

## **“Living with a New Spirit and a New Purpose”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church  
for ***Sunday, June 12, 2016, Pentecost 5*** – also

91<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of The United Church of Canada

Scripture Readings: Psalm 32 (VU #759)

Galatians 2:15-21

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

It is good for me to hear the Bible passages read every Sunday. I have read the Bible a few times, but each week I hear with new ears what is read. Now, I must admit, these readings are not always easy to listen to, or even to fully comprehend, but we all need to hear that God wants the best for us and cares for us regardless of who we are and what we do.

As I say, it is good to hear that, but sometimes what the Bible says is not that direct, or clear, or even consistent.

Take, for example, today’s readings. The Psalm speaks to our need to be open and honest about ourselves – our strengths, our limitations, our opportunities. If we are clear as to what we offer, we will do well.

Contrariwise, the theme of the passage from Galatians is that we should live by faith and not by self-justification.

Live by faith, or be self-aware? Do not justify ourselves by our gifts and skills, or be fully cognizant of our strengths and opportunities?

What a dilemma!

This week I have searched a number of self-help writers’ blogs, well-known books, and web-based videos. The information amount is huge for those who are looking for clarity around what we can offer, and what God expects of us.

One writer offers nine questions that we need to ask ourselves in order to be clear about where the spirit can and does lead us, and how we find hope for the future. Nine different questions. Let me simplify his views by reducing those questions to four:

- 1) When have you been happiest in your life?
- 2) What qualities do you most admire in other people?
- 3) What makes you feel alive and energized?
- 4) If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

Each of those questions, maybe not so obvious in the first one, speaks about our interaction with others, or the world in general.

When were you the happiest? I assume that was when your relationship with others, and your sense of self, was supported and encouraged by those around you.

Now I do not want to embarrass anyone, so you need not answer this question (blink your eyes if you agree – no one but me can see the response), but how many of you felt the happiest when you were all by yourself with no one around? As I thought, no takers out of close to 100 people. We are happiest when we have a sense of being and working with others.

What qualities do you admire in others? A question that clearly puts the focus on those around you, that you have met, known, worked with, shared life with. The focus is not on you, but on others.

What makes you feel alive and energized? Few of us reach a state of feeling alive when we are living in isolation. There is something and/or someone(s) that nurture us, encourage us, and give us reason to live fully.

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be?

The focus is not on you, or at least should not be, but on what the needs of others, even in the whole world, should be.

Living by faith is measured, or made clear, when we are open to wholeness and hope in our lives. We never give up; we never feel like a failure; we never dismiss opportunities. Wherever we are, and whatever we are called to do, we have confidence that we can succeed – and will.

It was that spirit that led to the United Church being formed over a century ago. Yes, today is the 91<sup>st</sup> anniversary, but birthing a church takes even longer than birthing a child. The process was at least 15-20 years in the making, and that is only measuring the push to the unification that eventually became known as the United Church. Uniting movements in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Canada are significant (and necessary) precursors to the formation of The United Church of Canada itself in 1925.

If we can but share the sense of wholeness and hope that comes from God with all we meet, even just within our families, what a contribution we would make in this world, within this time in history.