

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Sermon Preached by: Rev. John Henderson

St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Newmarket, Ontario
October 18th, 2009

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

Today is my second last Sunday with you

At one level
the emotional level

I've been in denial
That I'm coming
Not just to the end of just over 6 ½ years
among you
As one of your ministers

But that after 41 + years of ministry
I'm retiring

At another level

The cognitive level
I know it

I've been packing boxes
Loading my car
Traveling to Exeter
Unloading them
And even filling book shelves

But then I return
And pick up my daily round
Prepare for and write sermons
Do some visiting
Make phone calls
Attend meetings

And the familiarity of a ministers routine
Lulls me into thinking
It's going to continue

But we all know it's not

I made the decision
That one day
All of us will make

Who by the grace of God
Are granted good health
And long years

And that's the decision to retire

When Jesus called the 12 disciples
He didn't offer them
A retirement date
Or pension plan

But I'm not foolish enough to think
That if any of his disciples
Lived to 65
And we know many of them didn't
Because they either died
Persecuted for following him
Or died early
Because few ever lived
To a ripe old age

Or if they did live to old age
They by health
Had to curtail their activities
And were cared for by family
Or extended family

Jesus' call to follow him
Is a call for life
For as long as we have breath

And thank God
For the many people
Right here in this church
Who've retired

And yet still follow him
By serving in their retirement years
In so many different and effective ways

So while I'm retiring
From what I will call
Regular ordered pastoral ministry

I am not retiring
. From following the Master
. From following the One
Who stirred

- . my heart
- . my mind and
- . my imagination

Many times
As a young boy and also as a teenager
To catch a vision
Of God's reign

And to follow

God still stirs
My heart, mind and imagination
For those things
Which are happening
And are about to happen
Right here at St. Andrew's

And in many ways
I'd love to stay
To be engaged
And see exciting things
About to happen unfold

And that's one of the things I'm going to dearly miss
And it makes me sad

But there comes a time
And it comes for us all

Yes I'm sad

Yes,
It's hard to leave

But what a wonderful
Congregation to have had the privilege

To serve and lead in

I couldn't ask or imagine
A more exciting faith community
In which to conclude
My formal ministry

It was Eric Erickson
Who studied the life of men
And I mean men
Not women

And developed a scheme of stages
That men typically go through
Throughout a long life

The last stage
He calls "integrity vs. despair"
What he meant by that
Was that when we come
to final stage
"integrity vs despair
the tendency for us all

is to look back over our lives
to review where we've been
what happened in our world
and how we lived in it
what happened to us
what decisions we made

and to reflect on our lives

do we conclude
that we are satisfied with how we lived
did we live with integrity?

or do we have regret?
do we have despair?

Of course it's not that black and white
Most of us likely conclude
There is some integrity
And in some instances some regret
Perhaps verging on despair

But over all
What do we conclude?

Remember the story of Joseph
How his brothers
Hated him
Because he was his father Jacob's favourite

And they concocted a story
Presented Joseph's blood stained
many colored coat to Jacob
and reported how a wild animal
Attacked and killed Joseph

When in reality
They bound him up
And sold him as a slave
To some traders
On their way to Egypt

Joseph has a tough time of it in Egypt

Alone and in a far country
He by his wits survives
And makes it
Into the royal household

But he's accused of sexual misconduct

When in reality
It's he who has resisted
The sexual advances
Of Potiphar's wife

And he's thrown in prison

Again he survives by his wits
And eventually lands in Pharaoh's court
Interpreting Pharaoh's disturbing dreams

he's promoted one of the most powerful positions
in the land

years later

because of a famine in Canaan
Joseph's brothers come to Egypt
Seeking food
And Joseph meets them
But they don't recognize him
And Joseph is tempted to exact revenge
But he doesn't

Finally Joseph reveals himself
And he brings his whole family
Including his father Jacob
To Egypt to live

In the third and final powerful scene
Father Jacob dies
And the brothers now fearing
That because father is off the scene
Joseph will finally exact revenge

They approach him
And tearfully offer themselves to him
As Joseph's slaves

And Joseph says these immortal words
“even though you intended to harm to me
God intended it for good
in order to preserve a numerous people
as he is doing today” [Genesis 50:20]

Over all the years of his hardship
Suffering
Struggle and pain

Joseph saw the hand of God
In his life

As we come to the end
of these 6 ½ years together
That’s my question to you today

Do you see the hand of God
In our life together?

How do we understand
How do you make sense of our life together?

Has God been in it?

Or has our life together
Just been a human tangle
Chance
Accident
Busyness
And yes fun

Or in all this mix
have we lived together
In God’s plan?

It's an important question
Not just for this period of time
But for each one you as you look back on your life

For our way of looking at life
How we see it

- . Can shape our attitudes
- . Impact the way we think
- . And the decisions we take

In the story of Moses
There's no doubt
That God calls him
At the burning bush

That God directs him

The Old Testament theologian
Walter Bruggemann refers to the story of Joseph
That occupies chapters 37-50
in the book of Genesis

“the hidden call of God”

Because nowhere
Is there a reference to God
Calling Joseph
Or telling or directing Joseph
What to do

In my own life and that of others
I've discovered that often
It's in hind sight
That I come to see that
God was in it
Walking with us

Guiding us
Prompting us

Today I'd like to provide
A quick survey
Of our time together

And ask you
Was God in it
Guiding us
Motivating us?

At the last Session meeting
I told them that

When I was ordained in 1968
membership the Presbyterian Church in Canada
was 199,000 +
41 years later
The membership is 119,000
A drop of 71,000

Registrations in Church Schools
Had a similar decline

Now I hope you don't think
I caused all that!

Dr. Stuart Macdonald of Knox College
Professor of Canadian Church history
Informed me that
There was a burst of growth
In the churches in Canada
Following the War

It peaked in the early '50's
And the decline actually

In the mid '50's

During our time together

We've been fortunate

To have a relatively stable membership

118 members

Left the rolls of our church

but 133 were added

In those years

Laura and I administered

47 baptisms plus the 5 we did this morning!

One of the first things I noticed

When I came to St. Andrew's

Particularly before services

Is the joy and laughter

Of the people who come in

And greet each other

One of the first things I think people notice

Is our fun and fellowship

We do a lot of eating

Beef suppers

Turkey suppers

Good Friday breakfasts

Turkey pies

The BBQ on re-covenanting Sunday

More recently the fish fry

Our congregational picnics

With their games laughter

And easy relaxing times together

We have fun at

- . our annual golf tournaments
- . the family camps
 - At Prequille
 - Balsaam Lake
 - Arrowhead
 - Awenda
- . Algonquin Quests

And we work hard and laugh a lot
 at annual Women's Fellowship Plays

- . A Bad Day in Gophers Breath
 - While Jean Smith dies
 - Singing Bury me on the lone prairie
- . or Any number can Die
- . or Exit the Body
- . or this years A funny thing happened
 - On the way to the movies

How about
 The Mystery Dinners
 Or the Blue jays games
 Or the men's pie baking contest

The strong focus on welcome and hospitality
 is the result

- Of people who I will not name
 - Who exude caring and hospitality
 - In noticing
 - And taking time to stop
 - Talk and get to know
 - New worshippers

We've had many **changes**
In staffing alone

- We said goodbye to Carolyn Hill
 - And her husband Bill
 - In June 2005

Who can forget her work with the children
And her many musicals
 . Esther-ordinary faith
 . Promise U
 . Good News from the Grave
 To mention just a few

I particularly appreciated
 How she involved
 Every child

In January the next year, 2006
 We welcomed Edward Luka
 Assisted by John Collett
 Who revived the Sr. Choir
 Who bring us wonderful music
 And leadership each Sunday
Not to mention
 During Lent – the 7 last words of Christ
 And the Christmas Candlelight services

Liz Kinack left us in the fall of 2006
 And we welcome Robynne Hutton
 As our Administrative Assistant
 Who's pleasant competent manner
 We've all grown to love and appreciate

We paused for a bit
 To welcome Nigel Duggan
 Took a quick breath
 And then welcomed twins Callum and Zoe

As Julie Powers
 And then Julie and Lisa Schmauder
 Filled in during Laura's
 Maternity leaves

And what wonderful gifts they brought.

In December 2008

Max Ewart retired

After 10 years as caretaker

And Barry Morrison was hired

To work along with Gord Cunneyworth

Think of our **milestones**

Times of special celebration

Certainly at the top

Would be the burning of the Mortgage

In November 2007

When this building was finished in 1992

The mortgage stood at \$750,000

Not only was it cleared in 15 years

But during those same years

You spent an additional \$128,000!

The steeple was restored for \$56,000

Old Sanctuary new roof \$26,000

Ed wing new roof \$31,000

Manse renovation \$15,000

In Feb of this year

We began our 175th year

And the previous fall

produced a new pictorial Directory

Annie Williamson

Who died March 2008

Celebrated her 100th year

August 2007

In March 2003

Janie Halladay at the time

Member of St. Andrew's for 84 years

Died at the age of 98

We welcomed children

To the Table

Bruce McAnsh of this congregation

Began studying at Knox College

And is hoping to graduate

A year this coming December

And this September

Anita Van Nest

Commenced studies at Knox

We are indeed blest

With marker events

Including KUM JOIN US

Celebrating 45 years

And the Boarding Homes Ministry

Into it's 7th year

Our Board of Managers

Kept our properties and finances in good shape

3 furnaces were replaced in 2005

3 new computers

A new photocopier was leased

And what a difference that has made

Including wonderful newsletters

Containing pictures

A new phone system

Now with voice mail

And in the kitchen
2 new refrigerators
2 new stoves

And don't forget the parking lot
After 1 ½ year negotiation
9 new parking spots
Some transfer of land
And the new portion paved
All at no cost to St. Andrew's

And a new fund started
For new sound and audio visual system

In **Christian Education**

The lively and fun vacation bible Camps each year

The new Children and Worship program
And Julie Powers
And Chris Lindsay
Certified as trainers

The Teacher Appreciation Dinners

The Praise Band Workshop
Led by Reuben St. Louis
With our own youth
Leading in worship

And Canada Youth at Brock University
'03 when we send 10 youth
'06 we sent 7
And this past year '09 sending 5

The Wed evening Bible Study
Led by peter Leyland

Thurs morning Coffee Break
Led by Laura

Women's Fellowship studies

Special adult studies
Like the one on Cloning

The Men's Breakfast Studies
And The Great Dad's seminar
They sponsored

And Bryan Moyer Suderman
Who came twice
To share his music
For Small and Tall

And of course
Our Church School
That operates each week
With the faithful participation
Of volunteer teachers

And their yearly Christmas pageants

At the Centre
Of our life together
Is our **weekly worship**
As we bring our lives
Before God's Word

For guidance and direction
For forgiveness and encouragement
On our journey

Where we celebrate the sacraments
Of Christ's death and resurrection

Of our incorporation into Christ
At our baptism

Think of the additional services

- . longest night service
 - . the 5 pm Christmas Eve
- Families with young children

Think of the new hymn books

With the new Psalm books
We purchased in 2006

The music of our Sr. Choir

And the cherubs and Junior choirs
Under the leadership of Karen Shepherd

Think of our sermon series

Like being disciples of Jesus in a Blackberry world
Or last years Portraits of Family Life
Of Reflections on Paul's letter Colossians

Or the Lenten series

- . people at the foot of the cross
- . The last Week of Jesus life
- . or Great Nights of the bible
- . or Big butts of the Bible

Or the focus on Spirituality

With the Rev. Nick Athanasiadis
And then Rev. Bob Geddes
Who the previous Saturday night
Did a workshop on the heavens
And using a telescope
Identified stars
and constellations

The whole purpose of the Church

Is to live into the **Mission of God**
To join God's mission
And be signs and foretastes
Of its coming

We supported our youth involved in Youth in Mission
by raising money
And having them come home
To tell us and inspire us

Kristen Morrison to Iona Scotland
Rebecca Collett to Pioneer Camp as a counselor
Laura Ingle to Mistawasis
Mike Smith to Grenada
Tiffany Smith to Peace River country
Phil Whitfield to Malawi

Who can forget the Across the Pond
Talent Night
To raise funds for Phil Whitfield

Or the two talent auctions
Organized by Glenn Walterhouse
For Brad Morrice and Campus for Christ

When I arrived in 2003
St. Andrew's was making and taking each month
12 loaves of sandwiches to Evangel Hall

That ended when in our own community
The Inn from the Cold began
Sandy Ellis became its Administrator
And 13 volunteers from this congregation
Participated in the first years

But we still support Evangel Hall
By sending toiletries

And mitts and warm clothing
And shoes

Boarding Homes Ministry Team now in its 7th year
Visits bi weekly at Botsford house

The Loaves and Fishes growing project
And the 2 Harvest Celebrations we held here

The Benevolent Fund which
Provides food vouches
And Christmas boxes for needy families

The support of the Food pantry

This past year
A refugee sponsorship committee
Has worked long and hard
In leading us into an exciting new venture

To make us conscious
Of the plight of 20 million refugees in our world

First Glynnis Williams spoke
And most recently we were visited
By Dr. Mulera and his wife Florence
Who told their horrendous but inspiring story
Of escaping Uganda
And finding their way to Canada

With the help of the Talent Night
Which brought all ages together
And the Silent Auction
And your prayerful financial support

We are just \$300 shy of the halfway mark
Of \$12,000

This is a project
That has the potential
To change not only the lives
Of a refugee family
But your own life
As you become involved
And get to know

The personal stories
Of refugee.

Thanks to the Mission and Outreach ministry team
We have become more conscious
Of justice issues in our world

- . from becoming aware of our carbon footprint
- . to conservation of our world
And what we put in landfills
- . promoting a more sustainable lifestyle
Including ridding our selves of plastic
Such as plastic water bottles

Buying fair trade products
So workers around the world
Get a fair price for their labour

And who can forget the fun we have
On Canada Day
Standing on the corner here
Passing out free refreshments
To hot parched passers by

Or the Santa Claus parade
Providing warm beverages
And the hospitality of St. Andrew's

At lot of this is fuelled
By a hearts
That have caught the **Vision of Christ** to serve

One of the first workshops we had
Was with Keith Boyer
Who helped us determine
a new mission statement

“we are a caring congregation
Seeking to share, show and speak about
The love and joy of God”

He helped us see
That among congregational sizes
Family
Pastoral
Programme
And large

We are a programme size congregation
And we need to live into the size
With which God has blessed us

Session members
Will remember our consideration
Of restructuring session
And the development of ministry teams

The visioning dinners
In which members of the congregation
Helped us see where the gaps were
In living our mission

Out of those dinners
Came things like

the Family Camps
The canoe trips
The congregational care committee

Leading with Care

Took a lot of work
But demonstrated our commitment
To make our faith community
Not only a welcoming
But a safe place
For everyone

Including the young
And vulnerable

Recently as a result of attending

Stewards by Design
A task group worked for 1 ½ years
Consulted widely Session and Board
And the congregation

And presented an Enduring Gifts Policy
Which the congregation approved
This past May

Enduring Gifts is intended

To make sure gifts that you give
and bequest to the church
endure or last longer

It's the conviction

That the financial challenges
Of this present generation
Are the responsibility
of this generation

The policy

Enables your gift to be invested
And the interest used
With clear guidelines
On any use of the capital
So it is preserved and endures longer

Most recently we involved ourselves
In a survey prepared by Natural Church Development

30 active members completed the survey
And the results
As tabulated by a computer
Compared us to 2,700 other congregations
Across Canada

John Peter Smit
The Synod Congregational Development Consultant
Who works with this program
Told us

St. Andrew's is one of the two
Healthiest congregations
Who've done this survey
In our denomination

And that we've got something
As he said
To celebrate
Celebrate
Celebrate

To arrive at this score
Of course takes many years
Not just the last 3 or 4

Of course we have some weaknesses
And the Vision committee is working at

Suggesting ways in which
We can work at our weaknesses
And become even more healthy

These results
Will be of guidance
To the search committee
In looking for new ministerial leadership

Has God been in what we've been doing together
These past 6 ½ years
Or has it all been
Busyness
Activity for the sake of activity?

That's up to you to decide

But I for one
Believe God has been in it

Our O.T. reading from Job
Was a sobering one

While few of us
are suffering
or have ever suffered like Job

We've all asked a similar question
Where are you God?
Answer me

And we've been met
With silence

And we've had those close to us
Counsel us
Like Job's wife

To curse God
Or give up on God
Or say you're wasting your time
At the church
And we may wonder
Because we're so exhausted
Or we wonder
For all our effort it is worth while
Is it going to make a difference?

In the gospel reading
James and John
And indeed all the other disciples
Just don't get it

They don't understand
What Jesus is all about

In the verses just prior to our reading
Jesus tells them about his suffering and death
Not once but three times

And James and John
Can only think to get ahead
Of their brothers
And ask for favoured placed

But that's not
What Jesus and God's mission
Is all about

It's about God's mission
And the service
And if need be the suffering
That will happen
For the mission to be accomplished

Recently I came across a quote
On the internet
I think I sent to some of you

“when finally we discover the centre of the universe
many people will be surprised to discover
they are not in it”

That’s what James and John were after

Each week you come
And you sit in the pew
And ahead of you
Front and centre
Is the cross

It reminds us
That the centre of the universe
Is what took place on the cross
God’s love
sacrificial love

It reminds us
That all our busyness
Our whole life
Is about serving God’s mission
It’s about living
Following his example
Of sacrificial love

As Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy

the saying is sure

“if we have died with him,
We will also live with him
If we endure,

We will also reign with him;
If we deny him
He will also deny us;
If we are faithless,
He remains faithful
For he cannot deny himself”
[2 Timothy 2:11-13]

God bless you all