

## **“Where I Find the Power of God in My Life”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew's United Church  
For Sunday, August 19, 2018 by James Warner-Smith  
Scripture Reading: John 6:51-59

Good morning. Welcome again to summer worship at St. Andrew's United Church, especially to everyone from All People's, St. Mark's and St. Peter's. We're glad to be gathered with you this morning.

If we haven't met, my name is James. I'm a member of the congregation here at St. Andrew's. My family and I moved to Sudbury about five years ago. After a year of pondering, we chose St. Andrew's as our church home. In fact, Alison became the Office Manager here at St. Andrew's so she's the most involved of any of us. Our daughter Jacqueline, has been involved with the Sunday School for the past year or so as well. We have all sung in the choir and our son Chris spent his first three years studying Architecture here at the Place while Laurentian prepared the building down the street that is the campus for the program. He was very appreciative of the coffee and snacks that the Church laid out for the students while they were here.

St. Andrew's is a great place. We felt the call of the quality and diversity of Bob Hall's wonderful music.

We enjoyed the extraordinary "mullet ministry" as I called it, of Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman and Rev. Catherine Somerville. A mullet is a funny 80's haircut that's short and kind of square in the front and long in the back. Anyone who sported one used the expression "business in the front, party in the back" to describe it, so Bill was the "business in the front" and Catherine, the "party in the back." They have been a great team and they complimented each other so well.

And the third thing we were drawn to here at St. Andrew's is this wonderful congregation. They freely share their gifts of time, talent and treasure with those in this neighbourhood and beyond. And there are many people in our neighbourhood who are in great need, so there's a lot of work to do here in downtown Sudbury and these people really step up.

This is a place that celebrates the gifts of God and it's one of the places where I am able to find God through simple things. A song, a good story, a meal. It's a good place and everyone is welcome here. It's a place that takes the idea of being the living bread to heart.

My message this morning is centred around "where we find God."

I find God in beautiful places and simple acts. I believe that's where God speaks to us, through intuition or that still, small voice. But sometimes, hearing that voice can be tremendously difficult with all the chaos and confusion in our own back yards.

The Gospel reading this morning was a story very much like this. John 6: 51-59 talks about Jesus trying to introduce a simple ritual to his followers. An Act of Remembrance. And, at first, it seemed like a bit of disaster.

When Catherine and I met to discuss what I would talk about today, she offered some study resources with four different perspectives on the reading. The first interpretation talked about the reaction of the crowd to this idea of eating his flesh as "disputed territory." Jesus offered them a connection to "the life of the world," but rather than understanding the metaphor, they were so wrapped up in their own comings and goings that they got bogged down in the idea of "eating his flesh" and "disputed among themselves!" Many of Jesus'

disciples found His teaching "difficult, even to the point of questioning their acceptability" and there were even some followers who "turned back and no longer went about with him." The crowd couldn't get past this "cannibalistic metaphor!" as the notes put it.

It was like a lot of the Department Head meetings that I've been to at work or, better yet, one congregational meeting that I attended years ago at another church where the members started arguing with the minister to the point where he got up and walked out. The next meeting we had was chaired by a minister from another church who came in dressed in a hockey referee's jersey.

The crowd assembled around Jesus, had not found its "happy place." They weren't open to that still, small voice of calm. We have lives filled with our jobs, our bills, our friends, our families, our activities and issues that are sometimes a joy, sometimes a curse and, more often than not... BUSY. I'm the worst.

A particular activity or place often helps us centre as we take the time we need to remember and celebrate the gifts of God in our lives. Especially when we are busy.

Jesus was trying to establish a simple and familiar act in the reading from John that Betty shared earlier. Jesus said, "This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." A metaphor for embracing what God has given us and freely sharing it, sharing those gifts of time, talent and treasure with others.

And you heard what happened. Arguing, misinterpreting, spreading #FakeNews rather than first allowing the "busy world to be hushed" and embracing the simplicity and elegance of this act of remembrance.

It is good to do as Jesus did, and withdraw to a quiet place or at least a place with a totally different focus.

So where do I find this different focus in my life?

I find this a lot in music. My father taught music in Sault Ste. Marie. In fact, I found out when I moved here that Terry Carscadden and Alison Witty from our congregation were among his students. My dad understood the joy of music and shared it with many. One of the greatest gifts he gave me was to share his love of music with me. He understood, though, that sometimes children don't always listen to their fathers so he dropped me off at choir practice at the Anglican Cathedral in the Sault one Tuesday afternoon when I was 8 and that was it. I embraced it ... and the music, the ceremony and the ritual of that place became probably my first happy place. Music still is to this day and that's why what Bob does here is such an attraction to me.

Now Catherine, just so you'll feel completely at home, I have another sports reference for you! One of the running jokes during Rev. Bill's time here was that he would usually work some kind of sports analogy into his message. Catherine loves sports (shakes my head from side to side). Catherine has no interest in sports whatsoever. So she would either laugh it off, roll her eyes or maybe just nod off during that part of the message.

And the joke extended beyond worship. Quite often in the office through the week, my Alison, who played basketball with two Canadian Universities and was invited to try out for the Olympic team in 1988, had great conversations with Bill about the Raptors, the Leafs and the Jays all of which sent Catherine to some other quiet part of the building to find her happy place.

One of my other places was on the baseball diamond as a kid or, more often, by myself throwing my white, blue and red rubber ball up against the five story at my school on a weekend afternoon when nobody was around and I had the whole wall to myself. The goal, of course, was to have the discipline to throw it as high as possible without losing it on the roof. I guess that's another metaphor for keeping a higher purpose in mind without losing sight of God's plan for me on the roof of rubber balls that was beyond my comprehension. Occasionally I missed the mark.

But baseball was filled with grass, trees, birds, fun, quiet and companionship, all "gifts of the world" given by God and they provided a happy place where I could occasionally hear the still, small voice.

And the third "place I find God" that I wanted to share with you is the best.

One of the things I miss, living in Sudbury, is being able to hop in the car and drive 20 minutes to the shore of Lake Superior, a place called Gros Cap. It's actually not too far down the highway from Rev. Bill's new part time job at Goulais River United Church. I'm a little envious I have to admit.

If you've never been there, you can find a picture, taken at Gros Cap at sunset, in this week's e-current. Quite often there is no one there except you, the gulls and one of the most plentiful sources of fresh water that the Creator has placed on this earth. Nothing but clear, fresh water for as far as the eye can see. The Group of Seven was inspired by it. First peoples, fur traders and fun seekers have travelled the waters by this place and stopped there to rest and reflect for thousands of years. Sunset at Gros Cap is worthy of any bucket list. This is another place I have gone so "the fever of life can pass" and I can find that still, small voice.

The followers of Jesus were having trouble hearing what He was saying to them that day, as we often are in our day to day lives. If you don't fall victim to that grind, you're in a very good place. You have found His place and heard His voice.

The wilderness may not be where you find that voice. Some people find that God dwells in others, everyone from that homeless person at the at the bus station begging for change to the newborn child that fills our lives. Some find it in different forms of worship that make them feel good. Everything from "messy church" to "high Anglican." Some find God in work, in difficult relationships, in personal failings, in libraries and in loneliness. Each of us is different but, my point is Jesus encourages each of us to go to the place where we find that "peace of God which passes all understanding."

From there, as we find our "happy place" and know his presence through that voice, when we "walk the walk" of the way of Christ, He remains in us and we stay with Him. This is the bread that Jesus was talking about that day. Not the "what we make the ham sandwich with" but the "bread of life," the simple wisdom to accept God through Jesus Christ and to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

I hope that as you prepare for each day, for the beginning of a new chapter, for Sunday worship, whatever, you take the time to, either physically or in your mind's eye, visit "the places where you find God."

Amen