

ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
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December 6, 2019

"I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your elderly people shall dream dreams and your young people shall see visions." ~ Joel 2:28

Dear Friends;

These words from the prophet Joel ring true for me as we come to the close of a busy and exciting year. In 2019, I finished up my 12 year ministry in Maple, and followed God's clear leading to accept the call to be part of the Ministry Team here at St. Andrew's, together with Laura. Along with the church leadership, and Robynne's administrative position, you have made every step along the way easy, and it didn't take long for me to feel right at home in the church, manse, and community. The last seven months with you have been a pleasure and privilege, and I look forward to a Christ-led future with you, as we dream and vision together.

As we near the end of 2019 and stand at the portal of 2020, we have the wonderful opportunity to reflect on things past and to look forward to what can be. Looking back, we can make adjustments, and looking forward allows us to focus on our St. Andrew's vision to be *"a caring congregation seeking to share, show and speak the love and joy of God."*

In the 1940's, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, also sought to share, show, and speak when she experienced a vision from our Lord Jesus Christ to minister to the least, the last, and the lost. Upon hearing permission from her church authorities, Teresa asked, *"Father, can I go to the slums now?"* One by one, former students joined her in this important work.

In the 1960's, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed, *"I have a dream."* Dr. King's dream was a clear vision of his calling to move God's people from subjugation to liberty; from the bonds of the secular world to truly living in God's Kingdom, both here and in heaven. Few of us reach the mountaintop of leadership like Dr. King, yet each one of us is called to contribute as we can to the realization of Christ's mission here in Newmarket.

In the year 725 BCE, the prophet Isaiah expressed dreams in a very real way, when he shared that we can dream of eating and drinking, but still awake empty. It is by God and God's Spirit that we are nourished. In fact, the voice of the Lord is speaking to us right now in this season of Advent through our dreams and visions, and it is by these that we can join with God in making the world a better place, one person at a time.

In the year 52 CE, the apostle Paul wrote to his friends at the Church in Ephesus about God's hidden mystery made known to us in Christ Jesus. This was God's plan for the world and mission of the Church; to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

In 2019, during the Advent and Christmas seasons, we live in the fullness of God, knowing that Jesus our Saviour took on human flesh to give us the freedom of the Kingdom. With Jesus, our goals can be realized simply because of His invitation to *"come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart: and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."*

Friends; I pray that you, your families, neighbours, and friends will enjoy God's richest blessings and Christ's comforting peace from this holiday time onward.

Included with these letters is a St. Andrew's fridge magnet. There are more here at the church for you to share with others as you meet them on your daily travels.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Serving you, in Christ,

Robert

Rev. Robert

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Dear Friends;

There was a story on the radio earlier this week and on television this morning about a families' Christmas ornaments being given to Value Village by mistake. A member of the family was interviewed and appealed to whoever had purchased the vintage decorations. She asked that the ornaments be returned to the store and through the store to her family.

The woman spoke of how the ornaments held such meaning for her and other family members. Christmas would not be the same without them. The ornaments had been part of their Christmas memories and traditions for more than fifty years.

Listening to the story made me think about my Advent and Christmas traditions at home, the traditions we share at St. Andrew's, and those we share with other Christians near and far. What do these traditions mean to me – to us? Do they matter? And if so why do they matter?

During the Season of Advent, one of our traditions, together, is to light candles which mark the four weeks of our journey to Bethlehem. Some of us also count the days with an Advent Calendar – ones that hold chocolate behind windows, ones that build into beautiful scenes and/or ones that draw us into reflection and prayer. Advent is a season that can be overly busy for some and a journey filled with long dark days for others. As we mark the time, we notice the days and weeks. Advent Calendars invite us to notice each day; to pause and remember, at times celebrate, that another has begun, or passed on as we travel on a journey. We light a new candle each week in Worship. The light builds as we move through Advent and the darkness is diminished. Finally, we light the Christ Candle and celebrate that Jesus is the light of the world. The tradition of lighting the candles and using advent calendars speak of the importance of both the journey, the time it takes, and the destination, arriving in Bethlehem.

Other traditions remind us that we do not make this journey alone. We have companions along the way. Some companions share stories, stand with us on tough days and rejoice with us on happy days. They can reflect with us, watch what is unfolding with us or even point out what we might not see. Some companions call to us and show us the way. There are also companions who need us to notice them and offer our care.

Even before Advent begins, we sing Carols together as the lights on the tree outside of the Church are illuminated and we continue to sing Carols together each week during Advent before Worship. We send Care Packages to our students to let them know that they are loved and remembered while they are not in our midst. We gather gifts for companions on the journey at Evangel Hall and those helped by the Salvation Army-companions even though we have not met them. There is a special Christmas Lunch for the guests at the Thursday Community Meal in December. We decorate the Christmas Tree with mittens, hats and scarves which become gifts to help people stay warm. We take time to pause and remember that this is not always the best time of year for everyone. We hear John the Baptist's call. We hear the stories of Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Angels and Shepherds. We hear of God coming into the world, of Immanuel, God with us, in word and in song.

As I reflect on our traditions at St. Andrew's, I believe that they matter. Some have changed over the years and will likely evolve and continue to change in the future. Others have remained essentially the same for a very long time. Some newer, some ancient, these traditions invite us to reflect on the hope, peace, joy and love that God gives. They remind us that our companions on this journey matter. They remind us that the journey itself – week by week, day by day - matters. They remind us that the destination, Bethlehem, matters. There we will, once again, meet the Christ Child.

Blessings as you journey to Bethlehem this Advent Season.

May the peace and joy of God be with you.

Laura

Rev. Laura