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Squamish United Church

June 7, 2009

Readings:  
Acts 17:22-29  
James 1:17-27

## **The Journey to Squamish**

Today's story begins a few years back. It's not an overly exciting story except to maybe a very few. But it's my story and knowing today I would be conducting my very first service as the new minister to the ministers of Squamish United Church, a community of people who seem know each other pretty well. I thought I'd better share some of who I am with you so we can catch up a bit.

So rather than a deep theological 5 point sermon ( the kind I hear you are used to – and that I'm a bit nervous about) instead today I will share with you my life journey to Squamish. How did I end up in this beautiful little town of "Mother Wind." A place where I already feel more at home than I could have ever expected.

Now before I get to far, I might just begin by telling you that if you are looking for a story with deep scandal, intrigue, secrets and lies I suggest you go home tonight and cuddle up with an episode of "desperate housewives" or the "OC" because you will not hear one from me today.

Instead I will begin at the very beginning to kill the suspense and tell you I was born in Burnaby BC on Nov. 10, 1971 to Art and Nancy Millard of Vancouver BC. At 6 months of age I am sure I only added to the burden of the family move to Richmond. It was here that I lived the next 20 years with my Mom, Dad, and big brother Tim.

As a family we went to a Brethren church pretty much every Sunday morning and night and most Wednesday evenings. Church and faith were an intricate part of our everyday lives. So it wasn't all that shocking that at the age of 13 I began counseling at summer camp on Anvil Island where I spent the last week of July every year until a couple of summers ago. It was here on Anvil Island that I discovered not only a love of the ocean but also a love of sharing my faith and life with people. In a way it seems like sharing God with people was something I was born to do.

But as with so many of us in my teen years I began to struggle in my faith. It was mainly because the more I came to discover of God and Jesus and faith the more confused I became by the rules, regulations and laws of the church. (any church)

We sang hymns and read scriptures about a God of love and grace and joy and welcome. But what I experienced when I went to churches was anything but these things. I think that is why scriptures like the ones read today are so close to my heart. You see even though I now work in the church, and believe that church, faith and community are essential. I also firmly believe God is found everywhere in this world and in our lives not just in a building such as this where we do our ritual practices for an hour or two on a Sunday morning. But in our work and play, in everything we do each day.

So here's the part you want to pay attention to because it's about as close as I get to an episode of "Desperate Housewives." When I was about 19 years of age a friend of mine who was about 16 fell deeply in love with a 23 year old in our congregation. As you can imagine her mom and dad were anything but thrilled. So having been forbidden them from seeing one another my friend took the drastic measure of stealing a diamond ring to go and ask her love to marry her. Fortunately the couple immediately agreed that this was too drastic and measure and returned the ring. No charges were laid and no one had to know a thing.

But two years later shortly after the couple was married she told her mother the whole story. Some might say her mother blew a gasket. She went and told the elders of the church, and my friend was removed from communion and disciplined. (Something that was more common than I would like to remember in the tradition I grew up in). I found this confusing because all had been confessed and there seemed to be no reason for this segregation.

But I had no say in the workings of the church so I remained silent, sort of. Until, a couple months later when I was reprimanded for remaining in a friendship with the couple, it was then that I promptly exited church making a statement which called for grace and love over fear and punishment.

It must have been around this time that I discovered the verses from James Wilf read this morning. And I took deep to heart that religion that God sees as pure and flawless is to care for those in distress. From that point I have held those verses close and attempted to keep them as somewhat of a life motto. I have come to believe that God is always the God of the oppressed and my faith has told me that we as Christians are called to share in God's mission of grace and love even to those we find unlovable.

This part of the story happened while I was in university changing my major every semester it seemed until I finally decided to go into Social work and human services. I ended up with a degree in Social Sciences and History focusing on world religions, and psychology. While in school I began a practicum working in a home for women and youth in crisis pregnancy situations this eventually led to work in group homes for juvenile teens, and foster care. Finally I found myself dipping my feet back into the church in communities of many denominations while working for a couple of Para-

church youth organizations running community youth programs, drop in centers and camps.

In 1997 I was hired by North Lonsdale United Church as a youth consultant, and eventually I became their youth pastor and staff associate working in different areas of the church. It was this community that fostered, and helped me discern and eventually candidate for ministry.

So after a year at Regent College I went to Vancouver School of theology full time and discerned the call to be a minister. At the same time I began working as a women support counselor at a transition house in New Westminister, and through this organization I also helped teach community programs for women from or in situations of domestic abuse. I also began a more in depth training and internship in Bowen family systems theory. (that means that with my masters of divinity, I completed a counseling diploma as well). In Smithers I was blessed with the opportunity to keep up these skills and use them as a member of the Community Counsel for Women's Safety and well as a Christian counselor for people in the community with a variety of life and faith struggles. I look forward to finding ways I can continue to use and develop these skills here in Squamish.

Although it all sounds pretty smooth I will tell you that there have been some intimate, intriguing struggles along the way. I've been known to say that some hear the still small voice of God while others like me need God to hit us over the head with a brick before we get it sometimes.

As with most ministers I can relate to the prophets who have said not me Lord or I am not worthy God and yet at the same time felt with every ounce of my being that there is not another way to go. I have come to believe and discover that in the act of loving and giving we share the perfect gift of God. I believe with the Apostle Paul that it is within God that we live and move and have our being. As so I believe every one of us has gifts from God within us, and as we live out who we truly were created to be we live out the fullness of life God has for us and those we encounter.

So here I am in Squamish excited to be here. Glad to participate in ministry with all of you and looking forward to our journey together. As time goes on you will learn more about me and my passions. You will come to discover my love for children and youth. You will come to know how important my family and friends are to me. And you will discover that more than anything I long to share and learn more about the Holy with you as we travel this path of life and faith together.

Saying in life and song Here I am Lord...Be my Vision now.

Amen