

***“Does Today feel like a Day God has Made?”***

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

***March 29, 2015***

***Palm Sunday***

*Psalm 118:1-4, 19-29 Mark 11:1-11*

The Rev. Maurice Boyd was minister of Central United Church in Sarnia from 1967-1975. During that time he had a radio ministry that was entitled “Moments of Glad Grace,” in which he offered one minute reflections a minute to 12 noon every weekday.

In one such reflection he told the following story:

“I have a friend who becomes annoyed with people who speak of Monday as though it has to be a bad day. She doesn’t agree with them, and thinks that their dread of Monday is an ungrateful way to receive the gift of a new morning.

“I agree with her! It is foolish to hate Mondays, for if we live to be seventy, we shall have hated ten years of the only life we have.

“We should learn to say about Monday what we feel about every other day. ‘This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.’ Those words make excellent tonic for a depressed or complaining spirit.”

How wonderful that would be, were it true.

As the world reels from the news of a plane deliberately crashed in the Alps, we wish the co-pilot could have been soothed so simply and so completely by such words.

What does it mean to us to even think, much less say, that this is a day that the Lord has made?

Valerie Pitt, a retired diaconal minister in London Conference who is working as a support minister in Huron-Perth Presbytery, supporting those in active ministry, wrote in a recent email to those ministers a similar message:

“I love Tuesday! Tuesday is becoming one of my favourite mornings of the week. The garbage truck comes to my place as well as the recycling. I love to see things I have accumulated being taken away. It makes me feel a little lighter about life and less bogged down.”

The purge that happens each Tuesday makes it a holy day for Valerie, clearly a day “that the Lord has made, and we should rejoice and be glad in it.”

In the middle of the passage read from Psalm 118, we read similar words: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

In the midst of a plethora of thanksgivings, the Psalmist summarizes all that is good with those words.

The parade of Palm Sunday (Mark speaks of “branches” being spread without identifying their actual nature) is like many demonstrations in life – a parade, a celebration, but always close to becoming a demonstration, a melee, a time of tension between celebrants and officials.

We have seen too often what appear to be quiet, peaceful demonstrations turn into difficult confrontations between demonstrators and police or armed forces. If this is truly a day that the Lord has made, should we even be demonstrating at all?

There are times when we must speak up at what we perceive to be injustice. And there are times when if this is the day that the Lord has made, we must act in principle with how God expects us to act – and not remain silent in the face of injustice.

Most of us rely on the weather to tell us whether or not this is a day that God has created. A sunny day without snow at the end of March is a good day; temperatures of minus 21 with the wind chill not so good. A day without boots is a good day; a day needing boots and gloves and scarves not so good, unless we are seeking the final ski run of the season.

In his book ***In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership***, Henri Nouwen tells how early in his ministry he felt like a tightrope walker trying to inspire the crowds, as long as he did not fall in the process. He learned that ministry within the church – indeed, life within the church – is not a solo experience but a communal experience, even a mutual experience. It is something done with and for others.

And the Psalmist says: “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Not “May you rejoice” or “May I rejoice” but “Let us rejoice and be glad in it – together.”

Did Jesus have a good day on Palm Sunday? Given what he was about to face, hardly. Yet he was surrounded by friends and disciples, followers and supporters. He knew that he did not have to face the future alone.

And those around him were encouraged and strengthened by his own demeanour and attitude. How often we face that in life – where the person being challenged and attacked gives the strength to those around, who feel helpless and uncertain.

May that presence of Jesus encourage us this day, and every day, as we move forward in his name. AMEN