

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 3, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Tell Me the Old, Old Story”

Based on Luke 6:20-26

A few of us here had the pleasure of travelling up Silver Star Mountain for the annual Presbytery Retreat at Fairhaven Retreat Center. Our presenter this year was Mr. Bob Anger, the Assistant Archivist from our national office in Toronto, who spoke on the history of our church and the many stories of our past. You may be thinking that this sounds about as exciting as watching water boil!

But instead, we all found ourselves transported back in time, to the early days of settlement in the Maritimes; the rowdy streets of Halifax; stoic couples who braved prairie winters to bring The Word to the new western frontier. We held in our hands, the oldest document in the Archives, dated 1628, and the first sermon ever written on paper on Canadian soil. We heard through private letters, of the heartbreak of clergy, leaving family and friends for unknown places, because no one else would go; the excitement of new challenges; of long days of travel, of danger and death.

We learned of Rev. McGregor, who made Pictou, NS his home, when there was less than 1400 people in the entire region we now call Nova Scotia. This teetotaler clergyman wrote home of the scandalous behavior of the place: drinking, gambling, and foul language, a town caught

REJOICE IN
THAT DAY AND
LEAP FOR JOY,
BECAUSE GREAT
IS YOUR
REWARD IN
HEAVEN. FOR
THAT IS HOW
THEIR
ANCESTORS
TREATED THE
PROPHETS.

~Luke 6:23

in differing opinions of slaves and slave trading. After working for over a year, he was given less than half of the agreed up stipend, and then immediately used those funds to put a down payment on purchasing the freedom of a slave woman in the community.

We heard of Mrs. Christina MacKay, wife of John MacKay, interpreter to Rev. James Nisbett. She was three months pregnant at the time, when

they began a perilous forty-some day journey through the wilderness with horse and cart, from the Red River Valley to what is today, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, to begin a mission outpost there, and share the Gospel. They lived for three months in a tent with two other children; and in early November, when the nights were cold and the sun was waning, a small cabin finally finished. Three couples and their families slept in that tiny space; a cabin that became a maternity ward less than a month later, just as the prairie winter settled deep upon them. The closest doctor was 600 miles away.

And as I listened to these stories being told once again, I thought to myself, “I wonder what the Presbyterian Church in Canada might have looked like if these brave, faithful men and women had not made these journeys on behalf of the church? How would everything we have here, today, **be** different, if those before us, had not braved the prairie winters, and studied the language of the Indigenous peoples, or carried on without their stipend in hand, as is the custom today? How might our

church **look** different, if when asked by the church to brave new frontiers, the clergy replied, "No, I will not go," instead of echoing the prophet Isaiah's words, "Here I am Lord, send me?"

The stories of these men and women, too many of which are buried in the files of our Archives, and rarely see the light of day, are stories of some of the saints of our church. Each of them in their own small and unique way, has contributed to the story our church and helped propel it to become the church that it is today.

- Most lived modest lives, often well below that line of poverty.
- They went to bed hungry many nights.
- They wept for the family they left behind to follow The Call.
- They were often criticized for their efforts, for being so foolish as to leave the settled parts of British North America, and their dedicated work in the mission field was sometimes ignored by our own General Assembly.

But they discovered something in their hunger, and in their sorrow, and in their stubbornness. They were blessed.

- They were blessed by those, who could not pay with money, but offered food, a ride, a helping hand.

- They formed friendships with people of different race, language and culture. These saints set the stage for what Canada is so well known for today on the international stage: welcoming diversity and embracing a multi-cultural heritage.

- They became heroes to those they left behind, stories of courage and adventure that would inspire the next generation.

- They became strong willed, and determined not to fail; to see their mission work through. And they did not fail.

But "*Woe to you*" (v24, 25, 26) was their reply to those who discourage them or called them foolish. "Alas" is perhaps a better English word from the Greek, for it conveys a sense of loss. And you can almost hear the saints of our history whispering, "Alas!"

- It's too bad you missed the look of wonder on that slave woman's face when she realized she was free, never to be owned by anyone again.

- It's too bad you missed the sweep on the wind on the prairie grass.

- It's too bad you missed the opportunity to see the Rocky Mountains from a distance.

- It's too bad you missed the chance to be invited to a feast with the Indigenous peoples of the Red River, and be welcomed into a Metis home.

We too, live among the saints: past and present.

- What would Knox receptions be like, without Peggy Stickney's pink marshmallow squares?
- What would the Gleaners do if Gary Cooper did not volunteer his time repairing and tuning up the vehicles, which gather all the produce for the dehydrators?
- How much drearier would the days be for some of our most frail Seniors in Vernon, if Bea and Koren and Faye and Mary did not take time to hand out song books and sing "What a Friend we Have in Jesus" for the umpteenth time?

We are the saints. And each of us, in some small way, contributes not only to the **life** of Knox, but to the **legacy** of Knox, as the next generation takes their place in our pews. We may not be a Joan of Arc or the Apostle Paul, or ready to be martyred for the cause. But we are a part of The Story.

Live out your story.
Be part of The Story.
Looking back at your life, which would you rather whisper quietly to yourself?
"Alas, I missed it!"
Or
"I have been blessed."

Amen.

*Tell me the old, old story,
Tell me the old, old story,*

*Tell me the old, old story,
Of Jesus and His love.*

~ Katherine Hankey (1866)