

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Homecoming Weekend Celebration

September 11, 2011

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 36:5-10

Matthew 13:31-33

Lamentations 3:22-24

Matthew 5:1-14

Roots of Faith

I chose each of today's passages for very specific reasons today. As we celebrate this homecoming weekend at Squamish United Church we celebrate faithfulness - God's and our own.

Throughout the generations this church community has grown, struggled, strayed, come back, flourished in numbers, declined in numbers, and flourished in faith. The journey has had its high points, and a few lows but the two constants that have remained are God's steadfast love and the love of individuals and groups for this community of faith. God's love and compassion are palpable in this community. I say that not flippantly but with truth. Colleagues of mine share that members of their congregation that have come from or visited Squamish United Church often share how they are warmed, comforted and blessed by your heartfelt welcome. I too felt that the moment I walked in these doors and I can only imagine how that gift of welcome has been here for all the generations. That is the kind of thing a church community is rooted in and grows from.

I chose to share the beatitudes because I believe Jesus uses this teaching time to let his disciples know that a sign of God's presence is not that there is no struggle, no pain, no wonder. A knowledge of God's presence comes in the acknowledgment of blessing and grace in the midst of the struggle of life. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" Rejoice and be glad because you live in the midst of God's blessings that you might bless all the world.

As the worship committee prepared for this day we considered God's faithfulness for Squamish United Church, people talked about its history, and how they have been welcomed, into this community. We immediately thought of The Old Oak tree as a symbol of rooted faithfulness. We could go on for hours about how a tree is an example of life and growth for generations. We considered how like the mustard seed, the little acorns become a tree that eventually birds nest in, people find shelter under it and children play in. We thought of numerous worship services that have been held out in the wonder of the yard, sheltered by the tree. We considered how in native spirituality the tree can be considered a source of strength from its rootedness, how it stands alone, unwavering. We also considered how it provides nourishment as the animals eat from its leaves and acorns. Just as we have all grown from one God like the tree we are to spread out our branches and offer nourishment, shelter and care. Just as there are little saplings

growing in various places throughout Squamish from this tree we too have spread our wings and gone to new places and communities where we are called to continue to offer the fruits of our growth in those places. And then from us new communities of faith, new blessings and God's kingdom will grow.

One of the sad things for many as we look at this new building is the knowledge that the big old oak tree will go. I think for many it is a symbol of the rootedness of this community. I hope and pray that we will be able to make a beautiful cross or table from its wood (and don't worry the architect has been informed). I hope and pray that the saplings that are growing from it can become rooted back with us so that we may remember always that we are stronger than we think we are with God's great grace and love with us. For it is not a building, a tree or even a community of faith that we worship, it is not those things that hold us together it is something and someone much stronger than we can even comprehend. The most holy God is steadfast and faithful, offering us life and blessings even in the midst of change, struggle or darkness. The body of Christ is a body of people that are bound together by grace, hope, faith, compassion and holy love

Listen to the words of our hymn again "Tree of life and awesome mystery, in your death we are reborn, though you die in all of history still you rise with every morn, still you rise with every morn.

Christ you lead and we shall follow stumbling though our steps may be, one with you in joy and sorrow, we the river, you the sea.

God's steadfast love never ends, it is always with us.

I am so excited, energized, enthused, scared, anxious, wondering and confident about where the faithful holy one is leading us. I ask each of you to pray for and with us as we seek in the next years to honour our roots in their strength and gifts. I ask each of you to pray for and with us as we celebrate and live into the gifts we have and are today. I ask each of you to pray for and with us as we discern, dream, imagine and carefully develop our future life and growth as a community of faith.

We here at Squamish United Church are grateful for all God has given us. We are rooted in faith and life and we seek to live into a deeply rooted journey of faith for many more generations to come.

I would like to invite you all to pray with us over the months and years to come as we journey together on a new adventure. Whether you are close by or far away we would appreciate your prayers for a faithful heartfelt journey.

"I was there to hear your morning Cry"

Let us pray.

A Prayer for Squamish United Church

Creator God, with whom we journey
in this season of the life and faith
we live in hope, trust and mystery
longing to live into your wisdom
as the one who makes all things new.

Holy One, we give you thanks for the gift of each new day.
And for the mission and ministry of Squamish United Church.
Living in your grace and faithfulness we have embraced your presence in our lives.
as together we have ministered in downtown Squamish for almost a century

We hold deep gratitude for the many who have
built this church and community over the years.
We cherish the gifts given by those who have gone before us,
Live in appreciation of those who serve and minister with us now,
And are already thankful for the anticipated ministry that will follow us.

God in whom we live and move and have our being
Enliven, Strengthen and Entice us now to be a vibrant centre for mission and ministry,
embracing the lives of the people of Squamish as we connect our church and community.

Transforming Spirit be with us in this season
as we begin to live out our ministry in a new way
Assist us as we seek to be faithful stewards of all we have.
Give us wisdom and courage as we seek to live out our mission and ministry
through redeveloping our church property and connecting with Sea to Sky Community Services,
Always being thankful for the many blessings we have already been given.

Holy Spirit, deepen our trust,
as we partner with you,
in making all things new.

Amen.

The Reverend Karen Millard
May 2011