

Expressing Faith Matters

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

You may have, as I did, been intrigued by the overall theme slide for Lent: Wandering Heart: Praise the mount.¹

What could that mean – Praise the Mount – I wondered, when I first saw it. As it turns out, it arises from the old hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” by composer Robert Robinson.

Robinson's story he told, is that at 16 years old, he was going down a bad path. A superstar preacher, during the Great Awakening in England at the time², George Whitfield was preaching in London. Robert Robinson experienced that revival, powerfully.

But it was three and a half years later, in 1755, that Robinson became a Christian, and he was so moved that he immediately began preaching in Methodist and Baptist Churches near him and, in 1758, then, he was 22 years young. Aren't those Christian conversion stories interesting! It was then that he wrote Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing on no less a dramatic Sunday than Pentecost. His conversion story – his testimony of faith.

Now we are in the United Church where we feel decorum is important. That is the other denominations that build their churches buildings high up on hills where people are testifying... right? Now, let us take a breath for a moment.

Pondering, quietly, a question: Was there any moment when you and I were moved by something we saw, something we heard – perhaps in a spiritual gathering, or out in nature, or maybe it was in watching something on a screen? A moment in your life, to draw from the testimony of Martin Luther in his conversion moment at the Aldersgate church; a moment where your heart felt “strangely warmed”?

Praising the mount of God's unchanging love....

Peter of the Gospels, Jesus' impetuous friend, who speaks and acts rather spontaneously, before thinking about his words or actions. Imagine journeying as Peter did, with Jesus, day in, and day out. That would be inspiring. Given the opportunity, several moments actually, to proclaim his faith, he never seemed to hold back or censor his passion. His heartfelt belief in God's beloved one poured forth.

To have a deep and lived faith is essential. To know who you and I are, but also “whose” we are. We are not self made. We are created with purpose:

We are “fearfully and wonderfully made”. [Psalm 139]

In life, in death, in life beyond death, we are not alone.

God is with us. Thanks be to God.

[A New Creed, The United Church of Canada)

¹ Basis for the Message thanks to Dr. Terence Lester & Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Sanctified Art, Wandering Heart, Sermon Planning Guide 2024. sanctifiedart.org

² For more information about the Great Awakening, including stories about George Whitfield, please visit: <https://www.history.com/topics/european-history/great-awakening>

Living that fervent, living faith, is important – living it out with humility, with a sense of deep gratitude. That is important. But, what those sisters and brothers in faith with churches up the hills in our world might tell us, though, is that we sometimes need to let the Spirit move us to say what we believe – yes, out loud. In those moments of opportunity where we are inclined to be understated, subtle, when someone asks us our story, maybe we need to, today, ponder: Where did our faith journey begin?

For me, it was not a brilliant firecracker, wondrous, one moment in my life. It was the experience of church living. At church suppers, sneaking up to the sanctuary, to listen to the creaks and groans of the wooden roof on a windy evening. The space was alive for me in that quiet, but also hearing the din of conversations, over roast beef and those tiny little glasses of tomato juice.

What about you? What is the Origin Story of your faith journey, compelling enough that you are here today, instead of going for coffee, or sleeping in on a Sunday morning? Today, let's seek inspiration, so we too can praise the mount of God's unchanging love – in our generosity of time and treasures, in our willingness to take risks and, maybe this coming week, share our Origin Story, our Story of how we connected with God, or Christ, in a powerful way that has us praising the mount. Amen.