

Sermon Notes August 31st 2025

I describe my call to ministry as a seed planted in my heart.
A word that was given to me as a gift from someone who believed in me, saw something in me and gave me the gift of hope.

I began to use this metaphor part of the way through my discernment, because that is how my journey has felt.

That one conversation with my late mother-in-law, a curiosity, and the support of a loving partner were all I really had before Lauren and I made the decision to leave the UK and follow this path.

When I look back, that word seems such a small thing, and yet to me it was everything.

And the strange thing was, the more I began to tell my story, the more meaning it began to take on.

In parables, Jesus uses the metaphor of seeds in different ways:

To talk about faith, to talk about building God's Kingdom here on earth, to talk about the decisions that we make in the environment we surround ourselves in, in the community that we build.

And the part of the metaphor that sustained me was in taking responsibility for my own sense of nurturing. Often, making sacrifices and challenging myself in ways that were uncomfortable, that led to growth.

There was a lot of growing roots beneath the surface before any sign of life was visible to others.

For the 300 Anglican and Lutheran youth from across the country who descended upon Saskatoon last week, stepping into a vast Cathedral with its ornate rood screen poking over the top of the stage with its lighting rigs, sound system and screens, setting musicians, teachers, elders and actors, seeds were being planted.

The theme for CLAY 2025 was rooted and rising:

A nod to Saskatchewan's agriculture and our pilgrimage to the prairies to gather,

A hope for our learning together through Christian teaching that our flourishing can be experienced through our growth in faith. That is grounded in our tradition and nurtured in our Churches.

A recognition of our learning with indigenous peoples in our visit to Wanuskewin, a national historical site of Canada, a place of archaeological, spiritual and cultural significance. A place that honours the living history of 6000 years of gathering, where the buffalo run. A place where humans have understood a spiritual connection to the world beneath their feet, to the wind that whips across the landscape, to their Creator and to one another. And a place today where, through education and the continuation of cultural and spiritual practices, indigenous people teach visitors and settlers, and each other, the great value of their history, which enriches our lives today.

For the young people who came to this gathering last week: memories were made in a place of being seen, of growing in a place of safety and freedom, a place of being included and valued, a place of worship and peace.

This week was a reminder in so many ways of the opportunity and hope for our Church. And the metaphors through creation were present throughout the week.

This experience was a reminder to me how fragile and yet how resilient we are, just as how fragile and resilient creation is.

Nurturing growth is something that we have to invest in, both in terms of the commitment of resourcing, but most importantly investing ourselves. Our time, our education and learning, our willingness to learn from each other and gain perspective and wisdom from journeying together.

In the speaker's teaching this week to the young people, the parables of the seeds planted on different soils, the mustard seed and the fig tree all shared how Jesus connected our faith the world around us.

And before we left the speaker said remember this seed that was planted here this week. No matter where we go, no matter how far we wander. That seed of faith that has been planted is a call to come back home.

We left singing 'may we find a light, to guide us home'.

For Lauren, who has worked for 2 years chairing the planning committee for CLAY, and for me this week in helping to run this event, and for the many volunteers in the Church. The experience of being present for youth having an experience like this is transformational.

There is nothing that fills your heart or inspires your faith like seeing a gathering of youth in worship like this.

And the great joy is that our faith is lived out from generation to generation.

We participate in a living tradition that we immerse ourselves in through prayer, and we build connection as we find meaning where we embrace one another, where we invest our time and energy in seeing God's goodness breathe life into our Church.

Lauren and I have been involved in youth ministry since we were youth ourselves. And being in the Anglican Church here in Canada, it's hard to describe the vastness of the same type of question that we get asked when it comes to youth ministry from parishioners to Bishops: "how do we get young people in Church?"

While CLAY was an incredible success, there was some sadness in reflection on this event, and I was embarrassed for my own Church in this too.

At the Anglican Cathedral in Saskatoon, save a couple of lovely old ladies in the altar guild and a few volunteers, we as CLAY were treated like a rental group with little presence or enthusiasm from its people. For the biggest youth gathering across the country to put on an incredible event like this and for the people in the place that it was held to not take serious interest in or show up to any worship or gathering was so disheartening, and showed to everyone who helped lead and plan this event how much of an uphill journey we face.

We stopped investing in youth ministry many years ago, and so many Churches lost volunteers willing to help lead gatherings, people felt disconnected from the lives of young people and all of a sudden we look around a wonder where our young people went.

The answer to this question of ‘how do we get young people in Church?’ contains all manner of anxiety for the future of the Church, anxieties in people’s own faiths, worry and struggle about living in a secularized and polarized world.

But the answer to that question is simple. In fact its the same answer that we would have with any people in any place or time:

Build connections, grow relationships, give opportunity and space.

Invest yourself in the lives of those you wish to encounter, learn and grow with them and you will be transformed yourself.

To me this question is like asking where the fruit is, when looking at the withered tree. Before we ask where young people are in our Church, we need to ask:

‘how can we create an environment that young people feel a part of?’

‘How do talk about my faith with younger people in my family in a way that doesn’t make me seem different, but makes us more connected to each other’

‘How do we prioritize, sustain and support the youth ministry that exists?’

And ultimately ask ourselves the question? ‘Do we actually care enough?’, ‘do we actually want to make a difference?’

And these questions might seems harsh, but it’s true, caring is the baseline we should be aiming for, but it’s so visible to anyone, especially young people who are looking around and asking the question ‘do I belong here?’.

We invite Bishops to CLAY, and we appreciate all the Bishops who come to support what we do. But the young people notice the Bishops

who take photos and sit quietly at the back. Or the Bishops who help to stay and tidy up the lawn games, or speak to them and ask them questions. Who are willing to learn from them as they expect the young people to listen to their teaching.

It is humbling, when we listen to the words of those younger than us that provide wisdom that shapes our faith.

And so I want us all to listen to this prayer that was written by the young people of our Church.

God of all,

The church doesn't always recognize or value young people.

But we are the past, present, and future of this church.

We have talents to offer if there was space for us to share them.

We have building spaces that we aren't using to their full potential.

By giving youth the chance to invest and sow seeds into the church, we will grow old and reap the benefits of a church we built together on the rock of Christ.

CLAY understands that youth hold the future of the church, but what work will be done beyond CLAY?

Jesus said, "let the children come to me,"

We pray for a church like Jesus - welcoming people from all backgrounds, ages, and status, because it is through the wideness of that community that the church exists today.

So, God,

we pray to be conscious of the needs of the people around us and our own. To be a church where we take what we need and no more.

A church that focuses more on keeping the cause alive, not just the building. We pray for a church shaped by love, humility, forgiveness, A church that gives us purpose.

A Church that knows how to welcome new people, even when it means change.

A Church for everyone.

We long for a church of loving your neighbour. An enthusiastic community. A church shaped by youth's perspectives.

Hospitality.

Compassion.

Acceptance.

We have a theology of grace that can be an antidote to bad religion, because we recognize the unconditional love of God.

We pray to be a church that focuses even more on raising up the next generation of youth.

We pray for a church that breaks down barriers.

An intergenerational community.

This is the church we pray for, God.

This is the church we hope to be.

Amen.

