

North Kildonan United Church

7th August 2022 ~ Rev. Don Johnson

Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16

Luke 12: 32-40

*Eternal God,
in the reading of the Scripture, may your Word be heard;
in the meditations of our hearts, may your Word be known;
and in the faithfulness of our lives, may your Word be shown. Amen.*

I wish to begin this sermon with a word of thanks to our worship leaders who presided over our services during my July holidays. Thanks to Gay Todd and to Peter Latimer, thanks to the Reverends Paul Campbell and Paul DuVal, and thanks to Sheron Miller and the United Church Women. As I headed east on my drive to Toronto and then to Gatineau, I knew the worship life of our congregation was in caring and competent good hands, so I left without a worry, trusting that all would be well.

And from what I have heard, all indeed was well. We had visitors, visitors from United Church congregations near and not quite so near, and I understand that they were warmly welcomed by our congregation and the hope is that we will see them again this month. There were even rumours of coffee and cookies after last Sunday's service.

As I express my gratitude for the pulpit leadership, I would be sorely amiss if I did not acknowledge the others who made each Sunday service possible. Worship in our tradition includes music, hymns and songs and instrumental pieces, so we thank Joanne Diplock for her constant presence and her musical leadership throughout this summer. And it is hard to worship if you don't have the words near at hand so we thank Wilma Fehr for preparing the weekly PowerPoint on the screen before us, as well as for Wilma creating the Thursday news sheet and posting the service online.

Of course, PowerPoint is, well, pointless unless it is made visible and projected on a screen so we thank Heinz Goetz and Peter Latimer for their diligence in making the magic which presents the PowerPoint. And of course every service includes the words of Holy Scripture, and so we acknowledge with thanks our readers who willingly come to the lectern and proclaim the Word of God each Sunday.

But our list of gratitude is not yet exhausted. We have greeters who welcome the familiar, and the first-timers, with equal grace. We have the offering counters who carefully tabulate and deposit the gifts of the people for the good of the church and the extension of God's work in the world. We have our active pastoral care team, led by Marvelle McPherson and assisted by Barrie, who make sure that our pastoral care needs are brought to our attention and included in our prayers.

And a final and full thanks goes to you, the members and adherents and friends of North Kildonan United Church, who faithfully attend Sunday Service when possible,

and who hold the life and work of our congregation in their hearts when they are not able to be here.

In these days when church attendance and any involvement in the life of the church are not encouraged, it is clear to me that, more than ever, belonging to a Christian community is a tremendous act of faith. How many other places could we be? What else might we be doing on an August Sunday morning? How else might we spend our money, or share our volunteering time? Why are we here? A dangerous question to ask!

A wonderful opening prayer speaks to me of the gift of worship, the blessing of faith in God, and perhaps the answer to the question why we are here.

It begins this way:

O Lord, our Lord, there are many places we could go this morning, but we have desired to come to your house. There are many voices to which we can listen today, but we desire to hear your voice. It would be easy to scatter, but we have chosen to gather. We need to behold your beauty, to inquire in your temple, to be wrapped in your love, and to experience your renewing Spirit. Come close, Lord Jesus, to fill us and renew us. Amen.

It's a happy coincidence that the Epistle reading for this Sunday should come from the 11th chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. Think of the words we heard Dennis read: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*

Our congregation has been alive and vibrant these past sixty plus years because our people had, and still have, faith in the life and mission of NKUC. Faith that God in Christ is guiding us into God's future, a future not solely of our creating, a future not seen by our eyes or formed in our imagination, yet we trust in the loving purposes of God to lead us as Abraham and Sarah and all the faithful down through the ages were led.

Faith is essential to our life in Christ. Faith that God is with us, that God cares for us, that God cares for all creation. And we need faith in each other. Faith that promises made, will be honoured and fulfilled, that when we offer to do something, we actually will do it. Faith in the integrity of others and trust in their love and goodness.

Modern life requires a high degree of faith and trust of another sort. When you think of it, we often have to trust absolute strangers with at times critical matters. When we board a plane, we trust the pilot and crew know exactly what they are doing, of course the airports are a different story at the moment. When we choose to eat in a restaurant, we trust that the kitchen is safe and sanitary and we hope we will leave the restaurant full instead of infected. The list goes on, and it is basically through health standards, government inspection and employee diligence that we can trust those upon

whom we depend for our health and safety. It is more the fear of prosecution than love of the neighbour that keeps standards high.

In the early days of the Christian church, the community around the first Christians often commented on how those followers of Jesus loved each other, perhaps suggesting that the dominant pagan community didn't demonstrate much love and charity and compassion for others. In our day, we are often presented with opportunities to show compassion and love for those in need, continuing in a practice two thousand years in the making.

Often those deeds are simple acts of kindness. I remember, when I was just a boy, there was an elderly woman half way down the block who my mother knew. If memory serves me correctly, bread used to be delivered door to door, but it had stopped, and this woman had no way of getting bread. I was too young to know how she managed with her other groceries.

But I do remember taking bread to her house and having a short visit with her, as much of a visit as a shy 7-year-old boy might have. I suspect the true gift for her was more than just a fresh loaf of bread from the kindness of a neighbour. A simple act of compassion, faith in action we might call it.

I want to end this day with another perspective on faith.

During my recent drive through Ontario, I noticed the occasional horse and buggy on the road. The buggy was painted black, and the driver and passengers were dressed in simple black and white clothes. I wondered how the horses dealt with the traffic that passed them, especially the huge semi-trailers coming so close beside them. I'm assuming the drivers and passengers were members of the Amish community.

There was surprisingly little construction work on the TransCanada Highway. Mostly bridge repairs. This work required the highway to be limited to one lane, and to enable traffic to progress in an efficient manner, traffic lights like the ones in Winnipeg were used. So you sat at a red light and eventually a single lane progression of traffic would approach and then pass you. After the last vehicle was through, the light turned green and our turn began.

As I waited for my lane of traffic to get the green light, on that +30C cloudless day, I saw the oncoming traffic approach. Leading the group was a black buggy with two horses doing their utmost to get along the highway, no doubt aware of the stream of vehicles cooling their heels, ready to race past once the road was clear.

As I watched, I smiled. Here were two horses, able to hold back vehicles possessing hundreds of horse power. For the occupants, who I felt sorry for, seated in a black buggy wearing black pants on a very hot day, they continued to do what they and their ancestors have done for centuries.

The Amish are in the world but not of the world. Their mode of transportation, their clothes, their lifestyle are all silent yet profound expressions of their faith and trust

in God. Yes, they must have been very uncomfortable in the heat of that day. Yes, their horses were under pressure to quickly get through the highway barrier. But these seemingly inconsequential inconveniences pale in significance to their hope in Christ.

I know little of the Amish, of their customs and beliefs, but I respect them for their silent witness and their challenge to a world that does not value what they value, that does not have the hope that keeps them faithful, a world and lifestyle and society they would rather not fall in line with. I rather suspect the words from the Letter to the Hebrews holds special meaning for them: *All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. Amen.*

Let us pray in the words we heard earlier:

O Lord, our Lord, there are many places we could go this morning, but we have desired to come to your house. There are many voices to which we can listen today, but we desire to hear your voice. It would be easy to scatter, but we have chosen to gather. We need to behold your beauty, to inquire in your temple, to be wrapped in your love, and to experience your renewing Spirit. Come close, Lord Jesus, to fill us and renew us. Amen.