

# North Kildonan United Church

8th May 2022 ~Rev. Don Johnson

Acts 9: 36-43

Revelation 7: 9-17

John 10: 22-30

*Gracious God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may hear your Word with joy. Amen.*

Back in the 1990s, during my years at McClure United Church, for several summers a group of us would go on day trips, usually within the city of Winnipeg but sometimes we would venture beyond the perimeter. Most of the trips would be to churches, where we would be welcomed by the local clergy or some other representative, and given a guided tour. One time we visited a synagogue and the rabbi explained Jewish worship to us. That was a very interesting visit, partly because most of us had never been in a synagogue before and partly because of how the rabbi revealed his understanding, and I should add misunderstanding, of Christianity. There is nothing like having your own belief system explained to you from a different perspective. In this particular situation, the rabbi maintained that the heart of Christianity was the crucifixion of Jesus, not the resurrection on the third day. It's very hard to understand anything about Christian faith and practice when Easter is removed from the equation. I suspect not all rabbis hold the same bias as this person did. That theological difference aside, it was still a very worthwhile trip to make, and as was our practice, we then drove to our reservation at a nearby restaurant for lunch.

Lunch together provided us the opportunity to talk about what we had seen and what we had learned from the places we had visited. It also opened my eyes to how older people are sometimes treated.

I was in my 30s at that point and the rest of our group were retired. At one restaurant I well remember the condescending attitude of the person taking our lunch orders. "Now dear, what would you like" was the way she took the orders. It was always "dear", with a certain tone that suggested the recipient had less ability to cope, less capacity to decide on white bread or whole wheat for the sandwich. It was a foolish assumption to make of our intrepid McClure travellers who knew full well what was going on and who bristled at the condescension implied with the misuse of the word 'dear'.

One time we made a visit to St John's Anglican Cathedral, and our guide pointed out a few interesting, if quirky details. One was the stained glass window devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus. A lovely window as most stained glass windows usually are, but with this one, at the very top of the window, in pride of place, was an almost photographic profile of the wife of the donor. So, who really was the subject of the window, Mary or this other woman? We were also shown a large marble memorial

plaque, which was later discovered to have a spelling mistake. The reference was to a canon, spelled c-a-n-o-n, which is the title of a certain office some clergy hold in the Anglican hierarchy. However, the more common cannon spelling c-a-n-n-o-n had been used, which might suggest the person memorialized had been a big gun in the cathedral. The engraver had to polish out, or is it dig out, the extra n and correct the entire word. You can see the indentation made to this day.

One church we visited had magnificent artwork over the main doors, a huge icon done in tiny coloured tiles. In describing this piece, the priest made an interesting comment. He spoke of the history of the icon, saying that it was the gift of a brother and sister – a \$10,000 gift in 1990s money. But he added that there had been a fair amount of controversy before the piece was created and installed, and at times there was a chance that the project would not be completed. Finally, all the hurdles were overcome, everyone was in agreement and the work installed, to the great joy of the congregation. But the interesting comment he made was this, as I remember it. *"The controversy beforehand was like a mother in the midst of labour pains, but once delivery happens and the baby is born, all that pain is put behind her. So too, once our icon was in place, we put all the pain leading up to it behind us, and focussed on the joy of the gift we had received and the delight of the artistry."*

His comment has always stayed with me. There was something both profound and honest about his observation. Any family, any group, any church or religious institution, is made up of people, people who have their own viewpoints and perspectives, their own needs, their own gifts and skills, their own pain and their own joy. People who usually get along together, but not always.

Today we give thanks for the great gift which is family life, and in particular we give thanks for our mothers. The pandemic of the past two years has shown to so many of us both the great blessing which is the extended family, as well as the pain we have experienced by our, at times, forced separation from our family. Finally, as the restrictions ease and the danger passes away, we can carefully return to those days of hugs and kisses and joy when the generations gather again as family.

On this day, I want to share with you this prayer by Angela Ashwin.

*"Thank you, God, that you are tender as a mother, and well as strong as a father. You give us life, and care for us like a mother who will not forsake her children. We pray for our mothers today, putting them into your hands for time and for eternity; and we ask your blessing on all our relationships in the families of our homes, our churches, and our communities. Amen."*

We know it is naïve to suggest that family life is perfect and pain free-as an old Chinese proverb puts it: "Nobody's family can hang out the sign 'Nothing the matter

here.” But that doesn’t take away the sense of belonging that we have in our families; however those families are created or constituted.

Family does indeed come in many forms. We live in families and we belong to families. But we also belong to larger families. As Christian people we find our place within the family of God, united by faith in God, taught by the word of God, encouraged to love and serve others by the Spirit of God.

It is as Christian people, as citizens of the world as well as of Canada, that we reach out in love to support our sisters and brothers in Ukraine during their time of extreme need. As members of the United Church we are encouraged to offer our financial help to Ukraine through the United Church Emergency Response Fund. The United Church is working in partnership with ACT Alliance and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to respond to this crisis. One hundred percent of your donation goes directly to emergency relief, with 85% allocated to Ukraine emergency relief and 15% used for responding to future emergencies that do not receive intense media coverage. The donations we make to the Mission and Service fund enables the United Church to cover all the costs of emergency response work without deducting any fees from your donation. Good to know.

Early in March, the Moderator, the Right Reverend Dr. Richard Bott, issued this letter regarding the invasion of Ukraine. He writes, in part:

*"The United Church of Canada condemns the invasion of Ukraine by President Putin of Russia. This act of aggression contravenes the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and represents a serious violation of international law. We call on all parties to immediately cease hostilities and to undertake action to restore peace, including through the negotiations underway in Belarus.*

*The United Church of Canada joins UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres in his call for the protection of the lives and human rights of residents of Ukraine. In addition to an immediate cessation to hostilities there is an urgent need for humanitarian assistance to be distributed to all those who have been impacted by the ongoing violence and to allow continuous unimpeded access. Food, shelter, health care, and comfort must be provided in adherence to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. We call on governments to keep borders open and provide safe refuge for everyone escaping the conflict and to create safe pathways for all regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or creed.*

*As Moderator, I am grateful to communities of faith holding in prayer the people of Ukraine and all people peacefully protesting violations of international law and human rights in the region. I join you in asking God to help us to be peace-bearers as individuals, as communities, and as nation-states. In our commitment to justice and peace, let us*

*call on government leadership to help bring this to an end so no more lives are lost or communities harmed.*

*We join with all who witness and work for peace and justice around the world, even in the face of violent conflict.*

*I invite you also to explore whether there is a Ukrainian Catholic church, Ukrainian Orthodox church, or Ukrainian community centre close to you to whom you might write a letter of concern and solidarity or extend solidarity to people of Ukrainian descent in your community. (we sent 16 letters out)*

*The United Church of Canada is receiving funds that will be directed to humanitarian assistance in Ukraine through its ecumenical partner, ACT Alliance, which is responding to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation. ACT members are scaling up their presence inside Ukraine and in neighbouring countries to aid those impacted by the current armed hostilities.*

*May peace reign in Ukraine and for all peoples facing renewed violent conflict.*

*Christ's peace,*

*The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott*

*Moderator*

Let us end with this prayer written by the Moderator.

*God of all Creation,  
God of the heights and the depths,  
and everything in-between,  
God of this blue-green bauble,  
spinning in space,  
a place of such wondrous creatures,  
and abundant life...  
we are praying for a miracle,  
one of the smallest of changes,  
one that would have immense consequence.*

*As people around the world  
seek the end of the war  
that Russia has perpetrated on Ukraine,  
seek to end the death,  
seek to make a peace,  
what I am praying for is a change of  
mind, a change of  
heart, a change of  
worldview,  
in the Russian leadership,  
who brought this into being.*

*Help them, God of all hope,  
to see that this is the chance to  
step back from the war,  
to pull back the escalation,  
to let go of whatever it is  
that made them choose  
the path that has led to  
the chaos,  
the destruction,  
the death,  
in Ukraine.*

*We need a miracle that will  
help them to not only pull back  
their forces to within their borders,  
their rhetoric of nuclear option;  
but to be part of the rebuilding  
of the nation they sought to overtake...  
in the midst of the grief and tears  
and anger and rage,  
of the parents and grandparents,  
of the siblings and children,  
of the friends and neighbours,  
of those who have been killed  
in this act of aggression.*

*Help us to bring this to an end, God,  
one that will allow the sunflowers of Ukraine  
to reach their growth,  
sprouting in the soil of peace,  
under a hope-filled sky.*

*Help us to make that miracle, God,  
for it is truly needed.*

*In Christ's name,  
in the Spirit's power,  
in the Creator's love,  
I pray.  
Amen.*

The Right Rev. Dr. Richard Bott  
Moderator