

“A Day of Celebration; a Day of Expectation”

*A sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman
at St. Andrew’s United Church, Sudbury*

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Confirmation Sunday - Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:44-48 Psalm 98 John 15:9-17

It could be the title of a lot of things. “A Day of Celebration; a Day of Expectation.” Most mothers have such experiences as they celebrate this day and also still hold out expectations for their offspring, no matter how old they are.

It certainly applies to Rachel Notley as she forms a government in Alberta, reminding the citizens of that province that she is not the head of an inexperienced caucus, but a caucus that represents the province in which they live and serve – business owners and workers, teachers and students, experienced MLA’s and those new to politics. Their average age, under 40, reflects the average age of the citizens of the youngest province in Canada. It is a week of celebration and expectation, as it is for the renewal of the government of David Cameron in Great Britain and the election of Patrick Brown in Ontario leadership for those who support those political parties.

Every celebration involves expectation. If we are open to celebration, then we live with expectation.

Two weeks ago Connor shared his camping experiences with us in the time up front, and Veronica Stover shared the experience of being a camp counsellor. Tomorrow Veronica turns 18, and a birthday is all about celebration and expectation especially as one plans to go onto post-secondary education.

And Connor and Avery enter into the vows of confirmation, a time of celebration and expectation for sure.

The gospel passage for today follows along the image of the grape vine that was the reading for last week. It continues the discussion of what it means to be a productive, fruitful Christian.

Differently stated, it is about how we live up to our expectations, or at least God's expectations, and do not simply worry about getting the celebrations right.

William Domeris and Richard Wortley, in their study based on John's gospel, offer a mythical scenario of how people might try to understand the teachings of Jesus in that gospel. In the debate about the future of the church happening at a university setting, they recreate this imaginary scene: one speaker advocated violent revolution, calling the church to force change in society; another speaker was a proponent of passive, peaceful resistance. One person spoke of reconciliation among all churches, and still another suggested that dividing the churches based on who was the holder of the right beliefs, and who were not, made sense. Others thought the "Kairos" moment had been reached, that is, God was present to lead us into a new and exciting reality, but some were uncertain as to what God was really saying to the church. And others were sure that it was not so much God was saying anything to them, but in fact God was calling them to get out of the lecture hall and into the streets to be of value and help to others.

It was not a time of passive acceptance at all, they conclude, but a time for teachers to listen to their students, for preachers to listen to their congregation, and for churches to listen to the poor and downtrodden who will teach them the message of Christ.

And we would do well as a congregation to listen to the messages of the Confirmation Class who studied and learned together, and who have shared in this service. Their questions and insights have infused this gathering, and their insights will be a blessing for months and years to come.

In the book *Seven Measures of Success*, produced by the American Centre for Association Leadership, it is suggested that one of the key measures of success for any association (organizations like Red Cross, VON, as well as churches and service clubs) is the fact that no matter what happens, they keep a focus on their mission and purpose. And they are eager to build alliances with others who share their concern for and interest in the community.

Great associations can teach those of us who seek to be effective, even great churches, that what is of primary importance is knowing what we seek to accomplish, and going ahead and doing that with the help of others.

So let's celebrate, but also let's live with expectation for the future that is yet to unfold.