

Reflection Week of May 18 -24

It's Sunday morning 9:30 am, from my home, three blocks away I hear the bells begin to chime an old familiar hymn beckoning me to church. I am walking this morning now that the long cold winter is a memory. I turn the corner and see the clock tower rising above the homes, a historic old church, more than 105 years on this site is now visible. As I approach the steps, pass by a sign in Cree Syllabics which bids our First Nations people come in.

I feel welcomed by the large pink banner that hangs from the front of the church "There is Love Here!"



As I approach the large front doors a greeter opens the door and wishes me a good morning. I walk through the porch of the church and see the big box filling up with food offerings for the local food bank. There are four sides persons greeting, handing out bulletins, aiding the elderly and ushering people to their seats. As I enter the Nave of the church there is a quiet chatter of people connecting with each other but one can't help but be captivated by the beautiful stained glass windows –above the altar there are five large windows: the main center window depicts Jesus seated and teaching the crowds. It is a large

church with a capacity of 300, for this main service around 150 attend. A few details catch my attention – there are small tents at the back of the church with toys inside. At the back of the church are two offering bowls – not passed during the service, but available for people to place envelopes. A book is open with a prayer list and people are adding names of loved ones for the service prayer. I notice a growing number of first nations folks seated together on the far side close to the back of the church. The congregation is varied in age and dress, some wearing jeans and ball caps, others in suits, very elderly women in their Sunday dresses, young families with little ones in tow, a row of teens together, couples and singles. The organist plays a prelude on a massive pipe organ and the congregation stills, a crucifer carries a large silver cross, followed by two lay readers carrying candles, then the choir files in about half way up the aisle. Then from the back the voice of the rector. Good Morning.



Welcome to St. Paul's. She announces the processional hymn. The organ swells and the congregation and the choir sings in worship as they move slowly up the aisle to the chancel. It is obvious this church affirms women in ministry as the deacon and the priest as well as most of the lay readers are women. The service begins – the order of service printed in its entirety in the bulletin with directions. The service is from the Book of Alternative Services. The two readings are shared by members of the parish, the psalm is sung responsively with a cantor, then a formal procession follows for the Gospel with the deacon reading. A children's hymn is sung and the children eager rush to the front of the

chancel to sit on the steps with the rector. She knows every child by name and finds out the name of visiting children, she tells them a short message and prays with them and they are led out to their Sunday school classes by the crucifer.

The Rector then preaches a message – usually about 15 minutes in length, standing in the center aisle in the front of the Nave of the church. The sermons are based on the Revised Common Lectionary



Readings. The service continues with the Creed, confession and absolution, prayers of the people – in the form of a litany which is also led by a lay person and with a choral response. Names of those to be remembered in prayer are read during this time. Then the rector says The Peace – people move around the church and shake hands or hug, greeting as many people as time is allowed. Often the rector encourages the people to intentionally find someone they don't know and find out their name. There is a friendly, warm embracing atmosphere and I notice if someone hangs back in their pew, they are not left alone, people come to them. With the Offering hymn the service turns to the more formal Eucharist Service. Lay people bring forward the Wine and Bread, and the financial gifts as well as the Food Basket for the

Food Bank to the Altar. These are received by the servers and Lay Readers. The posture for the Great Thanksgiving is standing, and the responses are said with passion and feeling by the congregation. Just prior to communion the Lord's prayer is led – spoken in Cree or Ojicree by First Nation Elders who are part of our congregation. It is wonderful to hear many voices raised from our indigenous brothers and sisters in prayer. The rector proclaim – come to the banquet and issues an invitation to all those who are baptized, regardless of tradition to feel welcome to partake. A blessing is offered to others and the offer of healing ministry in the chapel is announced. The communion is distributed at the rail at the front,

people stand or kneel, our deacon and a lay reader bring the elements to those unable to climb the stairs and walk to the communion rail, and then station themselves in the chapel for those desiring healing prayer. The choir sings throughout the communion and the ablutions. The prayers after communion culminate in the doxology and the rector again encourages people turn and look around and connect with others in the declaration – *“Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever.”*

The processional follows in formal fashion singing a hymn. The benediction always begins with

“As Ambassadors of Christ go forth to Love and Serve the Lord Alleluia”, The people respond – *“Thanks Be to God, Alleluia.”* There is a coffee time after the service and once a month a shared lunch.



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What do we understand about God?

Our view of God is one of awe and reverence along with a joyful and confident approach of the One who loves us and welcomes us to His table. As we come to him in worship and prayer we are changed, and empowered for service

What do we understand about the church?

We understand that church is a place of worship where all are welcome: to meet God, to share in the table of the Lord, to belong, to be trained and learn about God and enabled to practically serve each other. Our faith is meant to be lived in community and this is the locus where we find strength and encouragement in our lives.

What do we understand about the world?

We understand that an outward orientation is always in view. Every service, every piece of communication from our church, all points not only to the building up of the membership but pointing us to be Ambassadors – those who represent Christ to the World in word and actions. We understand that we can be change agents and bring Christ's love to a hurting world.

In light of this theological reflection, where do we need to grow/change in order to better address the needs of our age?

While St. Paul's is in the healthy and thriving part of their lifecycle right now the church needs to continuously be alert to opportunities and not be content, get complacent and sit in the good times. We need to be in constant reassessment and asking ourselves, what could we do more effectively. Given the number of newcomers and new families coming to the church through the programs like Messy Church, Youth Alpha etc – how do we effectively incorporate them into the church and its many ministries.