

Reflections for Sunday 6 February *Beautiful Things and Good News*

It is a pleasure to join you in worship this morning. I am grateful to Reverend Sharon for inviting me to speak about the spiritual dimensions of one of my passions, heraldry and the work of a herald. The title of these short reflections is “ Beautiful Things and Good News”. This was a phrase expressed by a woman at a party years ago in Ottawa. She learned that I was the Chief Herald of Canada and she asked me to explain this position. I described it as briefly as I could and at the end of my comments she said, “ Wow, you deal in beautiful things and good news”. Before and since I have never found anything more apt.

Let's begin by taking a look at those words, herald and heraldry. If churchgoers and others try relate these words to something familiar, they might well think of the Christmas carol, “ Hark the Herald Angels,” or the advent hymn in our Blue Book “Hark a Herald Voice is Calling”, Both these songs speak of announcements, of the good news of the birth of Jesus. Heraldry is in part, a form of visual announcement, with the herald playing the role of announcer, as well as in many cases the role of creator of the announcement, the person who shapes the message, with symbols and colours.

It is one of our most beautiful inheritances from Europe, coming first to Canada in the days of the French monarchs of the 16th century and then reinforced in the mid 18th century when Britain took over governance of what became Canada.

It was already an old established idea at that time, having been first created in the part of Western Europe which now forms NE France and SW Belgium, in the early part of the 12th century. So it was a form of art and identity which grew up in Medieval Europe in a Christian context.

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We will probably never know who first thought of the idea of placing symbols and colours in a precise pattern on the shield of warrior knights but its utility and beauty ensured its rapid spread across Europe, first to identifying combatants on the battlefield and then being adopted into civil society. Churches and communities came to use heraldry to represent their identity and personality through time. Not surprisingly, it came under the control of princes and monarchs who gave coats of arms or used the granting of coats of arms to honour individuals and organizations within the wider community.

Heraldry is a shorthand for something larger and more complex, an individual life, or an organization serving the community in some particular way. From the beginning the best examples of this art exhibited important characteristics; they were meant to be seen at a distance and understood at a distance, they were simple in format and limited in their use of colour. The flag of Canada is a fine example, only two colours, one symbol and a striking geometry. Another is the badge of the Anglican Church of Canada.

As an activity of the state, heraldry arrived in Canada on 4 June 1988 when the Canadian Heraldic Authority was established in the Office of the Governor General of Canada. I was privileged to be selected as the first Chief Herald of Canada and to work with others to create a heraldic system for the country, work that took me to every part of Canada until 2007 and then continuing as Rideau Herald Emeritus.

During those first twenty years, I had the great good fortune to work with church, municipal officials and some First Nations leaders on the creation of new heraldry. I would like to share several of these projects with you and reflect on how the content of them arises, and what their meaning is, and how they relate to the spirit. I believe that they all embody belief in vital ideas and how they illustrate what Thomas Roach

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expressed in a recent meeting in this sanctuary when he said “ There is a natural continuum between art and faith”. For me heraldry is part of that continuum. Good heraldry speaks to us about our beliefs, the importance of ideas and experiences, the treasuring of traditions, the timelessness of certain realities.

Here are two examples from our Diocese: The Badge of the Diocese of New Westminster, and the coat of arms of Christ Church Cathedral. The cathedral arms came first, being developed in 1997/1998 as a project to highlight the restoration and liturgical evolutions in the cathedral church. The ancient symbolism of the cross of Christ is balanced with the choice of a Celtic cross which has been a form favoured in Anglican churches for generations. The deepening awareness in the wider community, within and beyond the church, of honouring First Peoples, in which Christ Church Cathedral has been a leader, is emphasized with the placing of a Salish Spindle whorl at the crossing point, featuring three Salish style salmon encircling a Chi Rho symbol. In the base of the shield are wavy bars, representing the waters of the Inlet, and the water of life and of baptism. The main colours of white and red have long been associated with the Anglican communion in Canada. So in the choice of colours and symbols long standing tradition plays an important role. Altogether these arms dramatically represent a faith community of an historic church in the far west of Canada, with clear allusions to Christianity, landscape, and the original inhabitants of Greater Vancouver.

We see this importance of tradition in the badge of the Diocese which was created nearly a decade later in 2007, near the end of my term as Chief Herald. Here the result is rooted in ancient tradition, drawing from the arms of King Edward the Confessor which were developed in medieval times by the heralds of the day. Here we see the cross of his faith and the martlets or little birds. Some of these elements were

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enshrined in the coat of arms of Westminster Abbey, his incredible temple to the faith, which in turn inspired some of the design of the arms of our diocese. For the badge, I proposed historic colours of blue and gold, and a wavy line of white or heraldic silver for water. The birds, representing messengers to heaven and the spirit of aspiration, have wings which terminate in maple leaves, to underscore the nation of which this community is a part. Heraldry can summarize community, tradition and ongoing mission, in such a succinct and memorable way, as we see here.

Turning from symbols of our churches we come to speak of First Nations. From its foundation in 1988, the Canadian Heraldic Authority has striven to make a place for First Nations symbols, and honour the ancient symbol systems that are part of the heritage of every First Nations group in every part of Canada. This aim was one of the central reasons the national government sought to vest the Queen's Canadian heraldic prerogative to create heraldic honours in the hands of the Governor General.

These arms show a very interesting marriage of First Nations symbols and beliefs, and a heraldic structure inherited from Europe. The Kamloops chiefs and elders requested the development of the arms in 1996 and welcomed them in a huge ceremony in their Pow Wow grounds that year. In order to help me understand the traditional beliefs and important symbols of the Kamloops first people, then Chief Manny Jules arranged for me to spend several days meeting with elders, hereditary and elected. Among these was John Jules, Manny's brother, who spent a whole afternoon guiding me through the central grounds set out around the former residential school, and describing for me some of his people's central beliefs and stories, about the land and its creatures.

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The final result which is centred in First Nations style on a circle, shows the four cardinal directions in colours of red, black, yellow and white (heraldic gold and silver). The path of men is shown in black and the path of the spirit, in red. On each of these is a representation of water, the two great rivers which flow through and nourish the Kamloops lands and in the centre, a stylization of the traditional pit house or winter dwelling. Two creatures that were both spiritually important and vital food sources, the young deer, the fawn, and the salmon, are shown in the quadrants. On either side of the circular shield are two other important animals, the coyote and the fox. The coyote represents the messenger and teacher role of the chief, and the fox, as peacemaker.

It is a rich and striking visual symbol of the landscape, the wealth of the land and the power of the Kamloops people's presence and the beliefs that have anchored their multi thousand year story at the place shaped by the junction of the North and South Thompson Rivers. As their motto says in Shushwap, "The Kamloops People Endure and Flourish".

Almost from its beginnings over 800 years ago, heraldry has been used to identify, celebrate and honour communities. Towns, cities and villages. These symbols distill the essence of a place. The new ones created in Canada in this century are the latest in a long long line of symbols which speak of the spirit of a place.. Where do we look for symbols and colours to define a community? Landscape, history, and creatures of nature are vital sources of inspiration.

The coats of arms of the two North Vancouvers provides at least part of an answer. The City's arms came first, in 1982, a project to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the City's incorporation. The shield references the twin peaks of the Lions, with cougar faces to reinforce the drama of that splendid local landmark. A 19th century sailing ship recalls the lumber industry which was the major economic

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activity following the arrival of Europeans in the Inlet. The sea is shown by the wavy blue and white bars. One of the most memorable and long lasting parts of this project was Susan Point's commission to design a spindle whorl with bear and salmon, the distinctive object from Salish weaving. which appears as a medallion on the necks of the bear and salmon on either side of the shield. This was the first time that this domestic object became part of an official heraldic grant. It foreshadowed a much greater use of First Nations references in the heraldry developed in Canada after 1988.

Now we come to our home municipality, the District of North Vancouver, incorporated in 1891. District Council decided to mark the centennial of this event by petitioning for a coat of arms.

As with the City, the District's natural setting provided much of the inspiration for the design. The local mountains and the streams which feed the magnificent forests and verdant slopes are the central element of the shield. Blue , green and heraldic silver or white provided the palette. Nature is also paramount in the selection of the supporters, a deer and a bear. The sailing ship in the crest above the shield is an element chosen from the District seal, a pictorial design from the early 20th century. The Tseil-waututh people are represented by the golden Salish style salmon. It is interesting to see how the long established geometry of heraldry is used to stylize the mountains and the streams.

In closing, I want to speak just a little about heraldry and faith. In my work as a herald I cannot say that I consciously felt that I was undertaking spiritual work or a Christian activity. Yet as I look at what I worked with others to create, symbols in which they saw themselves, the best part of themselves honoured and celebrated, I think the Creator and Jesus were at my right hand, as I was doing the important work of giving communities and individuals images of themselves which

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are timeless, filled with deep meaning. Because the Creator's planet earth and all in it and on it are the starting point of so many heraldic stories, and Jesus' teaching about the importance of communities and relationships form another source.

Thank you, Sharon, for giving me this opportunity. Thank you all for listening.