

Reflection

Sunday June 23rd 2024

1 Samuel 17: 32-49

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Title: Only a lost soul can be found

Prayer: Holy One, guide our hearts on the path that is you; instill in us a sense of your presence through the connection with others. Give us ears to hear your word for us today. Amen.

“Lost souls are the only ones who ever get found.”

This is a quotation from Michael Meade, author of the book “Fate and Destiny, two agreements of the Soul.”

He is speaking of the soul’s journey: how we must be drawn out of ourselves in order to truly become ourselves.

This requires a trust in God. A humility in the face of God. And our willingness to be shaped by what is asked of us along the way.

The choir’s anthem this morning “Peace ... be still” is based on the text in Mark where the disciples are in the boat and a storm overtakes them. They get scared and Jesus calms the water. The anthem says “a miracle began by the power of his command.”

Nicole, Will, Ross and Derek animated the well-known story of David and Goliath for us. David is a young shepherd whose experience was gained in the sheep-field not the battle-field. And, yet he was able to sling a stone at a powerful force and kill a giant dead. We might say “a miracle began by the power of his faith.”

We’ll circle back on the scripture in a few minutes, but for now we’re going to insert the United Church of Canada’s strategic plan. Stick with me – because it’s all connected.

This United Church of ours developed a strategic plan for the next few years with a goal to disrupt the narrative of decline and despair and create conditions for renewal.

Let's watch a short video (2 min): <https://youtu.be/asZ1m26p-oI?si=HHIZQKka6SuXOztC>

I'm struck by a few sentences:

- We're working to live and do our ministry together.
- Dare to dream of a world where love reigns – that is the ultimate test for the modern Christian. And,
- This is our call. Let's make it our commitment

So, we are being asked as a church to commit to getting excited, to commit to working together across the country, to have some humble boldness, to be proud of this church that feeds us and fuels us, and to share it.

Some might say the scripture passages for today dare us to live in a world where God reigns ... where we believe that there is a God who can actually calm a raging sea. Where we believe that with our only armour being faith and trust in God, we can slay the forces that threaten us.

Amy in the video we just watched, says this is the biggest test placed at the feet of us modern day Christians ... that we dare to dream of a world where LOVE reigns.

And, if we are going to believe in a world where God / Love reigns, well then, we have to be willing to be led by God, by love.

Author Michael Meade, in his exploration of the soul's journey, also says "if we could arrive in the same condition as when we departed, there would be no reason to go." Change is required on a journey. Things – us, context, situations – must change in order for a journey to have done its job – for God to be at work.

We are on a journey in the church. We know this is not the same church it was 20 years ago; 50 years ago; 99 years ago. This is what our 75th theme was all about – humble

boldness: being able to acknowledge from where we've come and then burst into the future with God's love exploding into our surroundings like fireworks.

(heart slide – keep it up)

The vision: Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.



How are we going to let God lead us – reign over us? Guide us, nudge us?

There are six strategic objectives that are part of the operational plan designed to inspire us into deeper reflection and action. They focus on Indigenous justice, racial equality, LGBTQIA+ rights; Leadership, the common good ... which means thinking communally as a church whole more than as individual churches, climate integrity, and reminding us of the power of the invitation.

We are nervous to invite folks to church these days ... for all sorts of reasons. Because of some of the church's history; because we might be questioning our own faith; because social media and the news don't always paint church in a good light; because screen time is eroding the art of conversation. There are all sorts of good reasons why we get jittery thinking about invitation.

One of the statistics shared during the course I was on – and I can't credit the source or give details on the number of people polled, sorry – was that 40% of people under 40 would be open to a church like the United Church if they knew one existed.

So, that tells me a description of what the United Church is like was offered and it sounded appealing, but the respondents didn't know it was already real. It makes my heart cry out "but we're right here – come find life so full and love so real you won't even know how to take it in!"

Five times in the last 48 hours a song has just shown up in my day – and I haven't thought about this song probably for a good 15 years. It's a Keith Green song called "Asleep in the Light." Each time I hear one of the verses I cringe. The words are these:

The world is sleeping in the dark
That the church just can't fight
'Cause it's asleep in the light
How can you be so dead
When you've been so well fed?
Jesus rose from the grave
And you, you can't even get out of bed.

Ugh, it pierces my heart. Each time I hear it I ask myself “am I all in? How deep is my commitment to this God I think I want reigning over me? Why am I so shy when it comes to talking about church?” But, then I take a deep breath and choose to be encouraged by the lyrics once more.

We hear the story of a man who can calm a raging sea and keep his disciples safe. This is good news.

We hear the story of a young shepherd boy with only his faith, his trust in God and five stones to dismantle and take down the dangers of the world that come biting at our heels everyday. This is good news.

I don't know of any campfire, water cooler, or cocktail party story that is more compelling than the stories of our faith, and yet, too often, they stay tucked in our hearts.

Saul put his armour on David – all 126 pounds of it. This was Saul's protection. This was Saul's best chance at safety, security, shelter. But, it wasn't David's. David said to Saul “I cannot walk in these” and took them off.

When David was in the field he successfully kept bears and lions away from the sheep. He told Saul he'd catch them by the jaw and strike them down. But, just as quickly David added “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will save me from the hand of this Philistine.”

For David his armour was his trust in God.

We are on a journey of sorts in the church right now. The goal of this big plan is to disrupt the narrative we've been telling ourselves for too long – that we are in decline and despair.

No. We are in a time of change – and if change the measuring stick we might even say we are in a time of growth; so let's grow.

“If we could arrive in the same condition as when we departed, there would be no reason to go.”

This journey we are on requires a trust in God. It requires humility in the face of God. And it requires our willingness to be shaped by what is asked of us along the way.

During the week to come let's pray about this call ... (on screen) “to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship and daring justice.”

Let's reflect on how committed we are to this call. Let's dream of a world where LOVE reigns.

Let's commit to a church that is willing to push the boundaries until justice is met for those on the margins, a church willing to look at it's past, repent, change and burst into the future like a firework exploding God's love into the hearts of everyone around.

May this be so. Amen.