

# North Kildonan United Church

7<sup>th</sup> May 2023 ~Rev. Don Johnson

Acts 7: 55-60

I Peter 2: 2-10

John 14: 1-14

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*We have beheld your glory, O God, in the face of Christ Jesus your Son. Enliven our faith, that through Christ we may put our trust in you. Deepen our faith, that in Christ we may serve you. Complete our faith, that one day we may live with you in that place which Christ prepares for us, where he lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.*

A number of years ago, friends of mine in Minneapolis took me to visit the town of Stillwater, located on the river between Minnesota and Wisconsin. It's a community that dates back to the 1850s and its claim to fame was in logging. Year by year the trees of the area were cut down and floated on the river, creating ample employment for loggers and more than ample profits for company owners. It was a boom time, that is until in 1914, if memory serves me correctly, when the loggers ran out of trees.

It was a harsh lesson for the people of the area. We know a balance in nature must always be maintained, but if more trees are cut down than replaced, in time there will be no trees. And you can't have a lumber industry without trees. Somehow it never dawned upon anyone that new trees should be planted.

So this boom town came crashing down into a bust, and life was forever changed for the people of Stillwater.

Years later...decades later, Stillwater was brought back to life as a tourist attraction, and it is indeed worth visiting. We spent a marvellous day exploring the town, and one experience stands out in my memory to this day.

We were wandering along the streets of Stillwater, passing places like the bar that had a sign outside encouraging wives to leave their husbands at the bar while they went shopping. The promise was offered that the men would be well taken care of, in a tongue in cheek kind of way. Not sure how many availed themselves of that service and we kept walking along.

This is the experience I referred to. We came to an antique store. Not a high end store, with exquisite furniture and expensive artwork and overpriced china. More like a second hand thrift shop, with plates and plaques and bits of this and that. As we wandered from table to table, examining the wares, it suddenly dawned on me. While there was the occasional plate that might have an American president on it, or a mug celebrating the anniversary of a town or a college or a sports team, I realized that, unlike a similar shop in Canada, there was something missing from their tables and what was missing was this.

There was nothing connected to the Royal Family, nor should there be. No plates with the Queen's image commemorating a Jubilee, no Coronation china, no Charles and Diana or Elizabeth and Phillip wedding items. And why would there be? This was the United States, not Canada.

It reminded me though of how interconnected we in Canada are with the Monarchy. A similar thrift shop in Canada would have had some royal items for sale. In my early years of ministry in the Crystal City-Clearwater area, it was not unusual to visit a home and to see a card framed on the wall or on a table with the words of King George VI's 1939 Christmas message, the first Christmas of the Second World War:

*"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*

The following year, Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone against one of the most diabolical, evil regimes humanity has ever seen. To that challenge, that danger, came words of hope and courage, and the true power and influence of the monarch was felt by all who could hear. As the war intensified and Britain's cities were extensively bombed, the presence of the King and Queen was a boost to morale for many people, not all but most.

We can think of three years ago, as the pandemic turned our lives upside down, as we lived with fear of a strange and cruel virus, lived with the loneliness of isolation, all the while finding that our elected leaders offered limited help and encouragement. To that challenge the Queen said simply this, and her words made all the difference: for so many of us.

*"We shall take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return. We will be with our friends again. We will be with our families again. We will meet again."*

The Queen ended her message simply and honestly:

*"But for now, I send my thanks and warmest good wishes to you all."*

These were words we needed to hear, words from a person we trusted, and that trust made and makes all the difference.

We have been fortunate, blessed, to have been served so well by our monarchs throughout the years and King Charles will no doubt continue this practice of service. We will find in him a strong advocate for the preservation of the environment that we all share, for cooperation and reconciliation, for the careful balancing of tradition and innovation. I am sure he will provide us with many reasons to think "God save the King, long live the King."

For those of us who saw yesterday's Coronation, whether it was at 5 am when I tuned in or in repeats during the day on YouTube, it was first of all a profoundly Christian

service without being exclusive or boastful. We have reports that the King wished it to be as inclusive as possible, and from what I understand, the Archbishop's office and the Palace worked hard to draw as many as they could into this national event. Members of other faiths were involved in ways that would not offend their beliefs, and even the use of Welsh and Scots Gaelic and Irish Gaelic was an inspired decision.

The theme of service was woven throughout the Coronation, and it was wonderful how everything began. After the majestic processional "I was glad" by Hubert Parry, a boy chorister approached the King and said: *"Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings"*, to which Charles replied: *"In his name, and after his example, I come not to be served but to serve."*

One of the strengths of our monarchy, and I say that intentionally because Charles is King of Canada, besides service, one of the strengths is the personal touch and by that I mean that sense that this is not a politician looking for votes but rather a person who genuinely cares about the people they are interacting with.

But the personal touch is not restricted to monarchs. Think of today's reading from John 14. How many times have we, in the midst of our grief and sorrow, been comforted by those wonderful words we heard: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

While the Christian faith has doctrines and varieties of thought and complex teachings about many issues, and not everyone agrees on the church's position on those issues, it is centred in the one conviction that at a moment in time, God came to us, took human form with the cooperation of the Virgin Mary, lived and breathed and ate and laughed and suffered with us, suffered for us, was crucified by us and rose from the dead so that we might have life in all its fullness, both now and for eternity.

The extraordinary claim is that God was one of us in the form of Jesus Christ, and that during his life amongst us we experienced the fullness of God, the love and compassion of God, and complete access to the heart of God through Jesus. And all that continued after his resurrection and ascension, continues to this day. The personal touch of Jesus Christ is mediated to us through the Spirit of God, blessing us with God's grace, through the breaking of bread and sharing the cup, through the welcoming waters of Holy Baptism, through the community of faith gathered together week by week.

There was an item on YouTube about people of another faith who could not worship because their statue had been stolen. Our worship is based not upon statues but is based in the heart, in the songs we sing and the prayers we breathe, in the Word we read and hear, in the shared community of all believers on their own individual journeys of faith, all held together by the love of God we know in Jesus Christ. A journey that continues beyond this life into God's eternity.

But back to the Coronation. I know that there are probably a variety of opinions and convictions about the role and relevancy of the Monarchy in modern day Canada. And I wondered and worried more than a bit about offending or alienating any who have a different perspective from my own. Possible differences of opinion aside, that shouldn't distract us from having a good party to celebrate this momentous event. Even republicans enjoy fancy sandwiches!

I do want to thank the Hospitality Committee and the Worship Committee and Joanne and the Choir for their roles in today's service and for the high tea we shall soon enjoy. And thank you to all our fascinator wearers who got into the spirit of the day, for those who dressed up and for those who brought treasures from home in to help us celebrate the day.

Amen.