

**Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa
February 27 2022 – Elizabeth Bryce**

Reading: John 9

Sermon: When Good isn't Good Enough (Annual Meeting Sunday)

This week a very exciting parcel arrived at the Bryce-Dillman household. For Christmas presents, my mother in law Joyce offered to buy each of us clothing from the family camp that we attend almost every summer in Nova Scotia (the last 2 years for us has been over Zoom!) This year Berwick United Church Association celebrates 150 years of camping, so the fundraisers arranged a line of tshirts and sweaters, with a special anniversary logo embroidered on them. The parcel arrived this week, and we all tried them on (everything fits), we took pictures for Grandma, and of course we posted them on the Facebook group to encourage other people to buy the clothing too.

The next day Paul got a message from the person who coordinated the clothing project, saying: Please tell me the word Association on the logo is spelled correctly, because we have had some problems with that. Lo and behold, indeed the word Association is spelled associ-ci-ation on all of our 150 logos. They caught the mistake in the design process, corrected it, then caught it again with some of the first clothing items produced, and this seems to be the third strike. They have the correct spelling on the design, it is just human error, probably that someone goes back to the original instead of checking to see if there has been an update

Now, I have to tell you the word association is very very tiny on the logo. The name of the camp, and the signature hemlock trees are much bigger and attention grabbing. None of us noticed the spelling error until it was pointed out to us. So we are not really worried about them, we just decided to consider ourselves part of a very exclusive club of Berwick campers.

But apparently the manufacturer is mortified, so we are awaiting directions on how to return the first items and get new items with the proper logo. I kind of like having the unique wrong spelling – it says something to me about our humanity, how we all make mistakes and learn to live, yes, even flourish, in spite of those mistakes. But I guess that is not a good enough rationale for the manufacturer, whose pride in their products has taken quite a blow. They want the wrong spelling logos destroyed, never to see the light of day.

So even though the shirts are wonderful to us, and we were so delighted when we opened the box, apparently that “good” is not “good enough” for the manufacturer, who wants the orders to be perfect.

What do you do when “good” is not “good enough”? As a parent I know I sometimes had to bite my tongue when my children came home with grades that were “good” but

not really what I had hoped for, or what I thought they were capable of. (I'm pretty sure MY parents knew how that felt too.)

In some sense this human condition of wanting something better, wanting something MORE is what keeps life advancing, what keeps culture flourishing, what keeps science moving forward. But taken to the extreme, where ambition is fulfilled at the cost of one's neighbour, it can also lead to exploitation, to intimidation, to war. We have seen this in Ottawa, we see it in wars around the world, we see it in the conflict between Putin's Russia and an independent Ukraine.

In the life of the church, we are not immune to feeling not good enough either. We want more people in the pews, more screens tuning in to livestream or Zoom, more money in the bank account. That's not a problem, growth is good. But when our obsession with growing bigger blinds us to the good that is already happening in our midst, then we do need to reassess why we are here.

In our reading from the gospel today, we hear the story (another story) of Jesus healing someone who had lived for many decades with a disability – this time it was a man born blind. After affirming to the disciples that neither the blindman's nor his parents' sin had caused his blindness, Jesus spread some mud on the man's eyes and, miraculously, the man could see.

That was a great result – that a man marginalized by his disability was suddenly given the ability to see. In an instant, this man could now earn his keep, care for his parents, take up counted cross stitch – who knows? All in all, for Jesus, it was a good day's work.

But there were people who didn't see it that way. Everyone knew the rules: that work didn't happen on the sabbath day. Proper healing happened at one of the sanctioned healing sites, on the proper day, with the appointed healers. This healing of the man born blind by an itinerant upstart just didn't fit with the authorities' expectations.

As good as it was, it just wasn't "good enough". A conversation between the healed man and the experts followed, when the experts asked him by what authority Jesus had acted as a healer. I don't know, answered the man, I just know that it worked. It was good enough for me, so why can't Jesus be good enough too?

The pandemic has given us a whole new reason to lament that things aren't good enough. We miss the simple pleasures of coffee time, of singing together, of potluck suppers, of hospital visits and being able to support a friend when they are in need.

And yet, there is a lot of good happening **right now** in our community of faith. I know that the pandemic has curtailed many of the activities that used to delight and inspire us, but we have actually seen more innovation and creativity in the life of the church over the last two years than I have probably seen in thirty years of ministry. Bishop Michael Curry of the episcopal church in the US said in an interview last year that he got

pretty tired of going to meetings and listening to church people say – we know we SHOULD be trying these new innovations, but we just don't have the time or energy.

And then the pandemic arrived, and suddenly there was no choice: livestreams popped up in churches that had never even considered it. Ministers learned how to lead worship over Zoom and Youtube and Facebook. Social media platforms became the most important tool in a church's communication strategy. The buildings may have closed, but the ministry of the church just opened up a whole new range of possibilities.

So today, let's count up the good things and affirm that they are good enough to keep doing even after the pandemic doesn't make it a necessity:

- 1) Worshipping online – it may not be perfect every week, but now we can have people worshipping with us from coast to coast, from Sunday to Saturday, without having to be at a certain address at 10:00 am on Sunday morning.
I'm not saying I like preaching to an empty sanctuary, but at times the attendance numbers and locations reached are definitely good, even better than we could expect with inperson worship.
- 2) As part of that worship, we have welcomed Kitchissippi and Riverside and Emmanuel united churches into our space, and they have welcomed us too, into their livestreams. Members of our own congregation go church-shopping through the week and bring ideas from other places back to us. From some of that collaboration, new conversations are emerging now about working together as a cluster in our corner of the city. Definitely a good thing!
- 3) We have enjoyed the talent of a variety of musicians as well, because of the change in our way of worshipping. The Kitchissippi Choir, as well as Gavan their music director produced a number of anthems, Golden Ears United Church and Jim and Jean Strathdee delighted us with music from More Voices, I think even Cat Stevens and will.i.am joined us in worship through the magic of YouTube.
- 4) We have heard and experienced a number of guest preachers that we would not have heard, because we didn't need to transport them to Ottawa for a certain time on a certain day, all we needed was a video: Peter Flegel and Albert Dumont; Jordan Sullivan, Adele Halliday and King Julez, Rob Oliphant, Wendy Tarry and Charmain Bailey, to name a few. This gave us a much greater diversity of voices to interpret scripture, faith and ministry in our world.
- 5) Some very important work has been done on our building too, while it has been so quiet. We had talked about the security system and remote door opening for many years, but now we have new windowed doors throughout the building and better security for everyone using our space.
- 6) Many of our groups, both committees and social groups, have found new ways to keep connecting and carrying out their ministries – even pivoting to start something new. Our UCW have done a great job finding smart ways to fundraise and also to meet and make decisions. Sunday school and confirmation class on Zoom? Why not? Bell and Chancel choirs rehearsing while physically distanced, in masks – well, if that's what it takes...

- 7) We have all learned how to administer our life as a church using technology when we need to. We have learned to host Zoom meetings, and send out links and invites, to click on the link and turn on our cameras and mute buttons and raise a hand and even vote at a distance. We created a weekly email, which is much more effective at keeping us connected than our old monthly one. There are still glitches, but these are really important tools for our communications and our ministry together. That's a pretty good outcome to my mind.
- 8) Best of all, we have seen that the church IS important to people, that worshipping together and forming those multigenerational bonds is one of the things we miss. Now we are gaining more ways to invite and involve people who weren't able to participate before.

When the man who was given sight was being grilled by the authorities he said to them: Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.

It was good enough for him to believe in God. May Jesus be good enough for our faith and hope to be deepened and empowered too. Thanks be to God.