

Scriptures Readings:  
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

### **Journey of the Mustard Tree**

This year in May at BC conference we looked at the different strains of theological perspective. I believe Nick shared those with you while I was away but let me give you a brief synopsis. Rev. Janet Gear has researched and studied for several years the theology of mainline congregations. She is the United Church professor of pastoral theology at VST and through her study she has discovered that many of us land in many different places when it comes to what we believe God is calling us to as Christians. The five categories she has named as Theological perspectives found within our denomination and likely even in our individual congregations are:

Evangelical - proclaiming Jesus Crucified and Risen  
Ecclesial - Celebrate God's presence (these are the folks that build the church structures)  
Missional - Go be the church (church leads us to care for those outside ourselves)  
Eccumenical - To seek justice and resist evil (justice seekers - protestors)  
Spiritual - to live with respect in creation (prayers, people of spiritual practices)

Most of us as Christians fall in to quite a few of these categories but the majority of us have one main focus and that is where our soul lands. My soul lands in the missional category and so when I hear scriptures about mustard seeds, and yeast and pearls it all resonates. Likely, that is why my career path before ministry was Social Work in the youth work and domestic abuse categories. Even more likely that is why when I first heard about the work Squamish United Church was doing I knew it was a good fit for me. You see for me the church is called to care for and connect with those outside itself. In the church we are nourished and fed so that we might go forth and in that going forth God leads the way. I loved the way Peter Gordon shared his perspective of our new mission the other day in our board meeting he said something like "We used to focus on outreach, going out to the people, now we have found a way to welcome them in."

What these theological perspectives remind us of however is that not everyone will agree on what the church is called to and not all of us will discover and experience the holy in the same way. And that is why when Nick and I read your surveys re: shared ministry we discovered a huge variety of perspectives. Some want to come together and feel it would be a huge mistake not to. A few others feel it would be a breaking point for them if we did come together. Most like Nick, a few like Karen.... some like the Anglican way, others the United and when we go to our heart and soul, when we go really deep, few of us are really willing to change and adapt any more than we really have to. That is not so much a judgement as an acknowledgement of our human nature.

And we are not alone. Movement, change, adaptation, discovering the holy brings up different things for every one of us. Just ask the Israelites and Moses how smoothly that journey through the wilderness was.

As Squamish United Church began discussing the possibility of a facility like Centrepoint we meditated regularly on a scripture and that scripture was the parable of the mustard seed. We imagined ourselves and that tiny seed being planted so that one day we might grow into a place that offered safety, security, rest and care for those in need. We prayed that our roots might flow forth in such a way that they touched the whole community of Squamish, growing deep, nourishing, foundational. I personally have never let go of that image and as I did a prayer walk through the facility last Monday night I saw visions of it coming to fruition.

As we have been heading into this new phase of ministry another story of scripture has begun to emerge and although it was not a part of the scripture reading today I can't help but share it with you. A group of 17 of us met last Monday night at Centrepoint. This group was comprised of the board and some other leadership and members that have started to meet with a consultant team, that will soon meet with all of us that are willing and able. In my conversations with Chris and Amanda over the last 6 months we have carried together the story of the Israelites in the wilderness. Here is part of the invitation letter sent to this group for our Monday night meeting.

“Squamish United Church is in a period of massive transition and has been for the past two years since the Centrepoint project was started. In many ways the situation we find ourselves in is similar to that story of the Exodus: a people wandering, taken in by grace, fed and cared for and then ready to enter the promised land. Like the Israelites in the story, the promised land is a very different place from where they left, and moving there will mean they will become a very different people. Crossing the river (whether the Jordan or the Mamquam) is a significant event, and represents a generational change. Just as it was for the Israelites we as a congregation will never be the same. (And because St. John's have partnered with us in the journey by offering hospitality, fellowship, space, connection and grace I dare say you will never be the same either). With this degree of transition that there will always be anxieties and fears. It was that way with the Israelites, it was that way in Paul's time and it is the same now. Add to that the uncertainties of the future of the United and Anglican denominations and it's clear that the congregation is entering into the unknown....”

So on July 24th a team of people gathered together to Centre ourselves at Centrepoint. The Israelites took time to camp out, and prepare themselves before moving into the Promise Land. Joshua and Caleb sent in spies in to check things out before they all crossed the river. We imagined ourselves being those spies sent into to prepare the way for new ministry in that place. We recognize that our time has come and how we enter in makes a difference.

You see, All communities need help in transition times and that is why we as board and leadership have approached Chris Corrigan and Amanda Fenton to journey with us for a short time. All of the congregation will soon have opportunity to join with us as we discover our way together assisted by their leadership.

So as we consider what our mustard seed of faith might lead us to I wanted to share with you some of what our spies discovered last Monday night.

We were reminded that “we are the same family, but we have journeyed to a new place.” We are excited that this is an opportunity to start again “a blank slate with no expectations in a bright, warm and welcoming place” One of our spies felt “it feels like a space where God lives and where healing and new beginnings can exist joyfully together.” “There is a beautiful worship space to be used by the people of Squamish for a number of generations.” It was discovered that “Squamish United Church is alive and well.” and we have “a lovely space cram-jam-packed with possibilities” “Our new church is a corner-stone in a new facility that is serving our community of Squamish, especially those needing help, support and love.” Another spy said “As I walked through this place I felt Holy Presence. As I prayed I saw visions of community, love, laughter, peace.” And we were reminded as we asked the questions What is ours? What is there? that all of it is God’s and it is ours and it is everyone’s.

The parables of faith that we read today are beautiful but it is so easy to miss the point. We in our faith and in our churches so easily get stuck. We recognize we need to have a mustard seed of faith but we forget that the point of that faith is so that we might grow and spread out and touch the world. We forget that we are to become a safe haven for all the world around us. We miss out on the point that as we are yeast we are to expand and grow so that those we encounter may be fed physically and spiritually. When we discover we have pearls in our faith, gifts, wisdom we are meant to give it away, not keep it to ourselves. That is the whole point of our text. That is the mission Jesus gives to all the disciples “Go forth and make disciples” “Go forth and love all the world.” We are not called to hold onto our seeds, our yeast, our pearls we are called to plant them, knead them, give them away so all might live in the abundance Christ has to offer.

As I walked through the Sea to Sky community services offices this last week meeting staff and getting more acquainted with those I already know Lois Wynne said to me this feels a lot like a birthing process right now. Its hard, its messy and it is the most beautiful exciting thing I have ever done.

As we complete our wandering in the near future as we cross over the Mamquam into the promise land we will be challenged to figure out how to live into something new. For we will never be the same after this journey we have taken. May that be true, and may we come to discover what God has for us as individuals and congregations as we together learn what God has in store for us all.

Blessings to each of you. I look forward to continuing to learn together in the weeks and months and years to come. Amen.