

A Meditation for June 19/22, 'Proper 7 in Year C' – pg. 1

By the Rev. Warren Ball of Mt. Albert United Church

Hello, and welcome to this meditation ... Happy Father's Day, too! In the reading from the Bible that we're using today, we're going to hear the Apostle Paul make this claim: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Come, let us prepare to take up our place in God's radical unity, come, let us open ourselves to the fabulous possibilities of its infinite love, and let's begin to do all of that as we turn to God in prayer:

**Teach us now, loving God, that opinions may not divide,
that despondency and despair may not confuse.
Rather, assure and direct us in this time,
that we may walk in your Way for all time! Amen.**

⇒ Hymn suggestion: VU627 'Now There Is No Male or Female'

Today's Scripture focus: Galatians 3:23-29 'Heirs to God's Promise'

The Apostle Paul once wrote,

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

May God bless those words to our better understanding, amen!

Sermon: 'Don't Know; Don't Show; Don't Grow!'

We thank you for being here for us, Eternal God! Help us now to learn, and then, help us to live out what we've learned, that we may be your people and become as one in your love, amen.

If you were asked to point to a single good example of the way that God does **NOT** want us to live, behave, or act, how about using the history of our Christian church – how about using parts of the history of the Christian church as shining examples of what we should **NOT** do? I say that because throughout our long, and often difficult past, we've started wars, wars like the infamous Crusades of the Middle Ages to reclaim Jerusalem. Now then, do you think God wants us to start wars? Of course not! For that matter, how about many of the more recent actions by the Western World in the Middle East – do some of them not qualify as modern-day crusades?

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We in the Christian Church have also, at times, denied basic human rights as, for example, when some Christians used the Bible to justify slavery in the southern United States. Or, much more recently, as some of our own ancestors used the Bible to justify removing children from First Nations' homes right here in Canada in order to send those children to Residential Schools? Now then, do you think God wants us to deny basic civil rights? Of course not! We in the Christian church have built great, big monstrous barriers with labels such as Orthodox or Roman, Catholic or Protestant, Liberal or Conservative, and those barriers have divided, they've maimed, they've caused whole worlds of trauma and suffering! Just think of those who were tortured, or burned at the stake, or stripped of all their earthly possessions, in the so-called Age of Enlightenment as Europe was ripped apart in its various reformations. Oh, have no doubt about it, those barriers have served some very un-godly purposes in the name of God's love!

Yet, today, the apostle Paul tells us that the Christian church is supposed to be the very shape of love in this world. In traditional terms, the Christian church is supposed to be Christ's body for the world, where (even with all our differences!) we humans are brought together 'as One.' So, on this particular, precious day, I have some thoughts about where we've gone wrong captioned under three headings: 'we don't know, we don't show, and we don't grow!' Now then, do you suppose that, if we could clearly see where we've gone wrong, then we might be able to change our ways, and make sure that we don't repeat those same tired, old mistakes?

So, first of all, we haven't always been what God has intended us to be because we don't know! For example, on a regular basis, how much time and effort do we take to really learn the lessons which our history offers? I can't count how many times over the years that I've had one of those 'Aha' moments when something that had puzzled me suddenly becomes clear – 'Aha, now I get it!' Well, those 'aha moments' are always fed, always created, always sustained, by having new information. It's new information that changes us from 'same old, same old' to 'Aha, now I get it!' And getting new information, gaining new perspective, has never been easier! Back in the Middle Ages, before the printing press had been invented, all books had to be painstakingly produced by hand and were, consequently, very rare. But now, thanks to readily available mass-printed books and the internet, information is easy to get and totally up to date. The common 'smart phone' now provides access to more information that used to be contained in whole libraries! Of course, it will 'cost' us to learn, for it will take time and effort, won't it? Sometimes new information will also ask us to re-examine our old values, if we're going to incorporate that information into the way we choose to live. But aren't the most important things in life those things that do take our time and effort, that do challenge us? Oh, let's take the time, let's make the effort, to learn the wisdom of the ages, so that we won't just repeat the same old mistakes, and so that we'll live better informed!

Secondly, we haven't always been what God has intended because 'We don't show!' In other words, we simply don't do enough with God's love once we've received it! There's a great phrase that's used by physiotherapists with regard to muscles: 'If you don't use them, then you lose them!' Well, just as with muscles, spirits can atrophy and shrink if they're not used. So,

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by the same token, the only way that our spiritual lives will become real for us is when we live out of them. And the only way that our faith will make a difference for us is when we show it to the world! I think of a phrase that a grandmother used to use – she'd say, "Warren, your actions are speaking so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying!" Well, does the way we live drown out the love that God would have 'speak' through our days?

We don't know ... we don't show ... finally, we haven't become what God has intended because 'we don't grow.' The great humourist and social commentator from a century ago, Will Rogers, famously said, "Even if you're on the right road in life, you'll get run over if you're standing still!" Well, all too often, we people of faith have failed the world, even though we've had the best of intentions! Now don't get me wrong - good intentions are good. But the fact remains that they're not real until they're brought to life in terms of how we live each day. I once heard the story of a youngster who woke up crying in the middle of the night. The child's parents came running, asking, "What's wrong, honey?" "Oh, I think fell out of bed! I guess I laying too close to the getting in place!" Do we fall asleep in our spirituality too close to the place that we've gotten in?

Now those realities are not only personal, they also have a corporate life, too! They apply just as much to the entire institution of Christianity as they do to individual Christians. But at the very same time, those realities are neither predestined (they don't have to be the way they've been), nor are they permanent (we can change them)! And when we choose to live with God's love, when we come to know, and show, and grow God's message, well, that's when God's love will take us just as we are, right along with all of our bumps, and bruises, and failures, and then help us to become ever so much more in Christian community than we could ever be on our own. Living with God's love will give us a rhyme and a reason each day, a purpose and a power each day, that will stay with us through whatever happens to us. Living with God's love – not just when it's convenient, but each and every day – well, that's when we can become bound together in a community of love, and that's where we can find a joy and a freedom that are unimaginable from any individual perspective.

You see, we don't have to see eye to eye in order to walk hand in hand! As the Apostle Paul proclaims this day, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). It is spiritual community, just like Mt. Albert United, that can give us access to resources that lie beyond our imagination. It is spiritual community, just like Mt. Albert United, that can give us countless opportunities to show how much we care. It is spiritual community, just like Mt. Albert United, that can give us all kinds of ways to know, to show, and to grow!

Amen? Oh yes, amen!

Come, let us turn back to God now in prayer; come, let us pray:

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Loving God of all the ages: we give you praise for the long and rich tradition of Christian witness here at Mt. Albert United and we pray, now that the torch has been handed to us, that we may carry it with a joyful honour that does credit to that history.

On this Sunday, God, we would better understand how Jesus' ministry on earth, and how the risen Christ's ongoing witness to us, can affect the way that we relate to all your people – the people in this church, the people in the Christian church universal, the people who serve you in other faiths. Forgive all the times, and all the ways, that we have been presumptuous in our views, thinking of some as acceptable, others as not. Instead, help us to find your wisdom such that we may live to seek justice, love kindness and always walk humbly with you.

We pray now for all who are facing difficulty this day and we pray, too, for all the places where there's difficulty. We especially pray once again for the people of Ukraine, that peace come and that justice may be brought to bear! In the silence of the next moments, O God, receive the deep burdens that our spirits bear today: *moment of silence*.

All that I have named with my words, all that lies yet too deep for words to touch, we bring to you, God, as we take those words that Jesus once taught us and pray together the following version of Christ's Prayer:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil,

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,

now and for ever (VU959).

⇒ Hymn suggestion: VU509 'I, the Lord of Sea and Sky'

Loving God, we remember Paul telling us that we are heirs to your promise – well, send us now out to the world now with the strength, the joy, and the hope of that promise! And may we live with it close at hand – today, and forever, amen.