

## *Walking in the spirit of Christ*

### *Psalm 19 and Psalm 1*

My first job today was going to be to tell you the definition of anthem, but since the choir has done that for me, let me just note some of the things that just happened. A group of diverse people, none of whose voices are the same, came together and focused on one thing in common, one piece of music. The diversity of the voices and the parts united by one melody and one rhythm, held together by the following of a leader, having moments for all the voices, followed by moments of only three woven in together. Sometimes they were all singing the same melody and the same words, but at different times. All all together they sang Spirit of an Anthem.

What they were singing with based on Psalm 19 our scripture for this morning. And, what they sang earlier was based on Psalm 1. I'm not sure if you've noticed yet but one of the puzzle pieces in September is that we are hearing Psalm 1 every Sunday in different ways. Sometimes it is read sometimes it is spoken aloud by one-person, other times it is sung. So, you should keep your eyes out see if you should hear it again next week.

We are doing this not only because Psalm 1 is in our lectionary. We chose it too because Psalm 1 points out that there is a good way to be in this world. A way that has been taught to us by God's great teachers, mentors, prophets. It has been taught by people hundreds and hundreds of years ago who lived lives very, very differently than you and I. And they passed down their wisdom in stories and in song and in scriptures.

This wisdom is also told and revealed in Creation. One of the great beginning lines in the United Church of Canada's Basis of Union is that we believe that God is revealed not only in the scriptures but in Creation herself. "The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day there is speech being poured fourth, night declares, and yet Creation does this all without human speech or human words. In human language nothing is heard and yet the voice of creation goes out through all the earth." If you ever had the experience of standing in the quietest of forests, even there - in the pause between the bird songs- the silence of the forest is so loud Creation's words go out to the end of the earth.

Yet we also find the good way we want to live, the wisdom of God, in very local, ordinary ways and extraordinary, local ways. When I first came to Robertson-Wesley, I did not *only* find a short

pithy mission statement, which all churches need to keep on the go, and I did not *only* find statements of inclusion and welcome. I also found this Anthem, which was composed like a singing piece even though it is traditionally spoken. It is something you hear from Karen and I as we walk down the aisles; we always use at least one line. And it talks about how we are following not only directions set by God, but we are following and walking in a particular way - in the spirit of Christ.

Putting all these things together this month has been fantastic: putting our Creed and Psalms beside each other with our Statements of Faith and our Anthems. The Psalmist proclaim that the “law of the Lord is perfect. How do you know what is the law of the Lord? The law of the Lord revives your soul, makes wise the simple, makes the heart rejoice and enlightens the eyes.”

And so, we as a community can use this Psalm’s wisdom to ponder when is it that we, as a community, feel our hearts rejoice? When is it, as a community, that something positive or something that feels negative even, opens our eyes? Are there times when the smallest simple act is recognised as the wisest? Robertson-Wesley’s anthem is how we bring our spirits together, diverse spirits, and as Karen said this morning sometimes spirits of grumpiness, tiredness, “oh my goodness it’s only September what is the weather doing” –ness. And when we come together we try and encourage each other to transform that grumpy into friendship, to transform the stale in our lives to creativity.

I find at Robertson-Wesley throughout the week, and in this neighborhood throughout the week, that people get excited about the adventure of faith. They get excited and they live it out in three ways: the spirit of **friendship**, remembering that relationships with one another are crucial; it’s lived out in **prayer** and it’s lived out in **caring** for each other, supporting both those things that are going on here but also supporting the things that are going on outside the walls of this place. And so, often people think specially at the beginning of a journey of faith, that this adventure is going to be always awesomely wonderfully happy. Friendship, prayer and care.

But then for me the next three line of the anthem, they are not easy, they are not happy and joyful all the time. We are called to walk in the spirit of **justice**, where we will ask hard questions and defend those who need a voice. But to defend those who need a voice means that I need to defend people who I have not heard yet, which means I would need to be quiet. I would need to be quiet and invite the voiceless to speak as they are able. Whether it be in art, prayer, sign language. And then I am called to walk in the spirit of **wisdom**, where I am encouraged to learn with you; where we are all seeking our own spiritual answers. This means that as we all seek our own spiritual answers, we may come up with different answers and we are still supposed to walk together. Well that’s hard. And, encouraged to learn together, I mean what if I learn something that breaks apart my world view, that asks me to change who I interact with and how I interact with them.

And then it says we shall walk in the spirit of **belonging** where everyone is welcomed. And, we have a list of things, it doesn't include everything, but reminds us how diversity begins. Just this week on our Facebook page of all places there was a wonderful conversation that happened between Reverend Karen and the other folks who administer the Facebook and a few commenters, and they said we've read your statement of belonging and we think you should add gender identity. And we said, "well gender is there." They said, so what do you mean by gender then? And all of a sudden we realized that our spirit of belonging statement was going to need to expand (and will again pretty much everyday) so that we ensure that when we told people you belong here, (and when I say to myself: Leigh, you belong here) that we could find the words that currently describe all of us so that all of us know that yes we belong and yes we are asked to include all. This means that the little ones dancing, will sit beside the ones who are mourning, and they will sit beside people who are unsure of their gender identity, and they will sit beside someone who is quite sure of their gender identity.

And we will gather together, and we will figure out a way to make our worship sound, smell and taste and look like there is space for all. And this is not an easy task. What is going to nourish us? This is our hard, awesome work we get to do together. What is going to motivate us?

And that's when I turn to the last pieces of our anthem. We walk in the spirit of Christ, the spirit of **joy** where we play together as a family. I believe that playing together as a family and finding joy means two things.

It means that we stop taking ourselves so seriously. I've said before and I will say again that the Mysterious Divine that we often called God is not breakable. We cannot break God by change, by moving things, putting up a new or old piece of art in a new place, the changing of a tradition or the keeping of a tradition. It's all going to be okay because God is playing with us with joy. God made us to stumble, to fall, to get back up again. That is who we are. And so, we need to not take ourselves so seriously.

The second part for me is taking seriously the call to put the divine at our centre. This means that we acknowledge that we are worshipping God no matter what we find ourselves doing: at work, at school, at play. We worship at Koinonia, we worship at community dinner. The Magic Pantry is a place of worship. The art studio is a place of worship. In all these places we will gather, and we will either physically or verbally or spiritually enact our statement of welcome and inclusion following God's call to share the love of Christ.

This week I had the great honour of being in a hospital room. I was with a woman who been raised in the United Church. But upon her divorce and finding herself working full time and raising two children, she had never found time to get to church building again. She taught; impacting students by teaching them the importance of reading. And when I met her she was dying. Cancer and another blood disease were taking her spirit slowly away from her body. The honour for me was to be in the presence of that loving family and hear her questions. The

honour for me was to answer her questions. I will tell you I did not tell her anything she did not know or that she had not heard from others. But in that time, you had given me the honour of being there on behalf of the Christian Church, on behalf of the experts in faith that you are, that we are together.

And so, when I told her that she was in the most sacred of rooms because of who was there and that she was surrounded by the most powerful care because God was there and that she was on her way to be enfolded in the greatest love of all...she sighed, she fell asleep, she passed away about six hours later. Her daughter wrote and said, "how did you know what to say? How did that make the difference?" And I said, "it wasn't me." The daughter and the son had been telling her she was beloved and to let go for weeks. The woman had been raised in a Christian home and knew she was going to the heart of God, but you as a community went into that room and said we have collected wisdom from centuries and centuries and we have gathered that wisdom up and we now give it to you as authoritative people in this subject. God is love. You are loved. You are not alone. Even after you die you will never be alone.

As a community of faith, in all our diversity and all our different voices and harmonies, we become together as adventurers in a great faith story. It is an honour to walk with you in this faith story and have you remind me God is grace and God is good. Thanks be to God.