

Sunday, September 17, 2017

Exodus 14:19-31

Matthew 18: 21-35

Creating a New Vision

In these past weeks there have been challenging situations around the world and specifically North America with fires burning uncontrollably in BC and Manitoba, heavy rainfall in some areas, drought in Africa and of course the rains and wind of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. These storms have destroyed much property and land with extensive flooding in Texas as well as in the Caribbean islands from Barbuda to Cuba and inland to Florida. Throughout the world there has also been mass immigration with people leaving from one country to go to safety in another in several countries in Africa. With all of these disasters resulting due to too much water, heat and wind or lack of food, water to drink and a place to live and grow, many people have been facing very challenging situations.

In our own region, excessive rain fell on August 29 which overwhelmed draining sewers and water systems. As of now there have been over 6000 homes with claims of flooded basements. Some areas of the city were damaged more than others yet the result was a call for help to pick up garbage which includes parts of walls, floors, doors and cupboards as well as many possessions often stored away in basements for safekeeping.

But in all of these situations one thing that comes to the minds of many of these people is not just in grieving what was once before, but a vision or the capacity to envisage the future or plan for the future. With a vision there is hope and there is expectation. When all is gone, there is still hope for something to occur to bring about positive change.

Sometimes it takes a challenging situation to bring new vision. Priorities are often discerned differently after these challenges are experienced and this is what required by everyone several times in one's life. Often the pattern is that there is a challenge, which causes an ending, a time of confusion or sorting out or grieving losses which then leads to a new vision for the future. This pattern is a transition and it is experienced by people all the time. It is also experienced by groups, organizations and the church.

A transition like no other also took place on the banks of the Red Sea many years ago when Moses lead his people on dry land as they prepared for their journey to the Promised Land. After finally agreeing to let the Hebrew people have freedom to leave Egypt and to follow Moses the Pharaoh realized that he had let his slave workers go. He sent his armies after them

but God intervened. This was the moment when God told Moses to raise his hand and through the night God drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it to dry land. The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground with the walls of water on either side of them.

The Egyptians pursued them and with horses and chariots they followed the Israelites into the sea. After all the people had safely crossed, God told Moses to stretch his hand over the sea so that the waters would flow back as they should. He did this and the wall of water quickly swept them into the sea. Not one of the Egyptians survived. When the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, they feared God and put their trust in the God and in Moses his servant.

What did the Israelites learn about God that day? That he was to be trusted for he was powerful and he had a plan for their future. They saw the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers and they came to know God was in control. They then needed to acknowledge God's call to them and to realize the depth of His love for them—at the expense of the Egyptians. So they celebrate crossing the border in the hope of a new life in a new land and a place where they can freely live and love God.

In recent weeks and months you have seen images and read stories about people so wanting to live in Canada they walked for miles in the prairie cold. You've also seen images of people who have been living in tents in the Middle East and pray for immigration to occur. These people have a vision—a new and better life where there is freedom to grow and prosper. But to what extent do we share this vision? Or maybe creating a vision is not a clear task to do because the vision you had years ago is still coming into its own.

What does creating a vision mean for us as the church beginning our programs and activities in this academic year? Are we still holding back because of what we used to be? What we are now is most relevant to who is present today. What we do today impacts the lives of people not just in this place and in this moment, but affects people for generations to come.

As we venture forward in our journey of faith through this season of creation, what hope and expectations are we creating or imagining or re-imagining? What are your expectations and hopes for our church? What are we striving to create anew?

This past week, I shared in a study time of what transitional ministry involves. The church is always in flux, change and transitions. Why? Because the church is composed of

people—this week alone people I have connected with are in transition—two families are grieving because of a death of a family member; one couple begins their marriage. Today marks the beginning of Legion week when we remember and honour those challenges and changes of veterans' who returned home after war and found a different country. We will remember the horror of war and wonder about the future of the world as we seek peace but there seems to be much turmoil. This is a vision that we need to create – peace and shalom and how we are to achieve it?

What did people of Israel do once they reached the east side? They celebrated and they grieved. They grieved their past and rejoiced as they looked to their future. The vision they had as slaves in Egypt had to be refocused, reimagined and rethought. They were now free.

Is the church in transition? Yes, and it is good because the church always changes yet it is Jesus Christ who remains the same always and forever. And because of this we can faithfully follow his teachings and live His way. If there are problems along the way we have the ability to reach out and forgive. There is good news that the church is in transition- there are always endings and new beginnings—children are gifts from God and to be blessed to live a long time is a gift from God. How we respond is through loving others as God loves us. God's love will never change but we must respond in faith to do what he calls us to do. We may not do as he asked us or do something that causes us to seek forgiveness, but God will call us to rejoice in him no matter what we do in his name and for his sake. We are to also forgive others when put to the test and fail. We are to try again and seek a new vision- a new hope and have expectations larger than ourselves.

In all the situations around the world and in our city- the vision is clear—God is in control and as storms come and go we need to be ready to understand who He is and have hope for this life and prepare with blessed expectation for what is to come. God saved the people of Israel out of love, their journey to the Promised Land had just begun. They did not know the way but they knew why. And this was the basis of their vision God lead them as they walked through the desert so that they could continue to grow in faith and live life to its fullest.

How strong is your faith? Would you have walked across the Red Sea knowing that Moses was holding up his arms to do this? What if he got tired? Would it matter to you if Moses' story went more modern- and he told God forget it as he was just directing traffic. How strong are you amidst losses, and grief and recognizing the challenges of living? What keeps you grounded in Christ Jesus?

On July 19, 1996 after weeks of steady precipitation, the Chicoutimi district in Quebec received 11 inches of rain in just a few hours⁶. More than 8 feet of water passed through areas of Chicoutimi and La Baie, completely leveling the Basin neighborhood. Over 16,000 people had to be evacuated and 488 homes were swept away. As a result, the river overflowed, burst its banks and caused several landslides, 7 casualties and took over many buildings. For no apparent result, one tiny white house managed to survive through the daily pressure of millions of gallons of water and debris, the equivalent of the amount of water running over the Niagara Falls. The Little White House stood for four days while raging waters ran all around its base. When the flooding stopped the house was still standing tall and acted as a bright symbol of perseverance for the water-logged town. This “little white house” La Petite Maison Blanche still stands and now houses a museum which commemorates the floods. Instead of more structures around the house, a placid park was established all around the empty grounds as a place to remember the floods and the importance of trying again, moving forward in faith and having a new vision which leads to a renewed sense of hope and expectation.

What kind of vision are you creating—for yourself, your family, others? What do you see as in hope and expectation for Glenwood Church—the UCC as a whole? What is it you seek from God as you look to the past and then to your future? God is calling you to have hope. Pray to God to show you the way and stand strong in your faith—be like the little white house and know that God is in control of your life. Amen.

PRAYER

Gracious God you call us to you to have a vision of hope and expectation yet we often look to the past and stay there. We cannot change the past but we do remember. Help us O God to have faith strong enough to overcome anything—enable us to rejoice as we seek your guidance as you lead us and speak us your plan for our lives. Hear us we pray, In Jesus’ name. Amen..