

Canada Day Weekend 2017

The Big Picture

One of the common faults of humanity is that we often see the small picture but we fail to see the big picture. We even have popular phrase that captures that idea. "*He/she can't see the forest for the trees*" That means that often people, or a business, or a church, often lose themselves in the details (in the trees) and forget the larger picture, the larger purpose or the larger vision for their life, or for their organization, or for their community of faith. That larger picture is the forest.

"*Not seeing the forest for the trees*" means, that often we are overwhelmed by details to the point where the details obscures the overall situation. Let's give some examples.

A local community gathers together to fight a new landfill site being built in their neighbourhood. Everyone agrees that garbage has to go somewhere. They are not against landfill sites. They make that clear. They are only against one being built in their backyard. They certainly have no objection to it being built in someone else's community.

Despite the fact we all know that waste management is a huge issue in our consumer society, it's hard to see the big-picture when a new landfill is built near our home, which will lower our property values, and place big trucks on the road our children have to cross. Trees and forest.

Or how about protecting the environment. I'm personally convinced by the scientific evidence that global warming is real and that we need to make every effort to reduce pollution and to do it as quickly as possible. But do I want to pay a carbon tax? No, I pay enough tax already! Do I trust the government to spend that money wisely for its intended purpose? Absolutely not. Am I willing to change my lifestyle to save the planet by driving an electric car, investing in solar panels to provide energy to my home, or reducing my consumption of goods and services? Well I'll give that an "*I'll do it when everyone else does it*" rating.

Not "*seeing the forest for the trees*" is a definite problem in the Church as well. We have a tendency to be short-sighted. To think that the whole Church is just like the Western, or the North American Church, and that the Western world is still the center of Christianity. So we tend to have a superiority complex. Well listen to this. In 2015, the respected *Economist* magazine set out to discover, where the center of Christianity was today. I

won't bore you with their research methods but their conclusion was that the centre of Christianity today is not Bethlehem or Jerusalem or Rome or Washington. It is now NIAMEY, the capital of Niger in Western Africa, right on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

Andrew Walls is a respected missionary, writer, author and University teacher. In an article in *The Christian Century* (2000) he said this:

The events that are shaping 21st century Christianity are happening in Africa and Asia.

Part of what this change means is that the big ecumenical questions are no longer how Lutherans will get on with Baptists or Reformation churches with Rome. The urgent ecumenical question is how African, Asian, Latin American, North American and European Christians can live together in the same church, authentically expressing the same faith of Christ and love of Christ.

It seems to me that now, more than at any time in history, the church looks like the great multitude described in the Book of Revelation -- a multitude from every tribe and nation.

Those of us who have represented St. Andrew's as regular participants in the international Calvin Symposium of Worship can certainly testify to the truth of that statement, and to the fact that Western worship forms and church music are giving way to the forms and music of the churches of the southern hemisphere. Today, it is more important than ever for us in the North American/Western Church context to understand what the global church now looks like and believes.

Now, think about the Pharisees, the religious rulers that Jesus encountered in the New Testament. They were so concerned about their traditions, and their rituals and their expectations of what the promised Messiah would be like, that they challenged Jesus at every turn, and eventually plotted to have him killed.

Do you remember the story of when Jesus called Levi in Luke Chapter 5:27-32 (GNB)? Here's how it begins. **27 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." 28 Levi got up, left everything, and followed him. 29 Then Levi had a big feast in his house for Jesus, and among the guests was a large number of tax collectors and other people.**

Did you notice the highlights? Jesus invites Levi to follow him, and he responds positively. Levi is so excited about his relationship with Jesus that

he hosts a big party so that his friends and colleagues could meet Jesus as well. Levi saw the forest, the big picture. But then small picture people then came along, **"30 Some Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who belonged to their group complained to Jesus' disciples. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and other outcasts?" they asked."**

The Pharisees do not rejoice that Levi has started on a new faith journey. They can't get past his occupation, or the people he hangs out with, or the fact that, as a tax collector, he is socially and religiously an outsider. And they certainly don't get why a religious person like Jesus, would sit down and have a meal with Levi and his common friends because in the ancient world they inhabited, eating with someone meant mutual acceptance. They just couldn't understand why Jesus would accept Levi!

Listen to Jesus response. He remind the Pharisees of the big picture. He asks them to stop seeing the trees and to start seeing the forest. **"31 Jesus answered them, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call respectable people to repent, but outcasts."**

Jesus says in effect. Remember my mission. He laid it out in Luke Chapter 4:16-21 (GNB):

***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed
and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people."***

Read the Bible carefully and you will find that it is a big picture book. God's chosen people often forgot that in the Old Testament. They got caught up in the trees, and forgot that their special relationship with God was not only about them but that it had a greater and wider purpose. So God often reminds them of that, for example in Isaiah 49:6 (GNB) when God says to them, **"I have a greater task for you, my servant... I will also make you a light to the nations— so that all the world may be saved."**

And in the New Testament, overriding all the stories we love to hear, and all the verses we love to quote, there is one consistent theme. One particular phrase appears 73 times – **"The Kingdom of God"** and the other way of stating this "the Kingdom of heaven" appears an additional 32 times.

And when Jesus talked about the priority we should have in our lives, he said this in Matthew 6:33 (GNB), **"Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things."** That's a big picture, vision casting, and purpose statement.

Now we have another phrase we often use, **"The devil is in the details."** That reminds us that the details are important. I'm not trying to minimize that. In fact, if you don't look after the trees, if you cut them down, pollute them, cut off their water source, the forest will eventually die. But did you know that the origin of that phrase, which originated in the nineteenth century, was a big picture saying. Originally it was, **"God is in the details."** Get that? **God is in the details.** In our big picture thinking the Triune God; Creator, Redeemer and Spirit must be given fit place.

So the Confederation of Canada is now 150 years old. Can we put that in a big picture context so we don't get lost in the details?

Can we recognize that this land of stunning beauty and rich resources is God the Creator's gift to us?

Can we recognize that we are not "owners" of this land, with the right to abuse it and pollute it and exploit it, but that we are simply managers or stewards of God's land?

Can we recognize that *"with great blessing comes great responsibility"*, and that as a nation we have a responsibility to welcome refugees, to feed the world's hungry, and to work for peace and justice in the many violent and oppressed places on this planet?

And can we recognize that long before Canada became a country there were indigenous peoples here, whom we need to apologize to and be reconciled to? That, by the way is what the raising of a teepee on Parliament Hill this Canada Day weekend is all about. It is our indigenous brothers and sisters reminding us that Parliament Hill is situated on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people and that this land we love has a long and rich history stretching back thousands of years. Can we respect and celebrate that history?

Let me end with a big picture statement from Chief Seattle made in 1856, upon surrendering his tribal lands. By the way Seattle, Washington is named after him. It's not a Christian statement as such but it certainly contains a lot of truth to remind us of the big picture

There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfurling of leaves in the spring, or the rustle of insect's wings....

And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the argument of the frogs around the pool at night?

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If man spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know - the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to earth. Like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Let us pray.

Pastoral Prayer

God of every country,
 thank you for this country:
 for its beauty...from coast to coast to coast,
 for blue oceans on three sides,
 for great prairies, vast forest and stretching tundra,
 for every rushing river and great lake
 for Hudson's Bay and the islands of the north,
 all created by you, giving glory to you.
 We are thankful people!

Thank you for all the creatures
 With whom we share this country;
 the polar bear and the bowhead whale,
 the mighty moose and the fox,
 the Canada goose and the honey bee,
 the Coho salmon and the beaver.

Thank you for Canadian people, rich in cultural diversity,
 from First Nations and many nations.
 Thank you for cities and towns and all the little villages,
 for people living on the land.

Thank you for democratic government,
we pray for wisdom and guidance for our political leaders.
From local to national arenas, give our politicians the gift of honesty,
and the strength to resist the temptations that power brings.
Help them use their gifts as a gift for our country's good.

Lord, we need help in our country to live in peace.
We need help with our relationship to the land
to the air, to the water, to the creatures,
to all peoples inside our borders and outside our borders.
You have a vision of what peace is,
help us live in that peace and towards that peace.

Help us to be a people of vision,
And courage, and commitment,
offering your hope and comfort to all we meet.

Be with us this week, and especially with those in our congregation and
community who are sick in mind or body.
Be with those who grieve,
or who are at a place of struggle in their lives.
Give us strength as a church to live as citizens of your kingdom
as we work for peace in our world, country and community.
We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

(Adapted from Pastoral Prayer for Canada by Carol Penner. Leading in Worship.
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