



Deep. Bold. Daring.

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
January 7, 2024
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

These six words are our call as a United Church. And they go with a vision:

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.¹

I invite you to ponder with me, deeply, these words. Do we resonate with them? Do any words that stand out for you, me? Why? Do any words speak powerfully to us, here, at St. Andrew's United Church in Sudbury? Bold? Courageous? Hope filled Community united? Deep spirituality? Daring justice? Do any words or string of words stand out? I invite responses, out loud here in the sanctuary... and online.

I'm not sure, honestly, what I think of this statement. It seems a bit audacious, perhaps aiming a bit high. In a time, to be honest, when many churches are struggling to survive. Many congregations of the United Church of Canada at this time of year are crafting their budgets, and many wonder how much to expect of congregations with high inflation, and on and on we go. Scarcity thinking can weigh us down – that is for certain.

But then we think about these Magi. Do we know how many there are? We will say three, but Matthew, the only writer who tells this story, doesn't say how many? We don't know where they came from, but they brought some very meaningful gifts – Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. For Matthew, the Gospel storyteller, it was important to connect with the Hebrew Biblical stories, fulfilling, for Matthew, the prophetic vision of Isaiah of a light shining, gifts being brought to Jerusalem when it seemed like all was lost.

The Bible always seems to aim high in its vision, perhaps a little too audacious for its own good. Prophets speaking truth to power, sharing visions of hope in difficult times. I'm wondering aloud here, stay with me...

I wonder: Why can we not dare to dream big as we go into 2024? No, not a dream of an empire kind of church, like big numbers of bums in pews – but, how about a dream to

¹ To find out more about The United Church of Canada "Call" and "Vision Statement", please click <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/our-call-and-our-vision>

be a faithful church? A bold and daring church that takes baby steps in venturing outside of its comfort zone to speak to the hurting neighbourhood around us.

How about dreaming of being God's church that dares to invest some time and energy – like those foreigners who followed a star to find a Jewish baby in Bethlehem? For us, though, what about our vision beyond this worship community, sending folks like me out to the streets and back alleys speak a word of love and offer gestures of generosity to a hurting world?

We don't have a lot of us, and we feel pretty tired, perhaps more so after Christmas hosting of family and friends. But maybe we look to our Doing Discipleship process and its roundtables as rather like the Magi, seeking, paying attention to the signs, the portents, the stories. Perhaps we work on not listening to the voice of Herod, filtering out our world's negativity that tempts us into scarcity thinking – you know, making us shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, what can we do?"

What can we do? A great deal, I imagine, if I – we – dare to dream through the glimpses of God's vision. Looking for a moment at two parables that the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus sharing.

First, the parable of the *Sower* who scatters seeds extravagantly, almost, well, it seems a bit wastefully. But there it is, the sower, Jesus says in the parable, being scandalously generous.²

And in the same chapter, Jesus says the kin-dom, God's vision, is like a *tiny Mustard Seed*. There is a back story to mustard plants in ancient times; they were loathed, considered like what we would call weeds. But there it is, the little, amount-to-nothing mustard seed, Jesus' parable concludes, growing into wonderful, generous, and beautiful ecosystem for birds and creatures.³

Look at St. Andrew's. The work that you, and your leaders, put in to keeping St. Andrew's Place and United Church a balanced ecosystem, the work going into maintaining that healthy balance. I've been here going on 5½ years, and I'm still amazed at how you do this. May we have the courage, and daring, of Matthew's Gospel vision, and those Magi who were from an altogether different religion paying homage to a Jewish baby, following a star. That's audacious.

And so is God, as the Bible describes God time and again, and especially God's vision for God's children. Happy 2024 my friends, and may this be one audacious year for each of us, and collectively as we together serve God as St. Andrew's United Church. Amen.

² Matthew chapter 13: verses 1 – 23

³ Matthew chapter 13, verses 31-32