

Trinity United Church – 126th Anniversary Worship Service **June 13, 2021**

Welcome and Call To Worship

I hope you enjoyed our little walk through as I welcome you to the sanctuary of Trinity United Church in Foresters Falls as we celebrate the it's 126th Anniversary. Before I begin I want to mention a long standing member of this congregation John Bell who celebrated his 95th birthday this past Friday so our congratulations go out to him today on this momentous occation.

Well I certainly was hoping that we could meet today and perhaps share a meal, preferably prepared over the BBQ by some of the industrious members of this congregation. Some smoked pork loin, or pulled -pork on a bun with a multitude of salads; my mouth waters at the thought, but alas it is not to be. We are not able to gather and to celebrate in a manner befitting such an occasion as this.

But I know that this community of faith continues in whatever ways we can to be Christ's church, for although we are not large in numbers, we are large in heart as we continue, even in these changing times to show the love of Jesus to those in this community and around the world through our Mission and Service Funds giving.

I gave you a quick walk though of the church for those who have never been here before and you may have thought that it is just like the song says "the little brown church in the vale" but I like to think of our church more as a beacon reflecting the light of Jesus that shines from each of us as faithful followers of Christ. Our actions show others that ultimately the church is more than just a building. So today as we light the Christ candle let it reflect upon our past as well as letting it light our future as we continue together the wonderful works of Christ through this his church. Let us Pray.

Opening Prayer

Creator God, on this Anniversary Sunday, we pray for this your church family. We thank you for the precious memories of loved ones

who nurtured this church as they nurtured us. We thank you for those who continue to reach out with a helping hands or warm smile. We thank you for relationships that grow dearer with time; for the laughter and stories that bind us together. We are called to be church; the family of Christ in every age. Today as we gather, we renew our commitment to one another and the journey that we share. Amen.

Special Music

Talking about the joy of Christ's light shining forth into the world, I know that you will enjoy this rendition of "This Little Light of Mine" performed by the talented and enthusiastic members of the Bell family Daniella David and Scott

Scripture

Genesis 12:1-9 - The Call of Abram

12 The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

John 3:1-17 - Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

³ Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[a]

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Meditation – What do you know?

Well the lockdown is starting to ease so we are afforded a little more movement but somewhere deep down we know things will never be the same. I still stand before you alone in the church today on a day we should be celebrating our 126th anniversary of Trinity church, not to mention that we also missed last year's momentous 125th.

So the scriptures I am using this today, are from Genesis and John where one of the themes of these scriptures is movement or change; Something we do instinctively from the moment we are born. We move from somewhere to somewhere else; from being a little person to becoming a bigger person. Just give us a little time and watch the changes. But sometimes we resist change, because we just don't know what that change will mean for us.

Keep in mind, as we think together about movement and change, that in the 13th century the Italian poet, Dante, gave us a definition of hell, which he said is

“the condition of eternally remaining what one is, or where one is.”

There are some of us listening here this morning that have been asked to move in a direction where we have never been before. To move beyond the familiar: new relationships,

new vocations, a new direction in life.

I think that we have all had a bit of extra time especially this past year to ask; Is this where or who you want to be at this time in your life? As Dante says, that's the hell of it. But we have a choice and do not have to remain where or who we are forever.

As we contemplate journeys and change both individually and as a church today listen to the words of Parker Palmer, a great teacher of teachers :

To journey without being changed is to be a nomad.
To change without journeying is to be a chameleon.
To journey and be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim.

For Abraham and Sarah the journey or the movement is largely physical. They are being called to a new and strange land, to venture in faith where they have never been before. They sense that things will work out, because it is God who is doing the calling.

I did a cemetery service in Golden Lake this past Saturday and as I looked at the tombstones, I reflected in the great

distances covered by my grand parents and great grand parents.

Can you imagine why anyone would want to leave the beauty of Austria or Germany, for the muddy streets of undeveloped Ottawa, or in my case the rocks and hills of Renfrew County, to come to uncertain futures, jobs and living conditions., but still in faith they came. And we are benefiting from their decision, their faith and their commitment.

Now if you were here in church this morning and I was to ask you the question Are a local here, are you native to the area? I'm thinking the answers would be nearly unanimous - Born and raised. Born and raised.

A lot of us never move physically, and that's fine. My Mom lived and died in the same house that she was born in and never moved from it. I like some of you may have moved so often that we dare not count the number of times.

Abraham and Sarah were called to pack up and move to a land that God would show them. Some of our ancestors felt a similar call and took a similar risk and moved to a new land starting this church in 1895. Do we as new pilgrims'

journey with the same faith as our forefathers and foremothers? Do we know where we are going? Do we know what we will encounter when we get there?

On the other hand, Nicodemus, the other actor in our scriptures today, moved a little bit physically, by coming to see Jesus by night. But he journeyed spiritually, emotionally, and mentally, a far greater distance.

You may know that Nicodemus was a big player in the Jewish Sanhedrin, a group of 70 men having life and death powers over all their people. He was likely wealthy, highly intelligent, and certainly very powerful.

Anglican preacher, Herb O'Driscoll started me off on this sermon with one word – that word is: *know*. Herb writes,

Like many of us, Nicodemus knew a great deal about religion and many other things, but he also knew that there was an empty space at the heart of his life. He longed for something more, so he came to find out about this kingdom of which Jesus had been speaking.

That's the core. Nicodemus knew so much. But it wasn't enough. But he knew enough to move toward filling that

empty space in his heart, and so he sneaks off under cover of darkness, so his colleagues wouldn't see him and think him weak, to interview Jesus. Perhaps he too had a sense that "hell was the condition of eternally remaining what one is, or where one is."

Nicodemus knew a lot, but he didn't know. What do you know? Some days it seems that I have forgotten many of the things that I once knew, or should know.

Nicodemus knew that he had to move from who he was and where he was. He had to ask questions of Jesus.

Later in John's Gospel, we hear that Nicodemus knew that he had to come out of the dark and support Jesus when he was being criticized, and still later, he knew that he had to help Joseph of Arimathea remove Jesus' body from the cross.

That's a lot of knowledge. He was a brave man to follow through on filling that empty space in his heart. He engages with Jesus in one of the most famous conversations in the Bible. This conversation produces that familiar expression "born again," which has been a source of controversy at times among Christians.

John, in his Gospel, often has Jesus use words that have a double meaning. Like this word “again,” which also means “from above,” spiritually, from God, but which Nicodemus understood to mean literally “again.” You can translate the phrase “born again”, as “born from above.”

The discussion continues between Jesus and Nicodemus as Jesus prods him about what he knows, and doesn't know.

In another place in his commentary, O'Driscoll writes of Jesus words to Nicodemus,

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know ...

These last four words are hard on Nicodemus, because it is his business above all to know, to understand, to analyse, to explain, and thus to direct and to control. How can this be? He whispers, wonder in every syllable.

At what moment Nicodemus is born from above, we do not know. But we do know that when our Lord's body was taken from the cross, it was Nicodemus' arms that received it as it slid towards the ground, freed from the terrible iron that had pierced it.

Well, what do you know? Lets take a look at a few lessons

that this passage teaches us:

In order to enter the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus must be born from above; Jesus invites Nicodemus, as he invites each of us, to come into the light of day and become mature believers, full participants in the abundant life he offers. Jesus knows that neither Nicodemus nor contemporary believers can do this on their own. It is God who will give birth in water and Spirit. Rebirth is God's gift to give, God's work to accomplish, and it is God who labors to bring us new life.

Belief in Jesus and his earthly teaching is mandatory for followers; For many Christians, the gospel is summarized by the words in John 3:16. Some Christians, however, understand faith or "believing in Jesus" to be simply what one does with one's mind. In John's Gospel, being born from above and believing in Jesus are not so much about what one does with one's mind as about what one does with their heart and life

God sent Jesus to save the world, not condemn it. We can almost hear Jesus' amusement in verse 10 when Jesus asks Nicodemus why "do you not yet understand these things"? What if Jesus was exercising a little rabbinical irony instead of divine judgment? It changes our place in the story;

suddenly, there is room for our ignorance too! Nicodemus reminds us that even the best educated and most authoritative among us are still searching.

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Well, what do you know? ... I know that Life, is a time for change, for journeying, for pilgrimage.

Throughout its history, God calls the church to pilgrimage, to change and that is what will need to happen if the church is to survive. The invitation to us as leaders in the church is to be willing to accept the inward power of the One who takes us by surprise. As we read this passage and see Nicodemus changing his life, taking on new significance, his actions making a difference, you think to yourself, maybe something could happen to us deep down, to a place where only God can break through our religious defences.

Last year I posted a memorable video and photos for our 125th anniversary and you can still find them on our Pastoral Charge Facebook page, but in looking at them I was reminded of a novel by Anne Tyler.

In her novel, *A Patchwork Planet*, she has a very interesting character named Barnaby who works for Rent a Back. His job is to help people pack for a move, his hobby is looking

through their photo albums. In the novel Barnaby speaks:

“In those photo albums I used to rifle through, people were so consistent. They tended to assume the same poses for every shot, the same expressions. You'd see a guy on page one, some young father at the beach, standing next to his wife and baby with his arms folded across his chest and his head at a slight angle; and then on the last page, twenty years later, there he still was, with his arms still folded, hair a bit thinner but head still cocked, wife still on his left, although the baby had grown taller than the father and was settled into some favourite stance of his own by now.

Often, Even the beach is the same. I would turn page after page ... I would set my sights on one little boy and follow him through infancy, kindergarten, college. I'd see him slicing his wedding cake, and darned if he wasn't still wearing the same knotted-up scowl, or shamefaced smirk, or joyful smile.

What I'd wanted to know was, couldn't people change? Did they have to settle for just being who they were forever, from cradle to grave?”

What do you know on this anniversary Sunday, the second Sunday of June 2021? Do you know that God might, on this day, be offering you the grace and the power to make changes in your life, to shake yourself up, and to head out somewhere? And now that the stay at home order has been lifted who doesn't want to venture out!

What do you know? Well I know that as we continue to move and to change individually that we together as a church will continue to spread the love of Christ for many years to come making this world a better place for all. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Thank you God for the roots we have inherited from our forefather and foremothers that built this church. Roots in families and communities. Roots in this community of faith that run deep. Complex roots, interwoven roots, roots of compassion, caring, hospitality and justice. Roots that hold us steady as the wind of changes blow. Thank you, O God, for the firm foundations that keep us rooted

But Sometimes, O God those foundations don't seem very firm at all. They are questioned and probed. We begin to wonder about the future, to worry about tomorrow, to become anxious over what may never be. Sometimes roots can strangle rather than hold us steady. In those times Help us remember the gifts we have inherited, and the great cloud of witnesses who surround us.

As Roots hold us close, Your Spirit set us free. The forgiveness, love and grace we receive from you O God gives us the courage to stretch our wings, to risk in love as we experience the Spirit of Life. May Your love wrap around us now as we face life's challenges.

May Your love bring new hope and vitality to our family, our community and the people around the world that we are called to served. May Your love stretch beyond these four walls to all our neighbours of this world as we strive for peace and justice among all of humankind. This week We pray for the Muslim family in London who where viciously run down in the sprit of hatred.

Remind us once again that we are all pilgrims who are changed by love and may we follow in the steps of ancestors who built this church on the foundation of that love, secure in the fact that you are our strength and salvation in times of despair. We ask that your Spirit of Life and love may come alive to us and in us in the words that Jesus taught us to pray: Our Father who art in Heaven....

Song

Well we started off today's service with a rousing version of "This Little Light of Mine" so I think we should conclude today's service with a song that my mom used to play on the old record player that used to get my toes a tapping when I was a little kid. Hank Williams Sr. and his version of "I Saw The Light". Please Join us on-line next week for Father's Day. Until we meet again.