

Sunday, June 10, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:13 to 5:1

Mark 3:20-30

Moved from Within to Rejoice

The snowplough people jumped the curb and caused damage to the flower bed and the flowers were squished a little in the spring. The photocopier started humming odd sounds which were not healthy. A school bus was driving around the parking lot seeming to do 'donuts'. This was soon joined by an Enwin truck and on different days the Windsor city police cars were also present. The heating pipes started making gurgling sounds. Water splashes hit the floor and there were puddles everywhere. The phone started ringing- line one was answered; the phone was ringing again line two was answered. Bing bong- the doorbell rang with a man standing and wanting immediate clarification of a paper he had received in the mail. The study group was just sitting down to begin the session when one of the ladies let out a loud shriek something had quickly run down the hallway. Assistance was required in one of the offices something smelled funny. A creature of God had died in the office and was just discovered. Burial took place quickly!. Sometimes—I want to post this sign because all of these things happened within the last year or even this past week at this church!

But other things have also occurred- meetings for planning worship and social events, educational programs, choir practises, youth band practises, outreach projects discussed and implemented, gatherings for life celebrations—baptisms, weddings, funeral and memorial services. There is a lot going on and things can get hectic. We say in the church office "Next week it's going to get quiet," and it will but God's work we know is never completed and when you look at this sign there is a great deal of truth in it. There is something strange about the church. We are not just another club or civic organization. The church's view of reality is increasingly out of phase from a lot of prevailing views. In the church, we do and say things that do not always make sense to people outside of this house and yet here we are worshiping God, rejoicing in the Spirit and of course preparing to eat together—like United Churches across the country will do in these next few weeks!

But what calls us to be here? We are here to worship and to do the work Christ calls us to do. Bill Graham states: "The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service." This Christian service is what the Spirit calls us to be and do. To be like a regular family with all its quirks and challenges. A place where "whoever is present is doing God's will and are serving as brothers and sisters with Jesus.

To say this is easy but let us just take a moment and reflect on this. You believe in God. You believe that Jesus died and rose again and it is because God raised Jesus from death and like Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4, we believe that God who raised Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us to God. All of this occurred because of God's abundant grace and this grace- this outpouring of love with no limit is reaching more and more people. This is what we do= we share this message of love, and hope, of peace and joy with whomever and wherever we are.

In these last weeks we have heard of the covenants God entered with His people— Abraham and stars, Noah and the rainbow, Israel- the promised people of God, David, and the promises God made. We also know of the covenant Jesus made symbolized by his blood and death and in the cup we share at communion. All of these are covenants were fulfilled by God's promises. And when we each take time to think about these gifts, covenants and promises of God in the past, we need to give thanks because God's love is overflowing. This is an explanation of our Christian faith. Our hope is that we will live on earth and love others as Christ showed us the way but are we willing to do what it takes? As a church we have said yes to this question and we can rejoice together, we can celebrate that we are truly the church together!

Ninety three years ago the United Church of Canada came into existence because people cared and shared and wanted the message of Christ Jesus and the hope of the resurrection to be told across the country. People gathered just after the end of World War I to begin talks about uniting together their faith, their mission and their polity. And it took time= with many disagreements and compromises. But in the Mutual Street Arena in Toronto, the men who gathered came to a resolution of the United Church of Canada and a new Christian church denomination was born. A church unlike any other in the world at that time came to be through an Act of Parliament. But the purpose then as it is now has not changed- to make disciples and to grow in faith together so that all may bring glory to God.

Jesus faced many challenges in his ministry. We also face many challenges as a church but one thing is certain, we need to be positive about the Spirit being with us and guiding us. We need to be able to say that what causes us to do what we do is the Spirit which is within us as individuals and as a body of Christ, leading us and directing us to rejoice. That is, the Spirit within calls us to do something – sing, shout, or respond in such a way where others see that we have the 'something' for which they yearn. This something is the Spirit which drives us to give of ourselves and our time, effort and money so that others will hear it and receive Christ's Spirit, too!

When Jesus was teaching in the synagogue crowds of people listened to his insights, his way of telling stories of everyday life and how to live with hope. The people needed to hear this message of hope for their lives seemed to be empty and lacking a purpose. But so do we who are living over 2000 years later; we need to have hope, too!

. The people questioned Jesus and said, “He has an evil spirit”. But Jesus countered this by teaching them about the Spirit of God. He states, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand and his end comes. Jesus continued by illustrating this—no one can enter a strong man’s house and rob it unless first tying up the man. Jesus spoke clearly knowing that they needed to see proof that He was God’s Son and so he says something amazing. “All the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit- will never be forgotten they are guilty of an eternal sin.” What do you think the crowds thought of this? Who is this Jesus? And how dare he say something like this? Who is this who can say someone could be guilty of ‘eternal sin’? Jesus is the Son of God and yet he does not come out and say this specifically. At that moment Mary his mother and his brothers arrive but he doesn’t see them. Someone comes up to them and tells them that they are there outside the synagogue and want to see him. But Jesus asks, who? Who are my mother and my brothers? To illustrate the need for extending the family of faith—he looks at everyone who is seated and says, “Here are my mother and brothers—those who are doing God’s will—they are my brother and sister and mother!

In today’s world, we can hear stories from around the world very quickly. When government leaders meet to discuss current problems facing people including the economy, health, climate change and trade, we yearn for a message of hope that goes beyond what will result at the end of these discussions. People need to look beyond this week or next, but to look towards future outcomes with hope for change that results in positive gains for everyone. And people need to know how decisions by leaders will affect them.

When we reflect on our church- it is safe to say that you are my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and it is so good to be able to welcome everyone to share in the lunch table today. But this act of eating together is only the beginning of what we are called to do.. We are to do God’s will—out there—beyond the walls. We are to share what we can, do what we can with all that we are. And to do so without fear, or heartache but knowing that the Spirit from within us drives us and will protect us wherever and in whatever we do.

Jesus has called us; we answered and said yes. Now it is up to the Spirit to move us and lead us to where we are to go. And to begin—this is to sit and eat and share together and it is in this action of eating as the church that we nourish ourselves by giving thanks, breaking the bread and sharing it with each other. It is the cup of life in Christ that binds us together so that we can continue to be the church God calls us to be and become.

Paul states, “Do not lose heart. Within us we are being renewed day by day. Our light is Jesus Christ and even though we might experience troubles, craziness and the business of an active church; or as individuals or families our hope needs to be focused on our eternal glory with God. We need to focus on what is unseen and eternal. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary. But what is unseen is eternal.- That is God’s glory. This is our vision- to see God’s glory as the whole family of God. Our hope is that one day, those who have gone before us, will welcome us in God’s heaven and we will see His glory together.

Sometimes this is difficult to understand or focus upon because of the craziness of the world of church life. But when we stop, reflect and experience the Spirit moving in us and through us, when we look around at our brothers and sisters, we cannot help but give God thanks, to smile, to laugh and breathe freely. God is here. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.