

LET THANKS GIVING FLOW

June 10, 2018

Pentecost 3

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

(prayer)

We are living in a time of significant re-thinking of societal norms and expectations of what is considered appropriate behaviour.

We are becoming increasingly aware of our worldwide connections. We are slowly (but surely) embracing that a *human here is a human there*; we are realizing old language is not as helpful as it once was: *civilized* and *uncivilized*, *developed* and *undeveloped*, *east* and *west*, *first* and *third world* divisions have baggage stepped in euro-centric imperialism ... it comes from a time of conquerors and empire building. This old language taught generations of european and north american that they were intrinsically superior to people that were not part of the renaissance, new world exploration and industrial revolution.

As a society, we are coming to terms with the impacts of the excesses of privilege that systems of power have wrought... for as long as we can remember.

Governments, churches, corporations and individuals have responded with formal apologies, truth and reconciliation processes, and other well-meaning attempts to move in the future on a better footing.

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Okay, some are reluctant to embrace new realities.

We are living through the last gasps of resistance to an appreciation of the truth of St. Paul's very progressive first century words:

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female*

There are not four or five "races" of people, there is one race.

We are living through the last gasps of a tribalistic, nativist resistance to the reality of who we are created to be.

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Big world-reshaping changes always have a time of *reclamation* - when 'norms' of the past are re-evaluated and we are drawn to address our witting and unwitting attitudes and actions.

We gravitate to three types of reactions:

- We argue that there is no problem and blame it all on "political correctness";
- We get defensive and hope to end the discussion by saying "well, we didn't know any better, back then", even longing for the good old days; or
- We accept and confess our complicity and ignorance; we listen - in humility - to the hurt that remains; and we commit to moving forward with attitudes of honour and respect.

Sometimes, our head and our hearts are prone to respond in different ways... personal evolution seldom happens at one speed.

Ninety-three years ago today, three christian denominations in Canada with British Isles' roots celebrated a very hopeful union in a massive worship service in the Mutual Street Arena in Toronto.

Over our history, the United Church of Canada has painstakingly risked living on the *leading edge* of church and society.

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There are countless examples of our denominational leadership.

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In 1986, United Church Moderator, Bob Smith, issued an apology to *first nations people* focusing on the consequences of the churches imperialistic fervor: “*We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God’s creation healed.*”

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I remember some people (of the church) saying, in 1998, when another Moderator, Bill Phipps, issued a more specific [apology](#) to the former students of the Canadian Indian Residential School system: didn't we already apologize? Can't we just move on?

Actually, we couldn't!

Apologies are a starting point to a new era more than they are an ending point to an old era.

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It took another 17 years for Canada’s *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to issue its report after years of listening. We, as United Church people and residents of Canada, are only beginning to figure out how to respond to the TRC’s 94 [Calls to Action](#).

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The treatment of indigenous populations is but one example of *reclamations* facing our societies: sexism, racism, homophobia (and more) are among the *once acceptable* attitudes that are under review.

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Those trying to embrace this movement know that our context is global now. We live in an era where worldwide communication is almost instantaneous; the collective human knowledge base is only a wi-fi connection away.

What happens in one place can have real world impacts, everywhere.

Look at the wide outpouring of worry over depression and suicide after Anthony Bourdain’s and Kate Spade’s recent deaths.

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I attended a folk concert a few weeks ago in a Decatur GA second floor club above a Waffle House. The artist playing that night has a tongue-in-check song about the 24-hour breakfast chain. When the audience was asked for requests, someone yelled out “Waffle House”, but - of course, only six days earlier 4 people were killed in a mass shooting in a Waffle House in neighbouring Tennessee. Modern civility clearly dictated that this song needs to stay in the guitar case for a while (maybe forever).

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In this vein, as I was thinking about this week’s service, I feel a bit guilty that I found myself thinking of a routine that comedian Louis CK shared on an old episode of Late Night with Conan O’Brian.

In fact, I shared a video of it a couple of years ago in a sermon. But times have changed.

As revelations of misogynist behaviour offstage was brought to light Louis CK’s stock has gone

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down.

The #metoo movement has increasingly allowed victims of sexual harassment and abuse to speak their truth... even long after the fact.

Although not at the level of Harvey Weinstein or Bill Cosby, Louis CK has had to confront his own history.

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But...

Am I still allowed to watch "[Pulp Fiction](#)"?

Can I still cheer on Rudy Huxtable while she lip synced to Ray Charles' "[The Right Time](#)"?

Can I still appreciate the reality-based humour in an old Louis CK [clip](#)?

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Compromise... I won't show the video.

I'll just tell the joke.

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Flying is the worst. People tell you their horror stories: First, we didn't board for 40 minutes. Then they made us sit on the runway for 20 minutes.

What did you do next, did you fly though the air incredibly? Did you partake in the miracle of human flight?

Every passenger on every airplane should should be sitting there the whole time and just say... Oh My! WOW!

You're sitting in a chair -- in the sky!

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Everything is amazing and nobody's happy.

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You can see that I was planning to preach on the theme of *thanksgiving* today.

But... I have to admit that there is a lot about our time in history to be embarrassed about; to feel guilty about. These are strong emotions. Sometimes, they don't leave a lot of energy for gratitude.

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The parable of the good samartian may (very well) be the most well known of Jesus' teaching stories.

It is a story that can be easily adapted to be current for any time and place.

- There is an innocent victim in dire need of help.
- A number of *respectable* people passby.
- Then a person (whom the story listeners have some prejudice against), tends to the injured one's injuries, sees to a safe place to recuperate, and doesn't re-victimize the victim, by heaping on the debt of their own recovery.
- The moral of the story starts with a question: *Who is the neighbour in the story?*

You see, the impetus for the parable was Jesus teaching that the greatest commandments in the Torah are:

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*You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and
with all your strength
[and with all your mind]; and
your neighbour as yourself.*

(Dt6:5; Lev19:18)

Trying to find the exceptions to the rule, a teacher of the law asked Jesus: *Who is my neighbour?*
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[Love] your neighbour as yourself.

Okay, but who is my neighbour?

*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers ...yada yada
yada... Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man?*

The one who showed mercy.

Go and do likewise!

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The greatest commandment is to love.

The torah lawyer tried to change the discussion to the definition of 'neighbour'.

I love the fact that Jesus stayed focused on the central aspect of his message... *living out mercy, compassion, love.*

Q: Who is my neighbour?

A: Just be a neighbour!

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We are called to re-examine the quality of our interconnectedness.

We don't have to allow apology, defensiveness, guilt, tribalism, regret, grudges and reclamation to dominate us down to our deepest selves... to be all consuming.

These are important and must be part of the path we walk in this place and time.

But... there is more!

"To love with all your heart, soul, strength" means that love-mercy-compassion comes the very foundation of who we are.

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For the past several weeks, we have been talking about SDUC being a heart of our community.

It is a conversation we are beginning because (based on the first four months of financial statements) there is real concern whether this congregation has the capacity to live out the mission and ministry as planned.

It is too early to see the impact.

May was more than half over when the Heart of the Community campaign began.

Financial Stewardship Campaigns can fall into the trap of simply trying to make people feel guilty and hope that they will respond from that place.

Aren't we important to you?

If you don't step up, we'll have to...

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That guilt-focused approach is especially true, when churches only trot out stewardship

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campaigns in seemingly dire circumstances.

That's why people like Kathryn Hofley with the United Church of Canada's *philanthropy unit* (who has visited our church a number of times over the years) suggest that broad based stewardship programs (in some form) should be an ongoing part of church life.

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I know that it is hard to avoid (even subconsciously) portraying that *guilt* message, but I want to state - *for the record* - that the stewardship committee (who your church board appointed in mid-May) is grounded in a different attitude.

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The attitude is gratitude, not guilt.

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What is it that we are grateful for?

Let that be our starting point.

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This message is expressed very clearly to me in the passage from Luke we heard today.

Okay, who do I have to help? is a guilt focus.

Be a neighbour. is gratitude-based.

What we can offer *to and in and through* the church is not a chore, but an blessing... to ourselves, to God and to others (known and unknown).

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We are finite beings, with finite capacities.

We all embody some measure of *time*, *talent*, and *treasure*. Each of us is the steward of our own capacity. We live complex lives ... of which the church might be 'a part', but it is not the only part.

Let me put it this way... most (if not all) of us have a bigger desire to be a *blessing* for others that our *capacity* to be so.

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Our United Church creed says it as best as anyone: we are not alone.

The creed goes on to say:

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.*

WE are called to be the church.

Not, **I** am called to be the church.

We are not alone.

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Together... our capacity to be *blessings* to each other and the world is more than the sum of our parts. There is a synergy that comes with beating within the Heart of God.

The letter to the Ephesians speaks of a *power [that is] at work within us [and] is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.* (Eph3:20)

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Visual Parable: pitcher and cup.

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- Picture this pitcher as being filled with the unlimited blessings of God.
- Each drop into our cup is a blessing we hold; a blessing we receive; a blessing we can give.
- We get nervous when we come close to our capacity. We want to retreat, hold back, get away from the flow.
- But, let's remember what the psalmist said: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- *Loving God with our whole self* is allowing God's over-capacity fill us up.
- *Loving our neighbours as ourselves* is allowing the blessings of God flow in and through us.
- We can and will run dry, but the holy river still runs.
- God replenished us when we go into the water fall.

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It does start with each of us an individual's, asking *where can my gratitude take me from here?*

But it doesn't end there because "I" am not called to be the church, "we are called to be the church."

We are the church... the hands and feet of Jesus... the body of christ in the world.

There is power at work within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

We are not alone.

God is with us.

Thanks be to God.

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Let us give thanks.

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Let us pray,

We will dig deep within ourselves and give love and gratitude to you, O God. And we will take on the challenge to see everyone, everywhere as our neighbours. Amen.

#299VU "Teach Me God to Wonder"