

## **“Being Uplifted in Faith and in Life”**

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church

for Lent Two, March 12, 2017 at 10:30 a.m.

Scripture Readings: Psalm 121 (VU#844 )

John 3:1-15

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

Tired this morning? Most people are after the clocks are turned ahead. Even in the fall, when clocks are turned back, we find it an adjustment to the new time regime.

For those who travel around the world on business or for pleasure, some suggest it takes up to a day to adjust to every hour of change in time zone.

I certainly found that out in 2007 when I made my first trip to the Middle East – the 7 hours of change from here to there took me almost a week of adjustment. Nodding off on the bus as we travelled from point to point was not unusual the first week. I made sure on subsequent trips that I had a day layover in England, to allow me to adjust to the new time zone. That worked much more effectively.

But today's readings are not about nodding off – they are about holding your head high, and lifting up your spirit to new heights.

The passage from John speaks to an interesting dilemma – Jesus tells people that they must be born anew, but he is understood to say that people must be “born again.” There is no real justification for that translation. This is the only place in the Bible where the Greek word, ***another* (*ἄνωθεν*)** is translated as “anew” or “again” and not the normal translation of “above.”

Jesus is not so much speaking about a new birth or a separate and distinct spiritual experience (though such do happen and are not to be dismissed out of hand), but rather he is speaking about finding inspiration and hope beyond our normal, everyday activities and being prepared to enter a new realm of understanding, realization, and determination.

People have tried to capture this concept in different ways in the business and political world:

Vidal Sassoon, the cosmetic giant, once said: “The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary.”

Does that capture what Jesus had in mind?

Steve Jobs, Apple: “Your time is precious, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.”

Maybe the best way to try to summarize Jesus’ teachings is offered by White Eagle: Flowers do not force their way with great strife. Flowers open to perfection slowly in the sun. Don’t be in a hurry about spiritual matters. Go step by step, and be very sure.”

All of these touch a part of what Jesus meant and thought, I believe, yet the focus of Jesus is beyond what can be said in a few words.

The simple message that Jesus shared is: "When you think you have all of the answers, think again."

Last week I suggested we need to ask the question or questions nobody else is asking, and maybe this week our goal should be to looking for new answers when we think we have all of the answers.

What inspires us beyond us, above us, before us? Where do we get inspiration and hope, and are we open to receiving insight or do we assume that we have seen it all and nothing will change?

Any invitation to spiritual and religious insight involves us moving beyond our normal, everyday patterns. Would it not be expected of Jesus that early in his ministry he would want to raise up the possibility of new thinking and a new attitude to life? And whether that comes from above, within, or around us, what does it matter? The hope is for new thinking, new expectations, new attitudes beyond the judgment and hatred of the past.

Each week we seek wisdom from the words contained in our treasure box, and we seek a symbol to share back into that same box.

Today's symbol is this flashlight. I have had it for 20 years. So excited was I to see it one Saturday I used it for a children's story near Fenelon Falls the next day, and the Canadian Tire in Fenelon Falls sold out that very same afternoon. I have not seen them in recent years, and so I could not buy a new one for this morning, and I am not sure if this flashlight does not work because my supply of batteries are beyond their due date (I tried 3 sets) or the flashlight has died of old age.

But it still can be a symbol, for the flashlight's principle is the principle of today's passage.

We have a source of life within us, but unless that source is nurtured and made strong (in the flashlight's case, with batteries that work), then we have no energy to share. We may be energized and strengthened internally, but unless we share who we are with the outside world, we are like a light under a bushel.

This is our symbol of the week – be open to the strength and power and energy of God, and do not hide that presence, but share it with the world. And when you find yourself failing, seek the energy from above and beyond you to be awakened again to the light of God in your life.

One unknown author wrote: "Excellence can be obtained if you care more than others think is wise, risk more than others think is safe, dream more than others think is practical, and expect more than others think is possible."

Be blessed from above and beyond what you ever imagined, and you, too, also may be born anew.