

the rev. Karen Millard  
Squamish United Church

October 3, 2010

Readings:  
2 Timothy 1:1-14  
Luke 17:5-10

### **How then shall we live - mission mystery**

Rekindle the gift of God that is within you.

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and self-discipline.

Increase your faith.

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

This weekend a group of people from this congregation engaged in this kind of faith work. We rekindled and reminded one another of the gift of God that is within us. Last week we were reminded of the gifts that we have as individuals and community gather here. This weekend as we worshiped, fellowshiped and worked together. We were challenged and called out to have a spirit of power and self-discipline. For some of us there was a deep process of increasing our faith and trust. For others there was a wrestle with what God calls us to in a time of change.

As we sat with a passage from Jeremiah that placed us as an earthen vessel we asked ourselves how we are a vessel carrying God's message.

We reflected on the fact that we are grounded in the holy having a deep connection between the earth and the spirit.

We recognized that as people of faith we are called to be a witness to hope and new life.

Like a vessel that carries a message we are in transition and we do not know exactly where God will take us - but we stated over and over that we are willing and ready to trust in these uncertain times.

Much like our passages today we realized that we are being led by the spirit to take a leap of faith. We spoke to one another messages of Jesus' teaching - like "Don't be afraid" and "consider the lilies of the fields...consider their beauty and how God cares for them...how much more will God care for us? It is God's desire to give us the kingdom.

But like the story of the prophets before us we are called to be clear and transparent - sharing God's message with all who gather.

Like the growth of the mustard seed we are being challenged to change and trust that God is with us in the transformation.

Perhaps the clearest message we reflected upon over and over is that transformation is going to happen whether we go along with it or not and on Friday night several felt the spirit calling us to be radical vessels fulfilling God's prophecy.

Although without question we had moments of fear, and feeling stuck when we looked back through our history we recognized that as a community of faith Squamish United Church has come through some hard, hard times and like a clay vessel in the cilm we have experienced the refiners fire and come out stronger.

We have already become witnesses to the community of Squamish and they are looking at us to offer a place of hope for the future.

So having said all of that we began a deep process of reaffirmation and discovery. We sought out the mystery of what is our mission as the united church in Squamish. As people in the practice of leadership we recognize that we need to be attentive to all the voices in our midst. We need to ask ourselves who are the voices not being heard both within and outside of our congregation. Because as people of faith we need to ask who we are advocating for. How is God calling us to be in mission in this time and place.

As a group we reflected on the time in which we live. A time of fast change and transformation within the world of technology, education, communication and more. And yet we recognize that all statics say that everything that is working and growing today in this fast pace technological world is about relationship. Jeff Davis wrote in What would Google do "...the single greatest transformative power of the internet and google has little to do with technology, or media or even business. It's about people and making new connections among them. It all comes back to relationships." Think about it - email, facebook, social networks, skype, text messaging, iphones and blackberries are all about maintaining communication and relationship. The encouraging thing about that for us is that from what I can see about Squamish United Church is if there is anything we know and do well it is relationships.

If you recall a few months ago I preached a sermon on "What's the matter with the church today" In it we reflected on the question of a changing time. We recognized that this is not the first time in which the church has struggled. And this weekend we had highlighted for us a reflection on the fact that we are not alone in the struggle and transition. This is a international problem. Loren Mead from the Alban institute says "We are at the front edges of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for over 1,600 years. It's by far the greatest change that the church has ever experienced in America (even more so in Canada); it may eventually make the transformation of the reformation look like a ripple in a pond."

So perhaps that is why at times we feel anxious and fearful in our transition and process. Perhaps we feel like we don't know where we are going, what we are doing, and feel like we even need to rediscover our purpose. It's true we don't know exactly where God is taking us but as my friend Mary says what we do know is "Jesus is going to be okay." God is going to carry on working and moving in this world whether we join her or not.

That is why as a group we realized we need to get focused together. Fasten our seat belts in a sense and let the spirit move us where it may. Sure there are going to be times when we are going to want to get off the ride and place our feet on solid ground but as Debra reflected with us

yesterday we can't get to the solid ground without first going through the swamp. We are going to need to acknowledge that transition can be challenging. The spirit moves where it may and at this time we are being called to discover who God is calling us to be. And we are going to need to trust one another, and be transparent with one another. And so I encourage each one of you here to do that. To be in conversation with myself, with the facilities development team, with one another. We are the body of Christ in this place and each part of the body is essential. As we reflected together yesterday we talked about what is precious to us about Squamish United Church. Does anyone want to share some of those things with us today? Things we brought up yesterday or things you have learned and reflected on since?

These are the things I heard:

compassionate, caring people

progressive worship

nurturing

safe to ask questions and doubt

accepting

We experienced an ability to wrestle - honestly and deeply together.

In this place we are being challenged to live faithfully and grow. In a way SUC is a spiritual and ethical compass of what is most sacred and a way to approach the sacred.

We had a sense that God is calling us as Squamish United Church to be forward thinking - to be an example and witness to the community and to the United Church of Canada. We are to be courageous. With faith like a mustard seed.

The image I was reminded of when I thought about the mustard seed last night was not just that it grows large but that it grows wild and obnoxiously, it intertwines itself with everything it can get itself around. I am going to risk saying I think that is what the spirit is calling us to be in Squamish. A community that shares the hope of the gospel in a way that touches everything within our reach without abandon.

That is a powerful image. An image of radical inclusiveness of faith-filled action. That is what we felt God was calling us to in our conversations yesterday. A place where people speak for God as prophets and witnesses and we find and fill sacred space in our souls, lives and in the lives of others. We feel God is calling us to be available for those who hunger spiritually. We began to ask ourselves how do we feed our community. How do we hold sacred space? How do we hold space for the questions of life that matter? How do we fill the hungry? How do we live out healing (salvation) in this contemporary time? How do we reach out and make connections in our community and world? How do we be prophets and witnesses for our faith? How then shall we live?

As we had deep conversation we had some moments of fear. Moments of getting into the swamp as Deb called it. And yet what several of us reflected afterwards is that we realized that that felt

like a move backwards for a moment. People got really frustrated with the idea that we might not engage in a ministry of transformation. As hard as those hours were we realized afterwards how necessary they were. How critical it was for us to recognize that we need to know who we are called to be. That we need to reaffirm over and over the gifts that we have. That we need to discover new ways of doing and being as we journey forward in a development project.

We all know that if we build a new building that does not guarantee more people will sit in our pews. But we also know that if we maintain the status quo we will not survive. And that is why we go back to our groundedness. We remember that we are a faith community. A community of followers of Jesus. We are called to remember the vessel that we are and remember that we have discerned that we have been called to be a church in the downtown. That we have said we want to touch the lives and community of squamish in a significant way. That we are called to a mission of radical hospitality and welcome.

So my friends as we continue to journey together let me encourage you again with the scriptures of today. Let us rekindle the gift of God that is within us. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and self-discipline. Each and every day we are called to increase our faith. Today we are being called to increase our faith with the radical overwhelming presence like that of the mustard tree.

How then shall we live and be as a community of faith this day.

I want to encourage you to stand with me now as we celebrate our faith together with the words that are printed in your bulletin.