

Let us grow in our trust in each other and in God's Spirit

2 *Corinthians 13:5-13; Matthew 28:16-20*

Living in peace with one another is sometimes easier said than done. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians challenges the community to take stock of who they are, what they do, and how they are living out their faith. Last week I shared that one Biblical Scholar compared Corinth with modern day Las Vegas. Paul hoped to shift the focus of the people of Corinth from individualism and selfish gain to a spirit of generosity and sharing for the common good.

Changing the culture of a town, an institution, or a group is not easy. Like all change, it takes a willingness to acknowledge the truth, to recognize illusions and self deceptions and to gently let them go. It takes deep listening, patience, and the willingness to learn from one's mistakes. And most importantly it takes trust! Trust in God, Trust in the teachings of Jesus, and Trust in the Holy Spirit! In *A Song of Faith*, a poetic proclamation of our faith as a United Church we believe: "That the Spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy not only in what is familiar, but also in what seems foreign... We believe that the Spirit speaks our prayers of deepest longing and holds our concerns and prayers transforming us and the world."

In Paul's writing to the Corinthians it is clear that Paul believes that the Holy Spirit can mend and heal divisions. In the time that Paul wrote the second letter to the Corinthians, while he was away a rival group of apostles had come to Corinth. Their mission seemed to be to claim that their miraculous powers far exceeded Paul's own. This was dividing the community amongst themselves. Paul's solution was to ask people to self examination and self improvement. He wants them to be of one mind and to live in peace. He wants the body of Christ to live in unity not fighting against and amongst itself.

The United Church of Canada, and every congregation within the United Church have at times in their history be at odds with one another. At its best it is a reflection of the passion individuals and groups have for serving God. At its worst it is a reflection of people who have lost their focus on what God is calling us to do and be. We are human. We make mistakes. In the creedal statement I referred to earlier we acknowledge this truth. It says, "The church has not always lived up to its vision. It requires the Spirit to reorient it, helping it to live an emerging faith while honouring tradition, challenging it to live by grace rather than entitlement, for we are called to be a blessing to the earth."

Taking time to examine ourselves, and to reflect is essential to ensuring that we stay on the path that Jesus has called us to walk. Taking time to remind ourselves of what we have been commissioned to do. In the passages from Matthew today we hear the great commission as the

disciples went to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. Even then there was some division among the disciples... “When they saw Jesus, they worshiped him, but some doubted.” Jesus still commissioned them saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of God, the redeemer, sustainer, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Jesus commanded us to love one another as I have loved you. Jesus loved the disciples even in their doubt. Jesus loved the disciples even in their weakness. Paul echoes this sentiment when he wrote: “And we rejoice when you are strong and we are weak. We pray that you will be made complete.” Jesus says, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” With God all things are possible. With Jesus as our guide there is hope. With the Spirit working in us and others we live an emerging faith.

What does it mean to live an emerging faith? I believe this means that we are called to move beyond what is comfortable, and challenge ourselves to reach out and live in the unknown. It is about making sure everyone is safe, but where no one is comfortable. As a community of faith our purpose is about nurturing faith and caring for one another. It is about healing and forgiveness, compassion and belonging and love. It is also about fierce love in the face of violence, it is about defending human dignity. It is about listening with an open heart, listening for what is best for the whole – not just the people present but for all of God’s creation. It is about seeking to understand the “Why” of what God is calling us to do.

When Paul invited the people of Corinth to examine themselves, and to remember that Jesus is with you. The Jesus is calling us to go out in the world and share the message of love and acceptance. I imagine him asking the following questions: What’s the purpose of doing this? What is God’s purpose for Robertson-Wesley? What will this look like and feel like for the people? What is the plan for getting there? Will there be a place for me? What part will I play? How will our actions reflect our commitment to God?

As we, like the disciples, answer the call to serve the world in love, bringing harmony and peace to all of God’s creation we must remember whom we serve, we must remember that we are called to do this together, and we must remember that with the Spirit to guide us we can be united even in our differences. We are not all the same, but we are all called by God. Theological Banquet reminds us that there are many ways to serve God. All are essential. We need each other. How will we live out our faith in the spirit of evangelism where we share the good news; as ecclesial where we do the work of the church; as missional where we care for people, cloth and feed people in need; as ecumenical where we seek justice and advocate for the oppressed; as spiritual where we deepen our faith practices and understand our interconnectedness with one another? We are not here to compete with each other. We are here to work with each other. As Paul says, “live in harmony and peace! And the God of love and peace will be with you. We are stronger when we rely on the strengths of each other. We are wiser when we rely on the wisdom that we each have. We are closer when we care for one another, and when we openly share our mistakes and ask and offer forgiveness to one another, and learn from these mistakes. As it says in A Song of Faith, we the church need the Holy Spirit to reorient it. The Spirit has the power to heal, to direct, to inspire us. It is the Holy Spirit that speaks our prayers of deepest longing and enfolds our concerns and confessions, and transforms us and the world. The Spirit is guiding us, so let us listen. Let us listen to it through the voices of all people gathered. Let us listen for the collective wisdom that exists amongst us all.