

The marking of transitions

Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65

So, I think that we all know along the journey of life there are key benchmarks that help us to remember where we are, where we have been and hopefully where we are going too. A benchmark is a point of reference from which measurements are made. So along one's Faith Journey some of the benchmarks are obvious. We in fact did one this morning with Baptism. Baptism and Confirmation are both benchmarks along our faith journey. Communion is also a benchmark. These are the two official sacraments recognized by the United Church of Canada. Some other faith traditions include other things like confession, marriage, and death. I've been pondering what some other key moments along one's faith journey might include. Some of us might have had that Mountaintop experience where we felt so connected to God that we felt lifted up almost transformed in that moment. For some of us it might be the day that we received our first bible remembering who gave it to us. We probably still have it on ourselves. Some are well worn, and some are held in honor. Do you remember the first time that you lamented to God? Called out to God and complained or shared your frustrations? The moments that you were like why? Why God? Why is this happening? What about the time when you answered God's call and you volunteered to do something to bring God's kingdom to life? Maybe it was the first time you read scripture. The day you learned to pray. Maybe it was a moment where you felt healed reconciled. Maybe it was a time of peace. As a faith community there are also benchmarks that help us to identify significant moments. As we heard from Ian today the day this building opened to worshipers and the hard work that went into it. The day that Roberson Presbyterian became Robertson Wesley in 1925. The day that Robertson United and Wesley United amalgamated. The day the gym became a hall. There have been many transitions in Ministry personnel and staff over the years and over the time and history of this church. And now one of the most recent benchmarks will be the pandemic. These are significant moments that provide us with the moment to learn something new, to grow as individuals, and as a community. There are moments also of sorrow and moments of great joy and healing.

In the passage from Joel he speaks to a moment of transition for the community of Judah. The community had experienced a huge natural disaster. The land of Judah had been laid waste by a plague of locusts. And Joel interpreted this time as a warning sign from God. Joel called the people to be a part of the mourning and prayer. This was in the earlier chapters of Joel and this followed with a call to repent. A call to change their ways. Now the verses that Judy read today speak of the abundance that will now come. There will be an abundance of God's spirit. God's spirit will be poured on all people. We, like the people of Judah in the time of Joel, will be, and

are marked with God's love. Joel proclaims that the drought will be no more. That it will give way to the reigns of abundance. That God will provide an abundance of food to all people. Now this abundance, according to one theologian named Bryan Spinks, says that the abundance has a Divine Purpose. The Divine Purpose is that the people will know that I am in the midst of them. I am being a name for God. I the Lord am your God there is no others and my people shall never again be put to shame.¹ That's the promise that we hear in this prophecy. Joel is trying to change our natural reaction from one that predicts trouble to one that predicts possibility. I think it's human nature that we walk around waiting for the other shoe to drop. How many of us have walked through a week in fear waiting for this seemingly inevitable event that will knock us down? Joel though has faith. Joel places his trust in God. And the vision that he received is one where the whole nation will be possessed by the spirit of God. And that the people of God. And that the people of God will see the possibilities and hope for the future. So, we like Judah have gone through this traumatic event. Covid changed most things in our lives. Each of us has felt the loss and the heaviness of the things that disappeared. We felt the loss of the people that are not longer with us. God does not call on us to predict what troubles lies ahead. God instead is calling us to predict the future possibilities. To be the people of hope in this world. And God will provide us with relief and Redemption. So how will this promise shift our thinking and bring hope in our lives?

The Psalmist who wrote Psalm 65 describes God as a forgiver, a deliverer, and a provider. The Psalmist begins with gratitude saying "praise is due to you O God...O God you who answer prayer, you who forgive our transgressions, you who answer us with deliverance. You are the hope of all the ends of the earth." David Ruhe explains that Psalm 65:

"describes a movement in the life of the spirit that begins with a dutiful response to God for particular blessings. Moves through awe at God's majesty and culminates in an extravagant eruption of joyous praise. It teaches that to grow in gratitude is to become more and more the fulfillment of what God has created us to be. To move from being dutiful toward becoming truly beautiful."²

To grow in gratitude is to become more and more the fulfillment of what God has created us to be. Not only are we in a season where we focus on the spirit of gratitude. This is truly a pivotal time in the history and life of Robertson Wesley. I believe that it is the time that God is calling us to see the possibilities, to dream the dream of God and to see what others can't see right now. The spirit of God has been poured on all of us. We have been marked and will be a part of this benchmark in the history of this church. And we each have an important part to play. As we heard in the Baptism today, we are all called to specific Ministries. Some are here to nourish other Spirits. Some are here to care for the people. Some are here to teach, and some do the work of the church ensuring that we have a safe space. A beautiful building. A place where we can

¹ Bryan Spinks, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 196.

² David Ruhe, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 200.

come together. Some are seeking justice, and some are called the hospitality. Some of you are prophets. Some of you have the vision. Some are healers. Some are builders. Each of us are a child of God called and chosen in this time. Joel envisions a time where people will dream dreams. Share their visions and express gratitude and thankfulness. Remember that to express thanks connects us to others and brings us joy. Thankfulness can soothe our sadness and restore our hope. So may the spirit of gratitude guide us and enliven us this day.