

Sunday, September 9, 2018

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9.22-23

James 2:1-10. 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

God Cares for Our Church Family

Glenwood United Church is celebrating 63 years of faithful ministry. The Good News we share is the hope that goes beyond Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It is the gift of love we have with others as we live our life following God's ways and the teachings of Jesus. As a church we are the Body of Christ which is made up of people in all stages of life. We are all called to extend ourselves and be involved in each other's lives because of the love God gives to us to share with others. What unites us is our worship of God and how we each may respond to the music, the word preached and in what we share with God from our hearts. This is what is amazing about the church and its people because at any moment in our worship time God will speak to your hearts of those whom he has created as long as you are willing to hear!

God's creation is amazing and through the behaviour and nature of some of the creatures we may learn about our humanity and our need to grow stronger in our abilities and our actions.

- 1) Did you know that if you put a buzzard in a pen that is 6 feet by 8 feet and is entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of its ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner? The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of 10 to 12 feet. Without space to run, as is its habit, it will not even attempt to fly, but will remain a prisoner in a small jail with no top.
- 2) Did you know that the ordinary bat that flies around at night, is a remarkable nimble creature in the air, but cannot take off from a level place? If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly and painfully, until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it will take off like a flash.
- 3) And if you drop a bumblebee into an open tumbler, it will remain there to die unless helped out? It does not see the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides or near the bottom. It will continue to seek a way where none exists, until it can no longer even try.

In many ways, we are like the buzzard, the bat, and the bumblebee. Through life, we struggle with many kinds of problems and frustrations, never realizing that all we have to do is to have faith and look up! As we grow in faith and in relationship with God and each other as a church family we continue to look for the solution to life's problems.

And together we are and will be blessed and given hope that all will be ok, even good and better yet great because of our collective faith in God! These blessings might have already begun—you've seen someone you haven't seen in a while, you've embraced and smiled as you

met someone a stranger now a new friend. Maybe we've already sung a favourite hymn or song or were blessed by hearing our choir sing a beautiful anthem. As I share these words you are remembering and honouring blessings that God has given you in this place many years before. Even in this moment you are anticipating God's love shared and shown in human form. But in order to receive God's blessings and be spiritually lifted up, you too must have open hearts and be willing to lift up others. This is what has been happening throughout these last 63 years in Glenwood Church. People have travelled together throughout life's journeys and as the walk of life takes on new directions, there is an expectation and anticipation of what God will do next because the Spirit speaks to us all. And we have been given the ability to think, feel and act in response to what we share together. The question arises for us all, when are we to respond and what should we do? And just how persistent is God's spirit?

There is a story of a magazine company which purchased a new computer several years ago. The computer was to compile data and send out subscription notices to customers whose subscriptions had lapsed. One day something went wrong with the machine, and before the error was discovered (about a month later), a certain rancher in Colorado had received 9,374 notices that his subscription had expired. Someone in the magazine office posted the letter the company received from him. Inside was a check for one year's subscription along with a handwritten note saying: "I give up! Send me the magazine." He was won over by their consistent, persistent attention.

This is what still wins people over to become followers of Jesus Christ. It is the consistent witness how we as a church live before others: the kindness and gentility that are consistently evident, the willingness to listen without judging and to help without expecting something in return, the smile that's always there, the warm hug or handshake that we can count on, the friendship that doesn't blow hot and cold, the faith that is evident in good times and other times, as well. We articulate Christ's presence and power most effectively not with eloquent words but rather with a steady, faithful Christian life that others can see and believe in. And this is the reason why we can celebrate 63 years of faithful service! Because we love God and God cares for our church family just as we care and love others in Jesus' name!

The Gospel reading from Mark 7 is a story about Jesus being challenged in his thoughts and ministry. He had just explained the rationale that all of God's creation is good to eat and nothing needs to be excluded - all is clean. After this discussion Jesus decides to leave Galilee and goes to Tyre which is modern Lebanon. His reputation proceeds him as his fame as a healer and teacher has begun to spread. Soon after entering a house, immediately learning that Jesus is in the neighbourhood, a woman comes and falls at his feet. According to Mark she begs Jesus to heal her daughter from a demon. She is desperate for his help because she does not know what to do for her daughter. This demon could have been any illness that had not been seen or understood before. This woman is very upset and upon looking at her face Jesus notices a couple of things about her—she is not Jewish nor is she subject to the current protocol about

speaking to a man who is a stranger to her. He identifies her background- Greek and is from Syro Phoenicia. She begs Jesus again to drive out the demon.

In the parallel story in Matthew 15 Jesus says to the woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel! Does he utter these words to the disciples who watch or is Jesus thinking these words out loud? What should he do? The woman ignores his words and kneels before him. She is desperate for a miracle—her daughter needs healing. Jesus is not sure what to do. Jesus then replies with these words which don’t seem to be appropriate for him. Jesus mission is to fulfill God’s promise to the Jews. He states, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” What did he mean? The children of Israel needed healing first and if I don’t honour this, what then? Am I to heal their household pets? Or am I to include everyone?

The woman who is quick to respond challenges Jesus by stating—even the dogs under the table eat of the crumbs of the children. Pointing out to Jesus that yes he came for the Jewish people first, but when they have had their fill, there is still leftovers of which others may receive nourishment and care. This insight in faithfulness intrigues Jesus and as they talk, Jesus heals the daughter and tells her that it is her great faith which has brought healing. Jesus is in control and in power of the demon and because of her insight, the daughter is healed.

But let’s focus on the woman’s spiritual insight which she has pointed out to Jesus. Yes, Jesus came to redeem the Jewish people, God’s chosen, and bring them back to their creator. But did he not come for others as well so that they may learn of God’s love and wisdom and healing as well as to offer them hope? This Greek woman simply asked for a crumb, a morsel a little bit a taste of God in flesh-Jesus is right in front of her and she believed that he could heal her daughter. Her faith is based on the understanding of God’s will and not mere emotion. Jesus is challenged by this. Is having great faith a goal for all people? Is Jesus to be the Saviour of all, not just the chosen people?

Jesus had just spoken about all of God’s creation being good and clean. And it is this Greek woman of faith who points out to him the flaw of his mission—he is to become Saviour of all. This woman showed the relationship of faith and humility and her dependence upon God. She had a quiet enduring faith and it was steadfast and resilient as she sought out Jesus whom she had heard was the teacher and healer sent from God. She believed he could bring healing to her daughter and it did not matter her background.

Glenwood United Church welcomes everyone in the name of Jesus Christ- it does not matter your age, your background, your family situation, whom you love or your abilities—you are created by God and all are a part of this church family. We strive to be inclusive and prayerfully focus our spirituality on Jesus the Christ who learned of what having great faith means. He looked beyond the differences of people and established that the foundation of faithfulness is what we hold in common. As a church family we have shared the sacraments with many people under the knowledge and belief that all are welcome. There is no –east,west, south or north in Jesus’; we are one as we have come in to faith. We are a family of faith and

we are called to go beyond individuality and be involved in each other's lives because God calls us to give and share love. It is this relationship with God- Father, Son and Spirit which guides us and moves us and has done so for 63 years! But we must be willing to act, to respond and to seek God's guidance and grace to do this. And we must look beyond ourselves, our needs and look up to God in prayer.

Let us remember to look up, praise God with thanksgiving and ask for a stronger faith to enable to get through all of life's difficulties. God cares for our church family; we need to just look up and rejoice.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we pray that your Spirit will touch the hearts of all those present today. We pray that those with anxious feelings and thoughts may be calmed knowing that Jesus too was challenged as he looked to help many, did not include all in his mission. Help us O God to realize that we as humans are all in one club together. Enable your Spirit to help us discern our lives and to call us to knowledge and greater faith in you. Bless us this day and encourage us to share with others in faith and hope. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.