

**Canadian Shield Regional Council
Celebration of Ministry Service**

A Message shared at the Canadian Shield Regional Council
Annual General Meeting Worship Service
Sunday, September 25, 2022
by Rev. Michael Blair

We gather this morning to acknowledge and celebrate the ministry of the whole people of God, and in particular to celebrate the ministry of **Mastard Sakala** who is being admitted into the order of ministry within The United Church of Canada, and with **Diane Matheson-Jimenez** as we affirmed her ministry for leadership in the life of the church and in particular this regional council.

These moments are important in the rhythm of life; they stand as markers and reminders in our personal and collective stories. As we acknowledge and celebrate ministries, we are also aware of the reality that we live in a context where it is both a response of faith and courage to answer the call to serve. Some would say it's foolishness to want to work in an institution that for the most part is declining and has perpetuated significant violence and trauma on Indigenous peoples, people of colour (especially people of African descent) and members of the 2S+LGBTQI community. Some would say that the best days of the institution are behind it. The financial challenges are real, the deepening secularism, the rise of populism and right-wing politics, and the impending climate crisis are all part of the context of ministry in these days. It can be disheartening, and yet, we have hope, and across the church today and tomorrow, individuals are responding to the call of God on their lives to serve, and the remnant church that we are engaging in discernment and setting individuals apart to this ministry of partnering with God, in declaring God's love for the world.

Prayer:

Ephesians 3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. ¹³ I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

The text before us from the letter to the church in Ephesus, is a hinge text between the parts of the Book of Ephesians. Chapters 1-3 tend to be more theological and 4-6 are more practical (moral advice). The writer of this letter knew the church, its struggle and challenges. In the Book of Revelation (**Chapter 2**), we hear this about the church of Ephesus, 'To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands: ² I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. ³ I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary.

This community, was a community of faithful people, they were unapologetically followers of Jesus, the writer to the Ephesians would say, "3¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints."

In response to the courage of the community in the face of difficulties, and the relationship of the writer to the community, the writer prays for the community, the first petition comes out of the awareness of what God had done through Christ, and secondly, in response to the fact that the writer was imprisoned and didn't want the Ephesians to lose hope. In **Ephesians 3**:

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The prayers offered on behalf of the community are a reminder to us of what we as a church/community of faith are called to in these days as we acknowledge and celebrate

ministry. Recognizing the challenges faced by those we set aside and our own communities of faith, we are mindful of the words in Revelation to the church:

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

So, what are we called to do:

1. We need to remind ourselves of what God has done through Jesus, hear again the words of the prayer: “¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.” It seems to me that one of the challenges before us is to allow ourselves to know and be known by God. To know how much God delights in God people.

One of my personal practices is to take a picture of the sunrise. It is one of the ways for me to start my day with a tangible awareness of God’s extravagant love and care, and so the prayer “¹⁸ I pray that you may have **the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,** ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

2. The second prayer is about hope – an invitation to pray for the people we are called to serve with and among. I often wonder if we would covenant to pray for each other and our communities, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I am reminded of the Story of the woman going to her pastor, and telling him, Pastor I know God loves me, but sometime I wish it had skin on it. Friends, we are the love of God with skin on it.

Mat it be so.