us worship God, let us pray.

Gathering Prayer

Gracious God we give you thanks for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. We give thanks for the ability to gather in this way although it is not the way that we had hoped for this day. But let us now bask in the glory of your creation (rain and all), aware that the bountiful fruits of this good earth are now available to us. This morning we also hunger and thirst for you and long to be nurtured in your love and forgiveness, asking that you fill us with your Spirit knowing that only then will our hunger be fully satisfied. We pray in Jesus name. Amen

Song. At this morning service the band was scheduled to perform with special guests and accompanied by the St Andrew's sisters. One of the songs that they were going to perform was entitled "Farther Along" and I have to admit I was not familiar with it. So I now give you a rendition performed by Josh Garrels <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IctD9I4F-ag>

Scripture

Micah 6: 6–8;

With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸ He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

Matt. 18: 15–20

¹⁵ "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Meditation – Achieving Critical Mass

I was saddened when we were not able to gather in person at our outdoor service this morning as we've not gathered together

for 6 months now and I've missed sharing worship with you in person.

The last time we met way back in March, the headlines were not much different from what they are now. We still have Covid-19 making for the top news story each day.

But I hope that there have been other events over the past six months that really stand out for you, maybe something as simple as reconnecting on some level with a family member or an old friend, or for me one of the recent highlights was the tremendous accomplishment of our friend and fellow congregant Russell Mackay on his walk to raise money for CHEO.

It usually takes events of this sort to make us realize what matters most, and why hope is such an essential ingredient in the human make up. It is at times like these that we hear the Word beneath the tired words of the media, and our hearts are uplifted through the working of the Spirit.

I mention this because the Word today from the Gospel has to do with the relational nature of our life together. (which everyday seems to be leaning towards an us versus them showdown)

This 'relational' theme is illustrated in the Peanuts comic strip that I so admire, where Lucy demands that Linus change the TV channel, and threatens him with her fist if he doesn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks

Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Then turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

There is some truth to the cliché that there is strength in numbers. I think we only need look at the growing number of protests across around the world, whatever the cause. And when those numbers bond together towards a common cause we have what I like to refer to as "critical mass".

Let me begin with an explanation that I think describes the term "critical mass". In the mid-20th century, one of the most terrifying diseases threatening people was polio. It was the cruelest of diseases. Overwhelmingly targeting children, it would break out primarily in the warm, golden summer months, killing or permanently crippling its victims.

When Dr. Jonas Salk was at last able to announce that a vaccine was in process of being developed, the hoped-for cure went from the test laboratory to the doctor's office in record time.

By contrast, the same vaccine today, would take years of cautious testing, group analyses, research into possible side-effects, and clarification of possible insurance ramifications,

before being approved and finally distributed.

But in 1953, panic over the approach of yet another hot, polio-ridden summer spurred public opinion ahead of scientific caution, not unlike what we have seen in the last few months with a Covid 19 vaccine, skipping many of these steps and being used directly on human patients.

We saw the same back then in 1955 when thousands of school-age children around the US were immediately lined up to participate in test runs of the vaccine. The impatience of the public had reached what scientists call a "critical mass." The call to get the new, still-not-fully tested polio vaccine out and available to every child in America became an unstoppable force. Against many cautious voices in the medical community, the Salk vaccine went into production and became the long-awaited first line of defense against the polio pandemic.

The concept of critical mass first arose from physicists' description of the conditions needed for a molecular chain reaction. Once a sufficient number of molecules come together, the process becomes unstoppable, and the ensuing nuclear fission results in the release of tremendous energy.

Safely harnessed, this energy can be used to run the massive turbines of our nuclear power plants. But the same energy, indeed, can supply the destructive force of nuclear bombs. In

either case, nothing happens without critical mass first being reached.

The principle of critical mass works in other processes, and in human populations, as well. There always seems to be some magic number that must be reached, a tipping point, before things happen. By the way the 'critical mass' that turns a still photograph into motion pictures, is 24 frames per second.

In religion, critical mass results in a change in the belief system of its adherents or followers. Over the years, the Church has shown confusion over many of the issues constituting its system of beliefs; issues such as the divine right of kings, the institution of slavery, violence against women and children, the ordination of women and homosexuals, suppression of Aboriginals, abortion, birth control, contraception.

The nineteen-century German philosopher, Schopenhauer, declared, "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as self-evident.

It is only when critical mass is achieved, that societal change occurs.

And that takes a lot of people at one time, so can we, a small group of people gathered together achieve "critical mass"

Jesus was the first to elaborate on the principle of critical mass as it applies to people. As this week's gospel text lays it out, the critical mass of people is "two or three ... gathered together in My name" (Matthew 18:20). Although you wouldn't know it to look at the Church today, it was intended to be bureaucratically simple. Jesus insisted to his disciples that valid Christian judgments and decisions could be achieved when only two believing members of the Christ-body community gathered together, with faithful hearts and minds.

We don't need a quorum in attendance. We don't need a standing committee established. We don't need a long-range plan developed. We don't need an Executive Board action. We don't need a regional evaluation or investigation. We don't always need a two-thirds majority of those present.

What we do need is the mind of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. With Christ, we as the community of faith can move forward, even though perhaps only "two or three are gathered in His name. " Without Christ's presence, not even an assembly of 10,000 can achieve results that will empower the Church for the future.

If Christians gather in the name of fear or hatred—Christ isn't in their midst. If churches gather in a quest for power or prestige—Christ isn't in their midst. If two or three gather strictly to oppose a different group of two or three—Christ isn't in their

midst.

Christianity is founded on the principle that two or three committed believers can change the world. Together, the prayers and faith of two or three can work the most astounding miracles this world has ever seen.

In the Jewish tradition The rabbis also taught that "if two sit together, and words of the law pass between them, the divine presence [also] abides between them." (m. 'Abot. 3:2) When two people come together to study and learn, learning happens because a third party, the divine presence, enters into the process. Jesus adapts and expands this rabbinical saying, giving it new life for the new faith communities.

Jesus promises that the Church will be the Church because whenever disciples gather together in His name, He will be there among them. There will never be just TWO when Christians gather. There will always be three. Wherever two or three are gathered, whatever the reason for our gathering, whenever we gather, Jesus promises to be present. There's nowhere we can go that Christ will not be there.

But first we must gather in Jesus' name.

To gather in Jesus' "name" sounds deceptively simple. It's so easy to tack the phrase "in Jesus' name" onto the end of our prayers or meetings. But that's not what Jesus requires. To gather IN

Jesus' name means to come together like we have done today and stand inside the Word Jesus preached, the life Jesus lived, the sacrifice Jesus offered. Inhabiting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is what it means to gather in His name.

And when we gather together what is required is contained in today's old testament reading named in Micah 6: 8: "What does the Lord require of you/ But to do justly,/ To love mercy,/ And to walk humbly with your God?" Do justly; love mercy; walk humbly: that constitutes a community gathered in the presence of Christ.

There has been days during these past 6 month that have been hell for me so let me close with a poetic passages by one of the best poets through the mid 20th century, T.S. Eliot.

What is hell? Hell is oneself. Hell is alone, the other figures in it merely projections. There is nothing to escape from and nothing to escape to. One is always alone, so let me walk with you

But wait Who is the third that walks beside you? When I count there are only you and I together. But when I look up the white road, There is always another one walking beside you, Gliding wrapped in a dark mantle, hooded. I don't know whether it is a man or a woman. But who is that on the other side of you?

(Thomas Stearns Eliot)

As you and I journey together let that third person be the spirit of Christ. Amen

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Gracious God, You are present to us at all times and in all seasons (and in all kinds of weather). We see you in the morning sunlight that radiates through our window. We hear you in the music of the rainstorm. As autumn approaches we feel you in the stirring wind that rustles the leaves and chills our bones.

At this time of year as the children return to school we thank you for the devotion of those who work with our children and grandchildren on a daily basis nurturing and expanding their hearts and minds during these trying times and also for those who must extend the extra effort to keep those schools and all our public places clean and sanitized.

We thank you for the miraculous touch of the doctors, nurses and support staff as they care for those of us who have fallen to illness and we pray for them as they care for our loved ones.

We praise you and thank you as the giver of all that is living, Filling our world with plants that at this time of year make our trip through the local farmers market a sight to behold.

Compassionate God, Even in this wonderful world, we your children still know weakness and pain, Mistrust and division, grief and loss.

Into our weakness bring your strength. Into our pain your healing. As we mourn those we have lost, temper our grief with hope. And as we grieve the changes in our lives, friendships ended, children off to school, loss of employment or anxiety over this pandemic, stir our hearts and our minds, That we may be open to the promise of new experiences, of new friends, of new life of new hope.

Renewing God, As you moved upon the waters of creation, May your Spirit always move among all your people, Drawing together those torn by war and violence, hate and misunderstanding.

Those that are facing natural disasters we think especially those threatened by the growing wildfires on the westcoast.

By the power of your spirit, may the despairing have hope,
The hungry have bread, the weak have strength, the oppressed have freedom,
And all your children - from the coast of Africa to the streets of Wisconsin –
may they be able to pursue a future full of life, love and hope.
Sustain us in faith, as we now draw closer as family, church, and community. Renew our world in the words you taught us to say
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen

Last Saturday we said our final goodbyes to our friend Dale Brown. A familiar member of our community and cherished companion to Ezma, Dale's favourite artist was Hank Williams. So today in his memory I leave you with the song "I Saw The Light"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtolv9kM1qk>

Until we meet again which I anticipate will be next Sunday at 11 at St Andrew's United in Beachbearg. See You Then.