

## Sermon January 1, 2023

Welcome everyone to 2023, the 150th anniversary of St. Mary's Metchosin. Our church community is not yet to the age of old growth coastal forests, but we are getting closer. Hallelujah!

In the church year, this Sunday is the Naming of Jesus.

In Israel and the Mid-East, names had and still have power and aspiration. Our older son has a Sumerian name - Gilgamesh - from the epic poem. Arab colleagues have asked him why was he not named after someone like Abraham who did almost all good? They were too polite to suggest Muhamoud. Gilgamesh did bad and good - a bit sketchy.

Angels told Mary to name her son *Yehoshua* which in Hebrew translates "Yahweh is Salvation" Jesus is a Latinized version of *Yehoshua*. The baby's name was his life mission.

Our churches have a name - *St. Mary of the Incarnation*, *St. Mary the Virgin*, or the do-all *St. Mary's Metchosin*. None of the names go to the heart as does "Yahweh is Salvation". What name or short phrase goes to our heart?

I'm not proposing we rename our churches. I do propose that during our 150th year our community should freshly examine/explore/discern **what the Holy Spirit sets** as our mission. Maybe the right verb is more physical - *embrace*?

The mission of this church, just like Jesus, should enrich the networks of Creation and also be uniquely ourselves.

To the surprise of almost no one, I'm going to start by going sideways:

People from Metchosin, the Western Communities, and beyond use the Metchosin ecosystem: community hall, fair grounds, community house, arts centre, Metchosin store, My-Chosen Cafe, The Broken Paddle, the new brewery/pub, schools, parks, trails, and other services and places. The church contributions of space for the pre-school, Racoon's Den Child Care, and other community services and fundraisers are very good.

Does [1] Sunday service and youth ministries [2] contributions of space and [3] pilgrimage and other ministries embrace our mission ? I suggest that they are part of our mission, but are not the full intimate embrace of our mission.

Let's embrace the Old Testament and Gospel, specifically:

*[Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17] ....for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

What does that mean here in 2023? Definitely welcoming people of all nations/backgrounds, for we are all children of God. Probably not people streaming into the church building for prayer services almost 24/7, a modern Temple in Jerusalem, although that would be great.

Where does the Holy Spirit call us? *...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.* Answers come quite easily for some parts:

- my house = this congregation, as it is now, and more important as God calls it to be, plus the history, practices and theology of the Anglican Communion, plus buildings and lands
- all nations = safe and welcoming for all humanity

My struggle is with “prayer”, defined in a dictionary as *a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God*. At least in this part of the world in 2023, it must mean more than prayer service after prayer service, like a long dense string of pearls.

Perhaps [?] the Holy Spirit calls us to be the spiritual expedition centre - a safe, rich home for spiritual exploration and living. In our various spiritual trips and adventures, we will be requesting help, and expressing thanks for what we experience and learn to the other members of the congregation, and to God directly. This is a life of prayer, which includes and goes beyond a time of prayer.

Let me once again go sideways with the parable of the sermon, based on a true story.

Once upon a time, say Monday, a deacon started writing a sermon in their head. By Tuesday, it was almost finished - to them. Yet the Holy Spirit was bubbling away. A member of the congregation and the deacon were scheduled to talk Saturday, on unknown topics. Somehow, there would be more peace, more completeness to confirm the sermon after that meeting.

The flat white coffee at Starbucks was good. It was a rich discussion too, none of it directly about the sermon. Yet the sermon evolved. It did not contradict anything present on Monday and Tuesday, but went, it seemed to the deacon, further and deeper and more clear - more deeply affected by the Holy Spirit.

A spiritual journey, even for a hermit, is not solitary. A spiritual journey requires grit, which I will define as relentless gentle urgency, and patience. From this and more comes resilience of the community and of the individual. From this might be a community that defines itself as a **spiritual expedition centre**.

This sermon is not the first word and must not be the last word on the mission of this church. Please, like Mary, ponder these and many other experiences in your heart. Let the Holy Spirit and this community feed you and change you, so that you will contribute your part of the congregation's understanding and embrace of our mission.

Perhaps then we will be blessed once again as were the Israelites so many centuries ago:

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.*

We pray that this might be so for us, too.