

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Acts 2:42-47

John 10:1-10

I have Called You

You may have noticed that my favorite verse appeared in the lectionary lessons this morning. “Jesus said I have come that all might have life and have it abundantly.” I can’t think of a better verse to catapult us into this day. We have just celebrated a baptism, we have welcomed new members into our church family and we are in a season of big vision and dreams for our present and future.

You see it is that life abundance for all that I feel most compelled to follow in my life and ministry. It is offering life abundance that I believe the church is called to first and foremost. Just Imagine how our culture might react if abundant life was what the institutional church had to offer. This institution and faith that is so often known for setting up rules and conditions that keep people out is supposed to be the door to abundance for all creation.

That is what the people of Acts seemed to experience. Sharing, caring, awe, and love is what they encountered when they lived in the spirit. When you look at the acts communities they welcomed and shared everything - possessions, property, homes, family. It was as if ownership and mine and yours just wasn’t an issue.

So right away the majority of us are going to pause and wonder how that is possible? This is a non-existent community, proverbial community - it is just not possible to live in this kingdom of harmony and abundance. Well... what if we truly lived into the spirit, intentionally, every day?

I confess I actually believe then abundance is possible. But then again I have been called ‘young and naive’ before for thinking people in the church should work together and get along in love and compassion. And between you and me - I plan to live with that naivety for as long as possible and I will come back to it again and again. Because the bottom line is I believe God can work the impossible in and through us and the bottom line is I believe abundance is possible and that is what I strive for.

Oh I don’t always get it right. Believe it or not I frustrate people, I can be accused of being intimidating or stifling. And I personally don’t always live the ‘abundant life’ myself. I can let others get me down, I can get hurt or frustrated just as easily as the next human being. But hopefully the difference for us is that the door (or gate) of life and faith that we reach for the handle of each and every day is Jesus. Jesus said in this passage “I am the gate for the sheep” I like this image because it means Jesus offers a way into new life. As I understand it a better translation of ‘gate’ in this text would actually be ‘door.’ Jesus is the door to abundant life.

The people of Acts experienced that abundance because they worked and lived it Day by day. The text said “ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” Not just in one spirit moment did they offer care and love and generosity but daily. We know from the epistles that people within the early church found themselves in conflict with one another from time to time. We know that it wasn’t always easy but each and every day they went back to their source. Day by day they praised God and had the goodwill of one another. The spirit creates mutuality and daily renewing of commitment to love God and Neighbor. This is the kind of community Christ creates. This is the kind of community that we as Squamish United Church seek to be and embody imperfectly every day as a church that seeks to be an inclusive community caring for God’s world.

As I consider this passage on this day I want to bring us right back to our vision, mission and ministry. Later on today you will be given the opportunity as a congregation to vote on a very important vision and mission. For me the opportunity for us to join with the local community services in a hub or centre that cares for the whole person is exactly the kind of thing Jesus calls us to. I believe Jesus is calling us to join in the opportunity to experience and offer abundant life as a community of faith.

Throughout all of scripture we see Jesus caring for not just the faithful temple authorities but for the outcasts, the down and out, the hungry and the thirsty. Jesus the door in for the blind, the crippled, the women, the lame, the tax collectors, the children, the disciples. He is the door to pasture, nurture, provision, protection and abundant life. Jesus is not the gate to rules and intolerance he is the door to relationships of abundance.

Our culture also promises abundance but it is not eternal or lasting. It is not about inclusive welcome for all. What is different about the abundance The Holy offers is it is an abundance of knowing. Jesus calls you by name and when you hear his voice you will know it is he. I believe when the spirit calls our name we will know who is speaking just like Mary knew Jesus in the garden and Lazarus came alive, and the blind man could see.

As today as we look back over SUC developed and developing vision and mission you too are called to participate. You may recall that last October we had a Discovery Weekend. The theme of the weekend was “The mystery of the missing mission.” On that weekend we dug deep together to recall where we had come from and we continued to ponder where we were going. Here are some things that came out of those two days together.

We expressed a desire to “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.” *We felt a call to* “Increase 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.”

“As we sat with a passage from Jeremiah that placed us as an earthen vessel we asked ourself how we are a vessel carrying God’s message...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...we realized that we are being lead 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."

"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 *that* 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 *recognized that 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."

In that weekend 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...we can't get to the solid ground without first going through the swamp." Like the song Outside the lines says "We'll never walk on water if we're not prepared to drown, body and soul need a soaking from time to time. And we'll never move the grave-stones if we're not prepared to die, and realize there are worlds outside the lines." We can acknowledge that transition is challenging. The spirit moves where it may and at this time we are being called to discover who God is calling us to be in this time and in this place.

You might recall a reflection of the woman at the well that we shared a few weeks back. In that story I am always reminded that Jesus isn't selective in the same ways we are. Jesus doesn't look at the structure of a system and say 'but that's the way we do it in the church.' He doesn't change things for the sake of changing them but he does do everything he can to open the door for anyone who hungers or thirsts or needs compassion.

In reflecting on that passage I asked you to dream and vision with me a little. We were reminded that in the journey we are on as people of faith we are called to welcome every person no matter what shoes they wear, no matter what food they eat, not matter what house they live in, no matter what time they arrive at the well to drink. We are to offer living water. We are to be the door to abundance.

I shared with you on that day and it remains true that I believe in this project. I believe you have the opportunity to vote today to share the good news with the community of Squamish in a way no other church is capable of.

"We have an opportunity to be an example to the community of Squamish, to other faith communities and to the United Church as a whole.

This dream and this vision is not about a fancy new building. This dream and this vision as I have come to understand it is about building a legacy of faith. This project is about building a center that will care for God" s world in an inclusive and welcoming matter. This is about building a center that cares for the whole person. Mind, body and spirit."

We have the opportunity to be the woman at the well who can't help but share that Jesus has opened her up to abundant love, grace and life. We who perhaps feel insignificant, outcast, unworthy, and incapable can drink of the living water of Jesus who has called us.

When this woman recognized that God knew her, and loved her, and could use her to change her community and world she was compelled to live in a new way. She didn't know how to remain the same.

And so once again I invite you to "Imagine with me for a moment.

We have a sanctuary that is fresh and new, it is warm and welcoming both from the atmosphere and the people who are in it. People are attracted to this building and begin to pop in to check it out. They have researched us on our website, they have read the preachers sermons, and they have discovered this church even has some amazing ministry happening...Every day of the week people are walking by this building, they are coming through it's doors. At first they only head in one direction; towards their social workers office. But as they do that they notice a sign for a fabulous study group, yoga class, youth group or coffee house that is being offered. They soon discover that the little coffee shop in the corner is hosted by the church and is serviced by some of the people who have been working in on job and/or cooking skills. They realize this is a place they want to be a part of, this is a church they could support because they are living into who they say they are."

I have come to know that as a church you believe in caring for the community. I have come to know that you believe we are being called to something new. I have come to know that you think you know what that is, but you just want to be sure. Another of my favorite Peter Short quotes is "If you have to be sure don't do it." A life of Faith requires faith and trust. Just like taking a step we will have moments of feeling off balance. There will be days when we have faith like Peter and we step out of the boat onto the water. And then there will be days when we doubt like Peter and we look down and start to sink. And those are the days when the spirit of God through the community of faith will be called like Jesus to reach down and lift you up.

I don't want us to build a fancy something so that we are the shiniest building in town. I want us to build a ministry embraced by "an inclusive community caring for God's world." And I do believe that we have an opportunity to do that in a spirit-given way with this project. I believe we have an opportunity to enter into a door of abundance. I believe that the shepherd will always journey with us along the way. I long for us to run like the samaritan woman into the community to share the Good News. I long for us to listen to the call of the spirit. I also know that some of you are not as convinced as I am that this is where God is calling us. And I want you to know is that from my perspective we are all on this journey of faith together. And I do believe we are all doing our best to be faithful. So lets continue the faithful journey together. As individuals and community we are in the midst of discovering new life. May we always seek to be honest, faithful and loving God and neighbor first and foremost. May we always reach for the handle of faith. May we always recognize the shepherd who is calling us by name. And may we always know that Jesus came that all might have life and have it abundantly!

Amen.