

Sunday, September 11 2022 Pentecost 14 ***“Stepping into the Post Pandemic Church”***

Psalm 84, Ephesians 4: 4-16 Matthew 28:16-20

Praise the Lord He never changes! But it seems everything else has changed in these last few years. Or so it seems! We have to remember that the infants born in 2001 are now turning 21 years old. They have not known what it means to live prior to the attacks of 9/11 and this includes crossing a border without a passport, upgraded security measures at borders and in airplanes and learning that the world's leaders are continuing to change and evolve how societal and cultural differences make a difference for the present and for generations to come. Many of these young people have never written a cheque out of their bank accounts and the internet is where they do all research, upload homework, find games, and communicate with others. Friends are those the young people and children they met mostly 2 years ago due to online learning and connecting with them by riding bikes or eating out is unheard of. Most of the time they only talk from their own homes or rooms and this was normal activity prior to any lockdowns and continues today.

World history is evolving as historical leaders are aging and dying –with Gorbachev's Russia no longer in place the people are realizing what Putin has done in attacking Ukraine. And now with the death of Queen Elizabeth II the British monarchy will move into the hands of King Charles bringing about a new era and a new future will emerge as we steadily move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It used to be said that Canada and the US were Christian nations but recent statistics do not support this. Demographics have shifted to many people saying they are spiritual- having some sort of a connection to someone bigger than themselves but this is not realized through the traditional or any church. There is a dynamic shift of what being Christian today means or the perception of this. The Bible has some meaning but it is not read widely even though it is available now more than ever. Yet one of the most fundamentals or tenets of the Christian faith is simply God does not change- he is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Franklin Graham, the son of well-known and respected evangelist Billy Graham, recently toured and preached in London, England on his “God Loves You” tour. Prior to his preaching,

British broadcaster Piers Morgan invited him to appear on his television show. In the conversation, Morgan stated, "Times are changing. People are changing," shouldn't he (Graham) reconsider his stance on important social and Biblical issues. "We've moved on so much from large swaths of the Bible, he said. In other words, let's get with the modern take on social issues. But Graham responded," God doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, today and forever." Yet there are many who do think God left because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. And where is the church and what does it mean to be Christian today? Graham's response is that even though times change—with modern technology, world leaders prominent and then fading away, God does not change. And Graham states that what is striking is that people are facing more difficulties on a regular basis, there is fear and anxiety at every age, yet people are not turning to God. Morgan however, revealed the very heart of the world's spiritual problem: Without the authority and reliability of God's Word we would all be without hope." And this is where we find ourselves today as we step into the post pandemic church. Searching for hope and wondering where we will find it and will it be in the church you attend in person, watch online or both?

The church itself has and will reinvent itself. No longer do people attend weekly in person. Since the advent of livestream church services people can choose to watch this sermon at their convenience and for however long they want. And yet those who are committed to serving Christ and His church are in person and searching for community, comradery and the need to find hope as Christ Jesus offers it. Young people today do not see hope in the faces of people like previous generations did—they simply do not interact with older generations. And yet those who have hope share it. Those whose hope is in Christ- share it but with whom and how? By building up community friendship and mostly making connections.

Glenwood Church is a community church in the city of Windsor. Foundational to all that we do is begun with prayer to God- Father, Son and Spirit. The reason Glenwood Church exists is to support community people- neighbours far and wide by the simple act of love and offering hope. This is what this church has been doing-and will continue to do because God calls us to do so and we need each other to live, love and laugh as the body of Christ in this place.

We are a church that prays together- in our meetings, worship services, study groups and as we share together in fundraisers, events and just being together. Our worship time calls us to prayer and praise God, to open the scriptures which are so relevant to us because in 2022 we are very much like the Early Churches established by Paul and called to tell others the message of Jesus.

In Paul's letter to the young church at Ephesus he emphasizes the unity of the body of Christ. Paul could not have imagined that the church would be seen live through electronic means into people's homes when he wrote the letter offering hope to the Ephesians. But he states, 'There is one body, and one Spirit just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.: This one hope is God.' Paul continues by saying that the gifts God gives to people is so that the body of Christ would be built up. God wants the church to grow and be built up in order that we all come to the unity of faith in Jesus. This is where our hope lies; it is the purpose of the church. So when we gather- in person and online like in this moment right now God sees this church is alive. He knows the hearts of all who are watching, participating and responding to these words shared. And God knows that the post pandemic church will continue to have its challenges until and unless people who are searching find their way home. And this is why Jesus came. To seek the lost, to save them from sin and to know that our purpose on earth will only be fulfilled when we fulfill the commandments Christ gave his disciples. These commandments are- to love one another and to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This is the church's purpose and to fulfill this, we are to also teach others to do the same.

But and this is big—we're not left alone to do this. God is with us. For as the prophet Joshua states (1:9), be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

The post pandemic is evolving even now. Yes there will be some churches closing—but this is not because of the pandemic; it is because the focus of the church shifted away from what was needed at that time. There is also the reality that people are not sure that they need

God in their lives. But when we reflect on Queen Elizabeth II she spoke frequently about her personal Christian faith and asked for prayer on the day of her coronation. “I want to ask you all, whatever your religion may be, to pray for me on that day,” she said, “to pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.” She did this well.

But what about you? Yes we use technology to reach out to those near and far but this is a means to share the message of Christ. And the message of Christ is to tell others the Good News. The question is do you know what the Good News is? Have you experienced it and are you willing to receive it? This is the good news—hope. And hope happens here at Glenwood Church as we receive people who are hurting, lonely, happy, searching and who generally need a friend in Christ. For we all face the same things as we live our daily lives. We are called to share the simple act of loving others and caring for them as a community of faith focused on having hope for tomorrow.

Let us remember this as we give thanks; as we are renewed in faith and as we seek hope for tomorrow! Let us pray

God of hope we praise you. Be with us O God as we share and show our love for one another.

Enable us to experience hope as we see Christ in others and as others see Christ in us. Amen.