

## **“When is ‘Just Enough’ Not Really Enough?”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of  
St. Andrew’s United Church  
for Sunday, October 2, 2016

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

**Scripture Readings: Lamentations 3:22-26**

**Luke 17:5-10**

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

I invite you to pause and think with me about a moment in your life that was a defining moment. It may be that it determined what you planned to do with your life. It may have been something that determined your values or moral compass in life, or it may simply have determined how you live your life -- your approach to cooking, shopping, personal time, and planning for the future.

Sometimes we are absolutely clear about why we do some things (a child raised in a household where there was alcohol abuse may never take a drink as an adult, or someone raised by a parent in the military and so moved so much as a child that he or she never wants to move as an adult. There are other moments that only appear to be significant when we look back on them. They may define why we do what we do, and in other cases they may simply define who we are in a clear and concise way.

The latter was the case for me about 4 years ago as I drove into Toronto from Kitchener on a Sunday afternoon. I was heading to the Home Show at the CNE grounds, and made sure I left soon after the church coffee hour so that I would have a reasonable time at the show.

It took less than an hour to get to the CNE grounds when I turned off the Lakeshore Rd., so I was hopeful to have a lengthy afternoon to see what was there.

To my amazement, then my frustration, then my upset, the traffic was not moving into the parking area. There was only one parking lot available, and people were entering the lot from three different directions. People not only were attending the Home Show but also a hockey game in the Ricoh Coliseum next door. It took about 55 minutes to drive from Kitchener to Toronto, and then over 45 minutes to drive the kilometre (or less) from the Lakeshore Rd to the parking area.

Now all of that can get a person upset and frustrated, but so far the story has little significance for today’s sermon (other than showing small things can irk me). So, why the story?

Well, as I got to within about 200 feet of the parking lot gate, where one had to pay on your way in, a large wooden sign met drivers like me. On it was painted: “Cash only at the gate. \$15.00 per car.”

Now I had been in line close to 40 minutes by this time I saw the sign, but I rarely have a lot of money in my pocket. I quickly checked and was pleased to see I did have \$20 in my

wallet, but I was still ticked. Why was the sign so late in the entranceway that one could only pay cash – why was it not at the entrance to the CNE itself where cars were lined up?

When it is a matter of justice and fairness to me (something I learned from my parents due to their own experiences as children facing injustice), I cannot keep silent. So I said to the fellow in the parking kiosk:

“That sign saying that one must pay cash is poorly placed; it should be near the entrance to the park because if someone does not have cash you are stuck in line for over half an hour for no reason.”

“I had nothing to do with the sign,” came the reply. Fair enough.

So I began to offer a suggestion in a new way. “I realize you have nothing to do with how the parking lot is set up and the signage, but maybe you could tell your boss the problem with how the sign was placed – it might not work for many people.”

And this is when the significant response that I have pondered many times since that day was heard. “I could not tell my boss how to do his job, or I MIGHT BE FIRED.”

Unable to leave at that, I said over my shoulder as the gate was raised so I could enter: “I am glad I do not work here because I would never want to work in a place where I could not offer suggestions to my boss, especially if I was passing on concerns from clients or customers. I’ll be praying for you.”

Now I have thought about that moment many times, and have prayed for a fellow in such a dead-end, non-life-giving job, and never did I see it having anything to do with any biblical message until this week.

Hear the story from Luke? It says that servants should never feel that they deserve any special treatment or reward if they simply do their job. Feed the animals, then come in – next responsibility is prepare the meal, and only eat after the family has eaten.

How authoritarian is that? Why would Jesus tell a story such as this as a gospel story if he is simply making sure servants (or slaves) do their duty?

In truth Jesus is not just supporting the slave structure of his day. He is speaking to us all. We should never think that we deserve special rewards or honours simply by doing what is expected of us.

In the case of the parking lot attendant, he should have realised his job is more than just taking money – it is serving people. That never crossed his mind.

In truth I think that we do not say ‘thank you’ enough for what people do, but Jesus is speaking about the fact that doing what is part of ordinary life is not something that deserves honours.

And in fact we do not get gold (or even bronze) medals for doing the laundry, washing the kitchen floor, or playing with our grand-children.

So if we understand this story as a story to guide us as Christians, what is the message for today?

In my time this story has been about expectations and commitment – you do what you should do and should not expect any kind of reward or acknowledgment.

It underlined the language of duty and expectation.

But I would like to suggest it is not quite that stark. There are basic expectations we face as humans, as church members, as Christians, and that may underline the basic life, but living one's faith is never measured by doing the minimum expected, it is measured by reaching beyond the minimum to care in special and significant ways.

Today is the beginning of our Stewardship program, and we thank you – each one of you – for being here and being a part of this congregation, for visiting us today or on other occasions, for being a dynamic part of the programs, meeting, activities, and events here.

Each one of you has your reasons for being here, and neither I, nor the committee, are here to tell you how to fulfill living your faith.

But like most things in life – supporting the arts, being concerned about community groups, caring for friends, even cheering for your favourite sports team or supporting your former college or university, it involves more than just showing up.

And so when we send out an invitation to the congregation to be involved, and ask you to let us know where your interests are, we are offering the invitation, but we also promise to hear what you have to say and respond to your ideas, suggestions, and interests.

There is something worse than never asking for people's opinions – it is to ask for them and not listen to them.

You see, the parking attendant never asked for my opinion about the sign. So he could ignore what I had to say, I suppose, with good conscience. But the City of Sudbury recently did ask for my opinion – and yours as well – about noise in the city. And because I was asked to give my opinion, I did respond. Maybe that is why I was so incensed at the headlines of the Sudbury Star this past Thursday. "Noise Bylaw for 'Whiners'."

It seems that at least one of our Councillors (not in any way associated with St. Andrew's United Church nor our ward, I am quick to point out) finds those who have responded to an invitation to speak about the need for a sound by-law as "whiners."

I came from Toronto two years ago to reside back here in Sudbury, and at the time we had a very famous mayor who was known for many things outside of Toronto, but in Toronto he was the most attentive person to citizen concerns and individual complaints.

He was known to go to a home late in the evening just to hear first-hand a concern that a citizen had about city services. In Rob Ford's eyes, that was just part of doing the job.

So it was shocking to hear a Sudbury councillor suggest that recent concerns, expressed on-line through an open invitation to the citizens of Sudbury, makes me and others 'whiners'.

It seems that I have no right to ask why does a local bar need to have loud music and boisterous crowds on the street until 2:00 a.m. or later (typical for a Friday and Saturday night, as it was last night); I do not understand why street cleaners need to start at 3:00 a.m. or shunting of train cars usually happens between 2 am and 4:30 a.m. in the downtown core.

If the city wants the downtown to be revived and more people will live downtown, there needs to be better control over the noise.

Sending out a survey and not listening to the results is not even doing the bare minimum of what I expect of a councillor. Councillors may not be slaves, but they certainly are to have the interests of the citizens in mind, and not their own interests as at least a couple of our city councillors seem to think.

Jesus reminded those of his day that we all have basic expectations to live up to, and we only impact the world in a significant way if we go beyond those basic expectations.

Life is not about doing the least – life is about doing what we can to help others, and support their needs in daily life.

Today we thank you for your role here at St. Andrew's United, and also invite you to look for new ways you can be a significant part of all that the church seeks to do in our programs, activities, and ministries both here and around the world as we seek to live God's mission with our partners.

Now it seems sometimes trying to do enough is not really enough, but I am encouraged by a motto seen on a webpage this week:

**Gratitude turns what we have into enough.**

So thank you for what you do and who you are; for what you give and how you share. And if we all live with an attitude of gratitude, we will surely have enough.