

The Harcourt Herald April 2025

The Harcourt United Church Community



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Harcourt Memorial United Church

An Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Canada

We are a people of God called together and sent forth by Christ to... **Seek. Connect. Act.**

Our Mission: Inspired by the Spirit, we participate in Christian practices that strengthen us in the building of just, compassionate and non-violent relationships.

Our Vision Statement: To be an authentic community of spiritual growth and service.

Our Core Values: Risk... Respect... Responsibility... Vulnerability... Trust

Our Purpose: To welcome and strengthen in community all who wish to serve God and follow the way of Jesus

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From the Desk

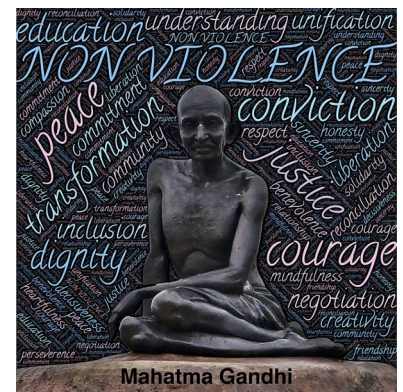
April! Faithfully coming again, and faithfully we have the next Harcourt Herald edition out. You have probably read by now that Andre and I will resign from our editing roles after the June edition. I am grateful that you have agreed with the change in focus for the Herald since I took over during the pandemic: we moved from general news reporting to a focus on sharing stories and views from within our Harcourt Faith communities. Especially in these times of great uncertainty, it is important to stay connected to each other in prayer, conversation and communication. So I hope whoever takes over will find their own way to help us stay connected with our different Harcourt Faith communities.



“Gentleness”: as in nonviolence

Too long the Church has maintained a notion akin to “redemptive violence,” some attempt to justify any act of violence in terms of the good which might result. For a while, we even believed in “substitutionary atonement,” which maintained that God allowed God’s Son to suffer in order to free us from the legitimate wrath that our sovereign God could unleash upon us because of our sinfulness.

More recent Biblical studies have forced us to reconsider this view in light of Jesus’ own radical non-violence. Gandhi, more than anyone, understood the power of non-violent resistance. “Gentleness” is defined as “a disposition that is even-tempered, tranquil, balanced in spirit, unpretentious, and that has the passions under control.” It is how a community living in the Spirit approaches all conflict and disagreements.

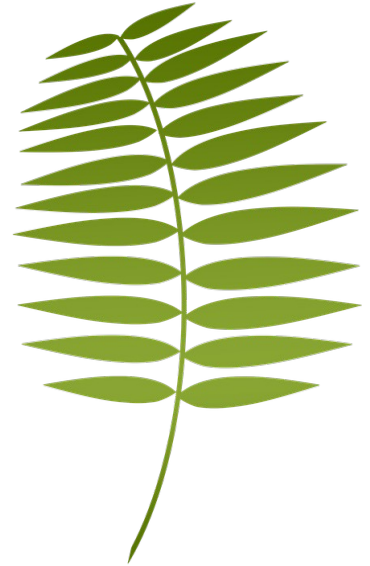


I don’t know about you, but I sometimes secretly harbour the deep desire that certain individuals could meet their just deserts... How do I develop an approach to the chaos and pain of the world in a radical, non-violent, but nonetheless effective, way?

Do you have any stories about non-violent approaches to conflicts that might have been otherwise? In what ways might resistance, resilience and non-violence be related? How do you cultivate gentleness?

From our minister – Kate Ballagh-Steeper

Lent will be well under way with Easter on the horizon when you read the pages of this newsletter. The Lenten journey is one that each year carries us along the path of our faith journey – hopefully overcoming barriers that have been in the way. This Lenten season has felt very much like the Lent of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic began. A time of uncertainty, dramatic change and fear for the future. While the Easter celebration of 2020 was virtual, it was a celebration of the resurrection nonetheless. So too for this year. Easter morning will arrive. We will hear news of the empty tomb and the resurrection, even if the news on the screen is bleak and worrisome. Easter proclaims again that God is with us. Easter proclaims again that the darkness of death, of the tomb, does not extinguish the light of God's love.



I will be taking a break from the Herald, as I am scheduled for back surgery on April 23rd. There is a three month recovery period. Thanks to the diligence of the Worship Committee, all of the Sundays are covered, many of them by the Rev. John Lawson who is well known and appreciated at Harcourt. The Rev. John Benham and the Rev. Bruce Dickson have kindly agreed to cover any emergency pastoral care needs (hospital and funeral). I am grateful to have the opportunity to have this issue addressed now before there is more significant damage or impact. I am also grateful that I do not suffer with chronic pain. And I am grateful to live in Canada where I am not facing a lifetime of debt to have this surgery.

I want to offer a warm thank you to Marion and Andre Auger who have worked with diligence, commitment, faith and creativity to bring you the stories and information in the Herald each month. They have made the decision to pass the torch and retire as editors. Through the pages of the Herald, we have gotten to know one another better and found a place to share the stories of our faith journeys. Thank you Marion and Andre, your ministry with the Herald is deeply appreciated.

If you feel called to serve as the next editor, please contact the office@harcourtcommunity.ca to share your ideas and vision.

May this Lenten and Easter season be a time of comfort, a time of growth, and a time of hope.

Peace, Kate

Council News - Kent Hoeg, Chair



This month's theme is "'Living in the Spirit" it encourages "faithfulness" - staying the course. How do you manage to stay faithful to the vision of Jesus, especially in these challenging times?

Like many, my faith gets tested numerous times. We know that life is not necessarily fair. When my mother-in-law passed away from cancer, that wasn't fair. When my son passed away at 31, that wasn't fair. There are so many things that are out of our control. When weather causes disasters. When people are discriminated against. When Trump is, well, Trump.

Yes, these are challenging times. Often, we feel powerless. But I would say that this is the time I am most faithful. I'm not going to bury my head in the sand or run away. This is the time when my faith allows me to move forward. I may not be able to save the world, but I can do my part. My faith allows me to bring a little relief to those suffering from homelessness or food insecurity. My faith allows me to be compassionate to those having hard times. My faith shows me the way. Jesus was about loving all.



I am very fortunate to be a very optimistic and happy individual. I don't know if it's nature or nurture; likely both. But I don't dwell on the negative nor on those things that I have no control over. I've said it before, don't sweat the small stuff – most things (to me) are small stuff. It also doesn't hurt that I have a poor memory and forget fast. In no way does that mean I expect others to be an optimist and always happy. Everyone deals with their trials and tribulations in their own way. My way is to have empathy, understand where I have no control and power through to good thoughts and actions.

During these difficult times IS when it's easiest for me to stay faithful.

Council News

Council met on March 19.

We had three agenda items.

1. We discussed the Annual Meeting held on March 2. What went well and what could be improved.

- First and foremost, the Table discussion exercises. I know many are uncomfortable in these activities (myself included!), but you did. You discussed and wrote down your responses to the two questions that we posed:

- i. What elements of our congregational Visioning Priorities energize you?
- ii. For which of the four Visioning Priorities do you have passion, and will commit your time, talent and/or financial support?

Your responses overwhelmed us! There was great feedback, almost all positive. We have shared your responses to our 4 Visioning Priorities champions. Council also had the honour of seeing the list.

- As we incorporated the table set up for the service, we were ready to go.
- Food was so appreciated. Another shout out to Heather, Sandra and the Joneses.
- Having a hybrid meeting allows others to join us from their home or their vacation spot!
- It was probably the quickest annual meeting we've had. Appeared to be good flow.
- Many positive comments about the hard work that so many volunteers put in.
- The technology worked better than last years Annual meeting but could still be improved.
- After the meeting, so many helped to clean up. Many hands make light work!
- It was observed that there may have been less congregational engagement than previous Annual Meetings. We took a positive spin on this; people do have trust in the members of council and know we move forward with you in mind.

2. Harcourt and Trinity Council met on March 9. It's clear that individuals are at different stages. Some would like to see no change, others would like to do more joint projects, others see value in combining committees, and, yes, some see the value in moving to amalgamation (horrors, did I say that!). It's a journey. Council commits to exploring more, experimenting and will always come back to our congregations before we move to anything formal. As I stated at the Annual Meeting – it's good that we are having these conversations now, when we don't have immediate urgency.

3. Council also discussed what should we focus on in 2025. Of course we would like to solve all problems, within Harcourt and beyond. But agreed that may be a bit much 😊. However, we do need to put more focus on Stewardship. Giving thanks, encouraging others to lend a hand, finding a community outreach opportunity. Living our values! We

as a Council also want to maintain a non-anxious presence in these anxious times. We want to lead the way with hope, empathy, kindness, caring and the way of Jesus.



Financial Update

Our February 2025 financial results are in. We are currently running a small surplus of \$1,790. Last year at this time our surplus was \$17,162.

Now would be a good time to increase your PAR contribution, increase your envelope/e-transfer donation or make a one-time special contribution.

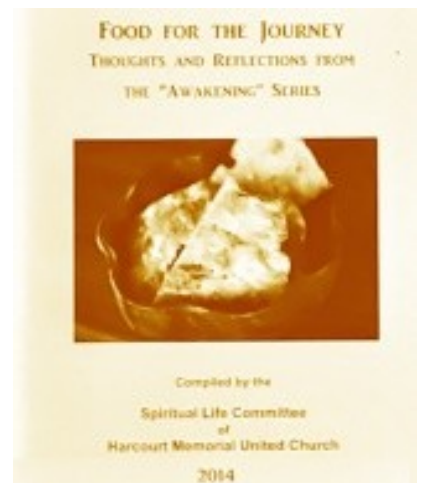
It's needed and appreciated.

Thank you!

Blessings.

Food for the Journey – In Dangerous Times: Deep, Bold, Daring – Stan Bunston, for the Spiritual Life Collective

As if the converging ecological challenges of floods and fires, misinformation and AI concerns, shifts against democracy, war in Ukraine, catastrophe in the Middle East and wars in Africa were not enough worry, Canadians are now faced with the loss of a friend and neighbour to our south whose leadership wants to weaken our economy and erase our very existence as a country! At the time of writing this article, the fear in our country is palpable even as our leaders make strong and encouraging public speeches. They are right to do so. In addition to our pride in our Canadian identity, as people called to Christian faithfulness, we have a foundation upon which our lives are built which can help us and our Guelph community and the nation beyond to weather these storms. That faithfulness puts all else into perspective.



A friend of mine recently quoted the statement that “faith and fear cannot exist together.” Since that statement is not obvious to me, I looked on the internet and found that exact quote referenced to Hebrew 11:1 and “the conviction of things not seen.” Personally, I

believe fear and faithfulness can be situated very close to each other in our inner lives in a way that Rabbi Kushner (best know for “When Bad Things Happen to Good People”) explored in “Conquering Fear: Living Boldly in an Uncertain World” published in 2009. Rabbi Kushner hits the right note – of course we fear for the health and safety of our families and the future state of the world for our children, grandchildren, and future generations! The chapter titles are telling as they reference terrorism, natural disasters, rapid change, loss of job, rejection, aging and for most of us, fear of death. The point that emerges is that we are called by faith and hope to conquer those fears! “Courage is not the absence of fear but the mastery of fear” (Mark Twain). Whatever the true number of “do not be afraid” or “fear not” in the Bible, it is no wonder that it is a recurring theme because in all ages, ours included, the challenge to stand against fear is always there as part of human existence.

Anytime we are shaken by fear, we are invited by Spirit to be aware of and strengthen our connections to our deepest identity. We are helped in that journey by The United Church of Canada's most recent expression of vision and call. Mission and vision statements are important but few of us can carry them in our heart for inspiration for one simple reason – they are too long and wordy to be remembered and recalled when needed in daily living. We do better in keeping top of mind key words, like Harcourt's “SEEK. CONNECT. ACT” or our Core Values – Risk....Respect ... Responsibility...Vulnerability...Trust – and even that length can be hard to hold onto though I am very impressed that the Harcourt Community had the foresight to include “risk” and “vulnerability” in the Core Values. I believe we are living up to those ideals.

Here is The United Church's new (2022) vision and purpose statement:

Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, The United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.

Good and true but too long to buck up the daily walk in this world. Now the much shortened “Deep Spirituality. Bold Discipleship. Daring Justice.” lends itself to much more powerful, punchy self talk that is action oriented and a reason for a weekly connection to inspiring worship.

Here is some further reflections from The United Church on each of these:¹



1 Copyright The United Church of Canada, downloaded March 10, 2025 “Deep Bold Daring.docx” with which this must appear:

Deep Spirituality

...what spirituality is: drawing close to God. In worship, we do that corporately – as a congregation. But what tools do we have to do it privately? Prayer is certainly one. Prayer is opening our lives to God. It can be with words or through music or using many other forms. For some people, it is solitude in nature. For others, it is quieting and settling themselves with tools like meditation or mandalas... Deep spirituality is the joy of those who know they are loved and held by God. ...Deep spirituality is the cornerstone of our identity, not just as a church but also as individuals.

Bold Discipleship

...Discipleship is seeing how our lives are a sacred calling and, out of our faith, connecting our gifts with the world's needs. Discipleship is how our lives become avenues of God's love and presence in the world. Let us not be hesitant in understanding or embracing this but rather bold in claiming every moment of every day as an expression of how God is caring for the world through us.

Daring Justice

...Daring justice is when we respond to the world in faith, not out of fear...So, let us be daring as we glimpse God's vision for a world transformed, trusting that the God we know so well, whose ways we seek to follow, will not forsake or forget us but will dare us to leave our fears behind to be in the world as people of deep spirituality, bold discipleship, and daring justice.

Strangely perhaps but I have found that the 3 words strung together – Deep, Bold, Daring – are easy for me to hold onto with a flow that naturally connects Deep (spirituality), Bold (discipleship) and Daring (justice). I want to remember and be inspired by those guiding truths. The outcome of those aforementioned challenges might appear to be determined in the secular world of politics and economics where our influence is limited. But underlying all that is our conviction that “we are not alone. We live in God's world.” As Easter people our identity is grounded in an archetypal pattern that is life-giving. We can be awake and wait with an Advent spirit infused with Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We know that, corporately and individually, the cycle of life includes suffering through challenging and dangerous times. Loss,

even death, does not have the last word. We hold to deep, bold and daring faithfulness until new light breaks through the darkness with the dawning of a new day, new life and transformation.

Deep Bold Daring

“Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire.” – Andre Auger

If you’ve never read this 2008 United Church document, it’s worth hunting it down. “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire” spells as clearly as I have ever seen just what kind of world we are living in, and what it means to remain faithful to the vision of Jesus in the midst of the temptations of the consumerist/materialist world in which we live.



How can I live faithfully, living as I do in the midst of Empire? As I look at myself and my family, I realize that we live a life smack-dab in the middle-class – a mortgage-free house, a reasonable bank account, good health. The World keeps telling me, though, that I can be happier if I bought such and such, or travelled to this place or that. I can’t help living in this World; I can’t help being complicitous with it simply by how I live. But I can resist it.

The Roman Empire was not much different from our times: one percent of the population controlled the wealth and erected those beautiful monuments we admire so much, while the 99% lived in squalor, fear and misery. Jesus’ vision of the “Kingdom of God” was of a society in which everyone had what they needed, compassion prevailed, people lived with true humility. How do I keep from straying from this vision, given the temptations of this life?

I’ve made myself a list of things that I am trying out to help me remain faithful:

- Keep the Beatitudes at the heart of my thinking. The Buddhists have their Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path; Islam has its “Five Pillars.” We have the Beatitudes. They describe, better than anything, what it means to live as God would have us live as a community. I have reworked Matthew’s version so that the language makes sense to me, and can guide me in my choices of behaviour.
- Remember the “Two Standards” exercise of Ignatius. At the heart of Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises – which Harcourt offers every two years – is an imaginative exercise, where we are asked to imagine that we are hobnobbing with the rich and famous who are

describing to us what we need to do to be “happy.” This is the “Standard” (the banner) of the World. Then we imagine ourselves in some soup kitchen or grassroots organization, trying to make this Earth a better place. We learn to see, taste, feel, hear, the place, and we experience what it means to live under the “Standard” of Christ. I need to revisit that exercise from time to time, to remind myself of what it could feel like to remain faithful to Jesus’ vision.

- Remember the Temptations. My approach to Luke’s story is to imagine that Jesus was trying to figure out how to make social change in the midst of this crushing Roman occupation. He reviewed the three typical approaches to enacting social change – wealth, power (political or military), and status (the “guru,” the celeb). He rejects all three and posits these instead: (distributive and restorative) justice instead of wealth; compassion instead of power; and humility instead of status. In my day-to-day choices, how might I always choose the second set of strategies?
- Remember Jesus’ vision of the “Year of God’s favour.” In his first public appearance, according to the author of Luke, Jesus proclaims the “Year of the Lord’s Favour,” a reference to the ancient Jewish vision of Jubilee practices that forestall the amassing of wealth and power and status. Can I use “Sabbath economics” as model for my life? Can I practice Sabbath as resistance, the way the ancient Hebrews did?
- Engage in responsible citizenship: Speaking truth to power: We live in times where power creates its own “truth” to reach its ends. The word “truth” is losing its value. How can I reclaim my ability to discern the truth of our situation in the midst of lies and disinformation? I need to know the facts of a situation; I need to check my media sources, and rely only on those I really trust; I need to size up my values, to ensure they always align with Jesus’; I need to confront rumours and biases with facts; and I must avoid blaming and name-calling.
- Ensure responsible Household finances: Of course, we live on retirement income. And yet, I know we have some disposable income. Do I have the right priorities for my spending? Do I always ask myself the question as to whether I need or merely want something? Can I overcome “therapeutic shopping”? Am I sharing my relative wealth with the less fortunate?
- Engage in responsible living: How close can I come to “net zero” with my carbon footprint? Can I reduce my dependence on nonrenewable resources? Can I avoid unnecessary consumption of fuel? Can I buy more local produce to avoid transportation emissions?

If you were trying to remain faithful to the way of Jesus, and not stray too much in the path of the World, what would your list look like?

Faithfulness – Sharon and Bill Chapman

American flags are being removed from hockey arenas and civic buildings. Cross border shopping trips to the USA are down, vacations to the USA are cancelled and usually mild mannered Canadians are booing at sporting events.

What has caused the extreme reaction in Canadians is a sense of betrayal. A nation we trusted, worked with, and had a long and deep relationship with has broken that relationship. It takes years of shared experience and shared joy and pain to build that kind of willingness to risk and be vulnerable and now it is gone.

A faithful ally is no more!



Faithful, a word we use often but what does it really mean? It speaks of honesty, integrity, loyalty and commitment to shared values and dreams. Many of us talk of the faithfulness of our family pet dog. It is heartwarming to watch our son's chocolate lab settle himself on the hall rug in the morning when our son heads off to the school where he teaches, knowing he will remain there all day until our son returns.

Faithfulness: loyal, patient, loving, trustworthy and committed.

What about us?

Where do we place our faithfulness?

Where do we risk, trust, build relationships, extend our vulnerability?

Where should we?

For me, there are two areas of life that command my faithfulness.

The first is my family. My spouse/partner, my children should be able to expect and enjoy my heartfelt love, commitment, time and attention. My heart longs to pour out love, care and blessing on them and watch them grow into the people they were created to become.

The second is my relationship to the Holy One. My commitment to my faith should be expressed in my faithful walk. Always progressing, never perfect, but a lifelong commitment to a relationship of trust and loyalty to the one we call The Christ. Faithfulness to both the inner journey and the outward expression of justice, mercy, love and kindness.

Sometimes I wonder. I wonder what someone who knew me well would write on my gravestone. Would they write that I was faithful to my beliefs, faithful to my loved ones and faithful to my life's calling? Faithfulness, a Christian virtue to build upon in a time of turmoil!

The Light of Faithfulness - Deborah Murray

When light shines upon the soul and is able to bring more feelings of optimism and determination as we journey through deep tunnels of challenges and conflicts, I honestly feel it gives a strong sense of persistence to help us get back up onto our feet throughout difficult times! I've always felt that the pure light of nature helps to brighten my feelings and change my moods whenever I'm faced with a difficult bridge to cross ahead! Just seeing the rays shining through a dull dark sky of grey always brightens my thoughts of what lies ahead!



Growing up I was faced with many different bridges to cross and it often made me think about a huge straight wall of stone or a steep cliff that was almost impossible to climb, but I found that as I dealt with many different challenges that were often a mix of lessons to learn, it helped me to focus on the fact that all challenges came for a reason! A reason to learn how to overcome them and become stronger and wiser throughout the continuing journey of life! I was never a child who fit in with the crowd and was often looked upon as an outcast for my two disabilities of having a learning disability and being epileptic! I used to feel embarrassed simply to say the word "Epilepsy", because it was sooo long and sounded so weird to some! Many of my peers did not understand why I couldn't keep up with their level of learning and why I could not understand half of the lessons taught in school at the time! School was NOT an easy bridge to cross at first, but as I grew into my youth I started to realize the importance about believing in yourself! There were many times I felt like a black sheep in my own family, because I was the only one in a family of three who had a disability and struggled in school!

After the number of times I did not pass exams in high school, I was convinced that I wanted to drop out! However, as I continued working with supportive counsellors and teachers who thoroughly encouraged me and showed me I had gifts and skills of my own by using the right coping strategies, I came to realize these difficult bridges had been given to me for a reason! As I progressed slowly, but steadily throughout every year of education, I found that keeping the attitude of determination, positivity, perseverance and believing in myself paid off in the end! I became convinced that the reason I had been given these disabilities was to learn that it's perfectly alright to be different and when understanding whichever disability it is, it's possible to use these in a way to reach out and help other people!

I always had wanted to work with children as a career and after my own struggle throughout education, I found I was meant to work with special needs kids, because just from my own experience alone, I came to understand their disabilities even more and I learned how to be a good role model to teach those with special needs how to overcome their challenges and build a strong positive attitude of their own to help!

I've never been an individual who has developed a career of high income and full independence! It's been hard NOT to compare myself to my siblings who are fully independent! However, as the years have progressed I've come to realize that as long as you keep the feeling of true positivity and optimism along with hope, there will always be a light at the end of the tunnel! I've decided that despite the difficult time and era that we face today of different conflicts throughout the world and complex changes with new technological ways, there are often days when it's hard to see the light! However, I've found that simply by reaching out to others and giving a gift as simple as a morning smile and greeting can make someone's day much brighter along with making yourself feel good inside!

The gift of love by simply offering company, reaching out to lend a hand, giving someone the gift of laughter, or by offering encouragement can make a difference shine out of one's heart and soul! Despite my difficulties, I learned to accept that I was NEVER a failure, because I tried my best for who I was and made the effort to share my gifts with others as best as I could! I learned over the years that I would never be able to have my own children, because of health reasons, but instead I was able to share my love of motherhood and leadership by working with children and helping to show them how to stay strong in keeping the faithfulness and positivity in themselves in order to see the light as they journeyed on through life!



Faithfulness to my Father's world. – Edna Miller

“This is my Father's World, I rest me in the thought.”

How lustily I sing that hymn and yet how ambivalent are my feelings toward that world. Am I a creature of God's creation or am I a kind of student passing through whose origins are some other place, some spiritual place, to which I will return when my time on this earth is done? To take the latter view is to risk becoming so heavenly oriented that I am no earthly good. Emphasizing that latter view risks casting a dark shadow on the world, labelling the world as evil, whose temptations are to be fought against and overcome? To take that latter view risks denying the lessons the world can teach us. Too often when reading Paul's letters I feel encouraged to take that latter view.

Yet still I sing, “This is my Father's (or God's, however I interpret God), world.” It is God who has made it and me. I am a creature of this world. I am not just an alien passing through. I am part of this beautiful, amazing, diverse expression of God. If I open myself to it, it has so much to teach me about God and about being part of that creation. It is a world that speaks of diversity, that nurtures interdependence, that takes no more than it needs, that regenerates and promises new beginnings, new tomorrows. It bears a message of hope constantly recycling. The list goes on and on if we are open to seeing and responding to its message.

I am reminded that Jesus often referred to creation as bearers of God's message... consider the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, the mustard seed... At the critical times in his life, Jesus turned to the world. To nature, to creation for solace and inspiration. After his baptism, Jesus withdrew to the desert, the wilderness, in order to determine his response and mission. As he faced persecution, torture, death at the hands of the so-called spiritual leaders of Jerusalem, he retreated to the garden for solace, strength and courage.

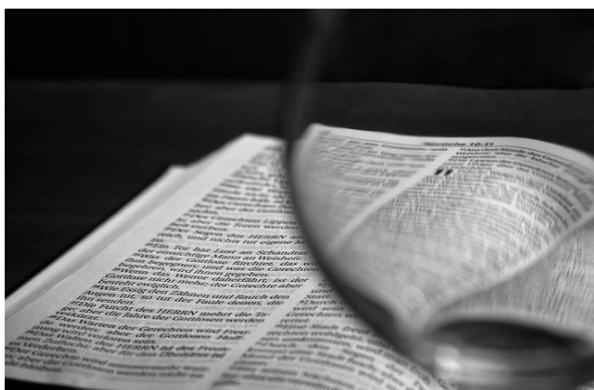
So, I choose to live faithfully, not by rejecting the ways of the world, but by embracing them. I go into the woods and look at the tree, providing homes, food, comfort to a vast diversity, connecting underground to its surroundings in minute and unseen ways, nurturing not only its own kind but many others that need it. I acknowledge that as part of creation, of God's world, I am called to do likewise. Or I go and sit by the lake and reflect on the vast diversity of the wonders of water and what it has to teach me about living in this world. So, I open myself to being a part of this world, not separate from it, not over it, not better than it, not alien to it, but an integral part of it.

The temptations Paul warns against are not really the temptations of the world. They are the ways of the temptations of Imperialism, of Colonialism, of domination, of superiority, of plunder and subjugation.

Those ways I try to reject by focusing on, and trying to learn, the real ways of the God's world as I continue to sing

"This is my Father's world.
I rest me in the thought.
The birds, the trees, the skies, the seas.
His hand their wonders wrought."

Maltbie Davenport Babcock 1858-1901



Galatians for Bible Nerds²! Some historical background to Galatians – Jim Ball

[Jim Ball, former minister at Harcourt, wrote me this email some time ago to tell me why he didn't think he could write an article in the Herald on Galatians. I convinced him that he just did! - Ed]

Of all of Paul's writings, the letter to the Galatians sets out best the background of his ministry and the terms of his arrangement with the church in Jerusalem. From the letter it is clear that Paul's ministry in the gentile world, and his control over it, had, at one point, been under challenge. Church authorities in Jerusalem ("the pillars") and Judaizers in the gentile world (those who insist that gentile Christians conform to the dictates of the Jewish law, including the requirement of circumcision) had been questioning his work. Paul writes his letter to defend his apostolic authority and teaching, and to bring wavering Christians in Galatia back into the Pauline fold.

In the opening two chapters we encounter the details of the agreement struck between Paul and Jerusalem to end the tension between them. The deal is this: Jerusalem recognizes that Paul is a legitimate apostle to the gentiles and will not insist that gentile converts be circumcised. Paul, from his side, acknowledges the authority of the Jerusalem church (although he can barely say it without choking) and promises to raise funds to help the mother church in

2 ... or should we all know a bit more about our Christian heritage???

Jerusalem contend with the famine that is devastating Palestine (“remember the poor”). To this deal Paul and Peter shake hands. James and John do too. This is the Faustian bargain - Paul gets permission and territory and a break on religious requirements in exchange for Jerusalem receiving fealty and money. This in-house political drama (Galatians 1-2) is the backdrop for Paul’s remarks about flesh and spirit, as well as law and gospel, in the rest of the letter (Galatians 3-6).

It is hard to know what the churches in the gentile world thought of this arrangement. On the face of it, the churches get Paul and an invoice. Hmmm. Officially, they also get a break on religious requirements, but this is hardly a win, since converts were unlikely to sign up for circumcision anyway.

As for Paul’s remarks about flesh and spirit, law and gospel, the more cynical have argued that Paul downplays legal and fleshly constraints (i.e., circumcision), in part at least, because it makes his Christianity easier to sell to a Greek audience. This does a disservice to Paul, and more importantly, to Judaism. The law/gospel conversation has long been used to fuel Christian separateness from, and animosity towards, Jews. Our interpretations do not need to reproduce this mistake. Paul’s point is simpler, I think. Namely, that you do not need to be a Jew, in the flesh (i.e., circumcision), in order to follow or believe in one. The gospel casts a wide net, and is not to be limited by notions of ethnic or religious identity. Elsewhere, Paul makes it clear that the counterpoint to fleshly indulgence and material accumulation is not spiritual retreat or freedom from material responsibility. On the contrary, inhospitality and injustice are sins that must be continually challenged by the faith community’s spiritual practices of wide welcome, open table sharing and fair redistribution of resources. (See Paul’s remarks in 1 Corinthians).

Indeed, such hospitality and fairness - made prominent through baptism, open table fellowship and concrete acts of ‘remembering the poor’ - lie at the heart of Paul’s practice and teaching. He does not discuss this practice as “law”, and certainly not as “new law”, since hospitality and shalom are part and parcel of the Old Testament tradition. Instead, he refers to such activities simply as life in Christ. Or life in love. And for Paul, a life of compassion is relational, not transactional.

Paul’s theology, which features prominently in this letter, goes further. The heart of his belief is in a gospel of freedom. For him, this freedom is both a spiritual and a social reality. Freedom is the gift of a life in Christ - a freedom, so transformative and comprehensive, it obliterates all traditional divisions, hierarchies and prejudices. To be in Christ means to be free from the repressive conventions of ‘this evil world’. The Christian is free to leave behind “the cultural and social distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks, the religious distinctions between Jews and non-Jews, and the social systems of slavery and the subordination of

women.”(see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, 29). Paul’s vision invites the experience and practice of a radical egalitarianism. Do not be dismayed by the term. Paul says in chapter 5 that the better word for our life in freedom is love. So let’s just go with that.

Lest we miss the heart of Paul’s thinking, he places an executive summary of it at the very midpoint of his letter. There we read ... “for in Christ Jesus you are all (children) of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3.26-28). These words were probably spoken at every baptism.

With Paul’s understanding now clarified, we can appreciate better why he felt it necessary to write to the churches in Galatia. As with any new movement, there comes a moment for each when the initial enthusiasm for it wears off, and the difficulties of maintaining it come to the forefront. This experience seems to be what happened to Paul’s converts in the time since he was last with them. Sustaining a life in freedom is hard going at the best of times. It can easily drift into libertinism and lawlessness on the one hand, or look for a crutch - in this case the legal dictates and customs of the old religion - on the other. It is a very human thing to want reassurance that we are “doing things right”. This is especially so when we are uncertain or faced with new challenges. At the time of Paul’s writing, the Galatians are apparently struggling with their freedom. Paul’s opponents are in their ears, suggesting that the ethics and customs of the ‘old ways’ would bring needed structure and support to their rudderless (i.e. free) enterprise. But Paul’s answer to the problems freedom raises is to double down on freedom. Paul encourages the Galatians to walk in the spirit, to be led by the spirit and to live in the spirit, which in every situation means living, walking and being led by love. Although we and the Galatians might have wished Paul had offered a few more details about how to live, effectively and faithfully, in love, he offers no instructions beyond those already given - namely, the practices of wide welcome (baptism), open table fellowship (communion and pot luck meals), and fair and generous sharing of resources (neighbourliness, redistribution and ‘remembering the poor’). It is a world in which no one need be out, down, or last.

Most scholars are convinced that the list of vices and virtues featured in Galatians 5 is also drawn from an early Christian liturgy of baptism. Although people may elect to use it as a focus for study or contemplation, the list is not included as the basis for a Christian ethic. The vices and virtues are not things we must avoid or aim for to achieve Christian freedom. There is no appeal here for “works righteousness”. Paul is clear: the freedom that a life in Christ brings can only be received, not earned. By grace. Through Spirit. It is a gift. The virtues, especially, are to be seen as evidence of the gift’s presence in the life of believers. They are what we manifest when we live in love.

This vision of the Christian life is profound in its implications. A couple of centuries after Paul, when the Gnostic gospel of Philip was composed, the impact of Paul's gospel of freedom was still being felt. In that ancient writing are found these words: "If you say: 'I am a Jew,' nobody will be moved. If you say: 'I am a Roman,' nobody will be upset. If you say: 'I am a Greek, or a barbarian, or a slave, or a free (person),' nobody will be disturbed. If you say: 'I am a Christian,' the whole heaven will shake!" (Gospel of Philip, section 49).

(An aside: Paul's arrangement with Jerusalem was a matter that the late John Hurd, professor of New Testament studies at Trinity College in Toronto, first brought to light in his published thesis on 1 Corinthians. As a student of the late John Knox, a towering figure in Pauline studies, Hurd followed his teacher's methods. As did Knox, Hurd used Galatians to build a timetable for Paul's missionary journeys, setting Acts aside, and then used both the timetable and the deal as a lens to understand Paul's written materials. Dom Crossan, who will be known to many readers, also follows Hurd and makes mention of the deal.)

Faithfulness – like an anchor holding in the storms of life – Julie Henshaw (with Bob Smith)

In preparation to write this entry, I reached out to my good friend, Bob Smith, to discuss the concept of maintaining one's faith in challenging times. Before I offer my personal reflection on the matter, I want to share some of his thoughts on faithfulness:

"As a hopeful agnostic, I have often pondered the subject of Christian faith. Faith itself is a two-tiered word. We talk about having faith in our dentist or our mechanic. This lay faith, as it may be termed, is essentially founded on empirical evidence, or, by extension, on reason. Christian faith, by contrast, is a sort of belief (or at least it seems to me) that doesn't go against reason, but rather transcends it, goes beyond it. The faith of my Christian friends of all denominations appears to be that which supports and sustains when intellectualization is not enough.

Faithfulness is the condition of being faithful, or, more precisely, the quality of obedience of God's will that results from being "faith-filled". The faithful Christian will attempt to maintain their loyalty to and trust in the ultimate beneficence of God's plan even when other parts of the mind begin to suggest doubt either in God's mercy or indeed, in God's very existence. A



paradox reveals itself here; it is at those times when events, external or internal, most cause a person's faith to be shaken (an interesting metaphor by the way) that faith is most necessary. Trial and tribulation test a person's faith, but it is in the midst of trial and tribulation that Christians most need the solace and the strengthening power of their faith. Many Christians to whom I have spoken have emerged from personal testing and tragedy with their faith fortified and increased, a logical result when considered in the right light.

Loss of faith seems to come from a variety of sources: personal misfortune that one perceives to be unjust, the suffering of loved ones or of the innocent and helpless anywhere in the world, excessive indulgence in the works of narcissistic (and sadistic, perhaps) atheistic writers and philosophers who, miserable themselves, wish to poison the well of faithfulness for those who believe, and deconstruct Christian belief and values out of existence. Please do not misinterpret: no one would wish to silence a Voltaire or a Darwin, but many moderns seem intent not on establishing a productive truth of their own but rather of sabotaging the heartfelt truth of others. On the retention and regaining of faith I am not personally qualified to speak, but my own movement from what might be termed an almost evangelical atheism to a hopeful and almost Christian agnosticism has been fueled, among other factors, by a contemplation of the fruits of faithfulness as exhibited by Christians both among my acquaintance and outside it. These fruits could not have grown had not faith, faith beyond and above reason, been cherished and sustained by its possessors."

As some of you may know, I faced a series of difficult life circumstances and losses in my young (and not-so-young anymore) adulthood. As Bob notes above, such circumstances are often cited as reasons for people to lose their faith, or experience a crisis of faith. I will not pretend that I sailed through those challenging times unscathed; sadness, depression, and at times, despair were all familiar companions. From an emotional and intellectual perspective, I had to confront a cognitive distortion that was shading my world view and causing distress: the fallacy of fairness - the belief that life is, or should be, fair. But more broadly, when experiencing tragedy, never once did it occur to me to question my faith. Over a cup of coffee with Bob, I attempted to articulate why that is.

Notably, where there has been loss in my life, there has also been God. God in the form of Church Ministers who swooped in offering counsel, prayer, and practical support. God in the form of the physical building of the Church where we gathered for funerals and fellowship. God in the form of the people of the congregation who offered casseroles, help with housekeeping, notes of encouragement, and gifts of prayer shawls. But beyond the embodiment of a benevolent force which I have been blessed to experience, there's a quality of faith itself, that supersedes reason, allowing it to stand in the face of challenging times. I am at a loss for words when I try to describe what it is about my faith that allows it to hold firm though life's difficulties, other than to attribute that resilient quality to the concept of faith itself. So rather

than continue to intellectualize something that is beyond reason, instead, I will regard the phenomenon with gratitude. I am deeply grateful that my mother brought me to Church as a child, and that I've had the comfort of knowing God my whole life. On a final note, there are two songs that come to mind when I think about my faith: 'Will Your Anchor Hold?' and 'Like a Rock'; I've included some of those lyrics below.

Will your anchor hold? (Voices United #675)

1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife,
when the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift or firm remain?

[Refrain:]

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!

Like a Rock (More Voices #92)

Like a rock, like a rock, God is under our feet.
Like the starry night sky, God is over our head.
Like the sun on the horizon, God is ever before.
Like the river runs to Ocean, our home is in God evermore.

An Antidote - Tammy te Winkel

A question on faithfulness - how do you manage to stay faithful to the vision of Jesus, especially in these challenging times?

As I pondered the question that was asked, my mind went to community, i.e., what role has community played in my life's journey so far. A big role. Even in darker times, the need to keep community, where I could, was a very strong driver.

So, let's examine "community". The dictionary says ..." a unified body of individuals having a common characteristic or interest within a larger society." The dictionary definition

felt inadequate somehow, so I looked up the “application of community”. One interpretation is:

Communities offer a place where individuals feel safe, comfortable, and connected, fostering a sense of belonging and helping people develop a sense of identity based on shared values and beliefs.

This felt much better.

Doesn't this sound like the comfort and support that we all seek, some times more than others? As I look on my communities over the years, various choirs and Harcourt have been pivotal. Living in Guelph for most of my adult life, I am physically separated from most of my family. Relatives on my mother's side are in the Ottawa area and on my father's side, in the Netherlands. So, in my local context, communities become vitally important.

For those who know me well, I have been known to just “follow my nose” at times – welcoming what the universe wants to put in my path. Last week I was having lunch with a friend in Elora. She mentioned she wanted to drop in at a local, independent bookstore, owned by a friend of hers. Right up my alley! Often, in a bookstore, I wait for the books to find me. One little gem did – *The Serviceberry (Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World)* by Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer. This is some of what spoke to me:

“Serviceberries show us another model, one based upon reciprocity rather than accumulation, where wealth and security come from the quality of our relationships, not from the illusion of self-sufficiency.”

“The Serviceberry is an antidote to the broken relationships and misguided goals of our times and a reminder that “Hoarding won't save us ... All flourishing is mutual.

The writing talks about the serviceberry as a valiant community member, providing a myriad of goods and services and supporting biodiversity – all in support of “... our spirits nourished by a sense of belonging, which is the most vital of foods.”

Recently, on the first Sunday of Lent, I read a passage that said: “As the shadows of Lent come closer, we extinguish our candle of hope, just for today, as we seek to reconnect with whatever it is that keeps us going, keeps us coming back, keeps us grounded in the faith that makes us who we are.” Think of the times we in, perhaps akin to the “shadows of Lent”, watching our candle of hope dangerously flicker. So, back to the question at hand – what keeps us faithful. For me, that involves staying connected to my communities and help in the mutual flourishing.

So, I've wandered around a wee bit, taking you down different paths of thought. For whatever reason, these tidbits have all be accumulating in my recent experiences since Andre approached me about writing something for the Herald. The thread for me is "belonging".

I do not know where the paths will lead, but I trust they are informing my journey.

May you take what you need from this wandering and bring it back to your communities – in the spirit of the serviceberry.



Why an Easter Vigil? – Andre Auger

On Saturday, April 19th at 3PM , Harcourt will celebrate an Easter Vigil in the Chapel. In our Liturgical Year, we move far too quickly from the sadness of Good Friday to the joy of Easter Sunday: Jesus dies, and He is resurrected. Done. The truth is probably more complex: The Road to Emmaus story captures that sense of loss: the One the disciples hoped would inaugurate a new Era in human history was brutally executed as an enemy of the State.

Yes, our Gospels – and our Creeds – tell us “on the third day, He rose again.” Notice the empty tomb, and the appearances.

The actual facts of history may be a bit different. The gloom, sadness, and despair resulting from the execution probably lasted a good deal longer than three ritual days. As Dutch theologian Eduard Schillebeeckx noted, the fact that disciples concluded that Jesus was somehow resurrected was the result of their own experience of a profound change in their own courage, as they threw open the doors of their refuge and began to act and preach in ways they had never thought possible. Writing much later, the Gospel writers expressed this in terms of the symbols of empty tomb and appearances, in order to convince those who had not had the first-hand experience of deep conversion.

We reclaim the Easter Vigil because we need to acknowledge that we live in dark times – as dark as the disciples’ – with as little hope and as much despair as they had. How can God have abandoned us? Where is the One who will lead us into this better way of being human? What are we going to do now, in light of God’s apparent silence? We need to acknowledge our darkness, our despair, our powerlessness, and our hopelessness, in order to experience the power of the Risen Christ within us.



And so we lament. Lamentation has been part of Judeo-Christian liturgies for millennia. “O God, why have You forsaken us?” We know the answer to that question is that God has never forsaken us, but is not coming in a blaze of glory as early believers – Jewish and Christian alike – had thought. WE are the hands and feet of God. It’s our mess, and we have the means to clean it up. We look inside, not up, in order to find the Risen Christ.

Join us on Saturday April 19 at 3PM in the Chapel for an hour of lamentation, prayer, and discovery of inner strength.



EASTER SUNDAY

We are continuing our tradition of placing hydrangeas in the sanctuary for our Easter Morning service.

If you would like to place flowers in remembrance of a loved one or to celebrate a special occasion, please contact Barb Friend by **April 13th**.

Home: 519-763-5032

Cell: 519-803-5032

email: barfriend52@gmail.com

An Interview with Marnie Allen - Judi Morris

I met with Marnie in her stunning corner condo on the 7th floor, overlooking downtown Guelph. The theme for April is Faithfulness. Marnie, you will read, has demonstrated faithfulness to humankind throughout her life. I thank Marnie for the enjoyable time we spent together, and for her life's inspirations. Marnie has the last word in this interview. When you read this, you will know why.

Judi: The first question is always what brought you to Harcourt?

Marnie: It's more of a who. Maxine Lipinski. I met Maxine, and we became friends. She invited me to Harcourt. I had left the church at the age of 17.

Judi: What church was that?

Marnie: I was born and raised in the Anglican church in Montreal. This is a little bit important because at that point I gave up the word "God." I didn't believe in it anymore. It was the one with the finger, pointing and saying "sinner." So, I left the church and just sailed along for quite a few years. Then being a Quebecker--the FLQ crisis came up and I decided to make a deal with God. If he got me out of Quebec, I would return to church.

Judi: *Gasping. Wow--gasping further--what an imprint on your soul.*

Marnie: He got Terry, my husband, a job at Imperial Tobacco, and got me out of Quebec. That was an important decision in my life. I lived up to my promise -- I didn't give myself any other choice except Anglican.

Judi: What age were you when you left Montreal?

Marnie: Thirty-Eight. I have now been in Ontario longer than I had been in Quebec. They say the Anglophones have PTSD from that crisis, and I agree. So it was like coming home to have everything in English. It was a good move for me and for Terry. I went to St David/St. Patrick. They had some pretty good ministers there. I can't remember all their names. I went to one and said, "Could I have a meeting with you?" And I sat in her office and said, "I don't believe in the Virgin birth." She said, "Neither do I," Then explained the metaphor and all of that. This was the first time that I was able to talk to a minister. I was testing her. Then, a not-so-great minister came up at St. David's, and I left. I went on a journey looking at Buddhism, Hinduism, and earth based spirituality.

Maxine had cystic fibrosis and was on the transplant list. I was the one who organized the drivers for Maxine to Toronto General. So, every week the people in the church

would get an email from me, getting them to put their names in spots to drive her down. She invited me to come to Harcourt and when I walked in the door, most of the people knew my name. They had never seen me, but they knew who I was and they were very welcoming.

Judi: When you looked into Buddhism & Hinduism, did it enlighten your spirit, your resolve?

Marnie: Definitely. I don't know the right terminology to use, but I am a practising smorgasbord.

Judi: *(We both laugh)* That's a good one. I never heard that description before.

Marnie: I do my meditation. I have Hindu & Buddhism symbols on the table and I do the Holy Listening Circle, which is above and beyond traditional Christianity for me. It's open. And I remember at the beginning saying to, I think it was Andre, sometimes I think I don't belong because I have different views and he said emphatically, "We need to hear those views." And from that moment on, I just let it flow.

Judi: Had you never been part of the United Church before Harcourt?

Marnie: I did go to CGIT at a United church because my friends went there.

Judi: Harcourt then was your first experience with the United church, and the openness it offers.

I heard you speak of Terry, your husband. I recall a long time ago, Women's Spirituality held a meeting at your house on Gryphon Place and you were on your own.

Marnie: He died in 2013. He had idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, which means his lungs were hardening. He was on the double lung transplant list. He died the day his lungs came in. I was sitting beside him—he was in the bed. You are supposed to stay within two hours of Toronto when you are on the list. I looked at my phone and I saw it was the Toronto General and I beat it out of the room, because I knew he was fairly sick, and I said, "Don't tell me you have lungs for him." She said, "Yes, I do." And I told her, "Well, he's got sepsis so you better call the hospital here and see if they can do anything." But they couldn't—he died that night.

I had been through all that experience with Terry and decided to walk with Maxine to her transplant. Her sister and I spelled each other week in/week out when she was in the hospital.

Judi: I'm sorry that happened to you. It's gut wrenching.

You said to me, as soon as I walked in, you came to Harcourt and heard Jim Ball's first sermon.

Marnie: Yes, and I thought he was terrific. I liked what he had to say. Some ministers can speak to your heart and some don't — I mean that's the same with life. And now I do Spiritual Listening with sixteen million ministers. (*Marnie Laughs*) and I hear them talking a different language than when I was young. So that's nice.

Judi: Did you attend church in person?

Marnie: The 9:00 a.m. service for two years for the Holy listening Circle after it. When Terry was sick, Steve Phair, Sandy's husband and I knew each other from Hospice. Steve would come and help me by giving me respite, by taking Terry to rehab.

Judi: Steve Phair was a kind man.

Marnie: Yes. He would tell me to get lost, so they could talk about sports. I'm very involved with hospice and so was he. We used to facilitate the training together. And through him and going to the 9:00 a.m. service, I got to know Sandy better. When she went through losing Steve, Sandy and I became closer.

Judi: You are a Chartered Professional Accountant. Did you work at that in Guelph?

Marnie: Yes. CPA. CGA. I was not a public accountant, I was a controller, which means I was a corporate accountant. I started with Walt Kelly Limited – Car & Truck Rental, then Rea Truck Sales, and then treasurer of Ontario Dairy Herd Improvement. I didn't stay there very long because that was government work and I was not cut out for that. I lasted nine months.

Judi: I'm curious; what brought you into that occupation?

Marnie: The choices for women were teacher or nurse at that time. I went into teaching and taught grade 5 for three years and thought, that's not for me. My parents expected perfection. In accounting, you can prove you are perfect.

Judi: Ha ha. That's me. I'm a bookkeeper. I love it. No matter how bad your day goes, mistakes are always there to be found ... they can't escape you. Nothing a good cup of tea can't fix.

So—what did you like about Guelph? Hopefully you liked Guelph.

Marnie: I loved it. It was a big transition coming from Montreal to Guelph. Our biggest problem was finding a “decent” restaurant. Quebec had very good restaurants. Montreal did as well. People were sociable and dressed up. They had the French flavour there.

Coming to Guelph was like taking a 50 lb coat off my back. I could talk to everyone on the street if I wanted to. There was no animosity or anything.

Judi: Did you find the people friendly?

Marnie: Not as friendly as French people. French people are very, very social, talk with their hands and they are very, very into people and family. For me, at the beginning, there was a little bit of hesitation with English people to be overtly friendly in the same way. I’m glad I was brought up in Quebec, because I have that French savoir faire. When I first came to Guelph it was really nice to not have to worry about speaking French. I loved the size of the city. When we first came, it was 65,000. Now it’s 144,000. When we moved here on Gryphon Place, it was the last house going south. There was no Edinburgh road extension.

What caught me all during this time was me finding hospice. And that was the biggest thing in my life.

Judi: How long have you been in Hospice?

Marnie: Since 2006. Lisa [Browning – Ed] published a book called, *You are not alone, 52 Stories of Hope*. I wrote a piece in it about how I became involved with Hospice.

Judi: I want to hear more about your smorgasbord.

Marnie: My practising smorgasbord means that I now participate in Spiritual Listening. I hear what the people have to say and I say what I think, which can be very different. I spent a lot of time apologizing for that, but I don’t anymore. Still, when I start talking Buddhism etc., it’s a little weird for me to do, but I get over myself.

Judi: You don’t have to be anything at Spiritual listening. You listen and let the words speak to you and how and where they take you. If you wish, you can respond to that and how the word made you feel.

Marnie: I started meditating after exploring Buddhism. Meditation is very good for me. I’m not doing it regularly right now, so I will check in with some friends and get back on track. For Hinduism, I went out Kripalu Yoga Center, in Lenox, Massachusetts. That involved a lot of yoga, some meditation, and connection to my inner being. It really attracted me.

Judi: Did you feel God—Spirit?

Marnie: Spirit, I would use. I'm just coming back to the word God because every time I would say this word God, it would be, I am a sinner. Then I found out that God is Dog backwards and I liked that idea. So my smorgasbord is: Personal Growth, Buddhism, Hinduism, little bit of Christianity. A little bit of everything.

Judi: When you say you like reading about Personal Growth, What books might you recommend?

Marnie: *The Four Agreements*, by don Miguel Ruiz--*The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle; There's one now, *Atlas of the Heart* by Brene Brown, that I am just going to start with a girlfriend. On Sunday I turned 78, and that's a big deal for me because it's pretty close to 80. I realize that is the end of a seven-year cycle, which is important in my smorgasbord. So, it's all about new beginnings and I'm stopping some things and opening up space to welcome new opportunities.

Judi: You haven't spoken of family.

Marnie: My parents had me in their forties. I have one brother who is ten years older than I am. I lost my parents when I was in my early thirties. My dad left when I was about twenty, so I felt I had to stay with my mother because she was so lonely. I stayed with her until I was twenty-nine.

Judi: I want to finish by asking what Hospice does for you?

Marnie: Hospice is my empathic work. Last year I was awarded the June Caldwood award for outstanding volunteerism. It is so nice to be recognized in this way. Because I don't have family here at all, I get honoured by other people. At Hospice, I have a one-on-one bereavement client, which means I meet with her once a week for an hour to an hour and a half for twelve weeks. This is when they are going through grief. You listen to them tell their story to someone who doesn't know the family etc. etc. I do reception on the community floor every Wednesday morning. I also like helping with fundraising events.

Judi: How do people get into Hospice?

Marnie: Self-referred for community level support which is caregiver, palliative, and bereavement. This is all at no cost to the client or resident. Everything that Hospice offers is at no cost. There are programs, there is art therapy, there is music therapy, there is bereavement groups, caregiver groups, and there is this one-on-one.

Judi: The theme for April is “Faithfulness.” How do we stay the course?

Marnie: Just saying that word, makes me realize how important it is for me to be faithful to myself by continuing to learn and look for signs of where I’m supposed to go and what I am supposed to do. If what I am doing is not very helpful, I need to do something about it. So be faithful to myself so that I can be the best I can be for you. What Hospice has taught me is to be there for other people. To have their back. It will end up being reciprocal.

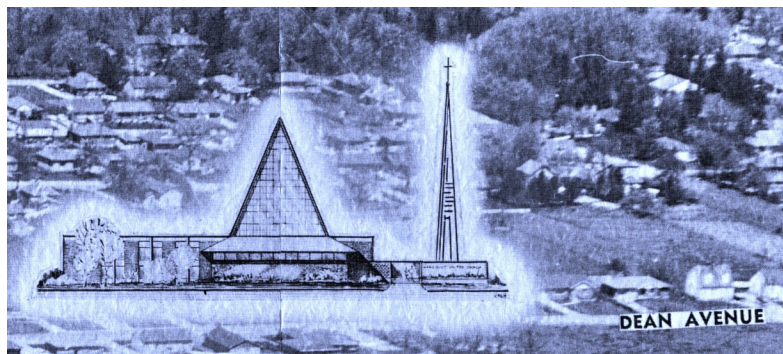
To help me understand the importance of hospice to Marnie, she asked that I read her submission to Lisa Browning’s book, You Are Not Alone: 52 Stories of Hope. I wish I could have included it. The book is available for purchase on Lisa Browning’s website. 100% of the proceeds go directly to Hospice Wellington. Lisa has also donated a book to Harcourt’s library.

A Piece of Harcourt’s Unwritten History: The Steeple Saga – Peter Gill

Marilyn Whiteley’s March article about Harcourt from the 1960’s to 80’s reminded me of conversations I had with John Haayen. John lived across the road on Forest Street from us for many years.

I’m not sure if anyone is still around from the planning and building of Harcourt but John was the architect who designed the church. He was quite well known in the city and in fact designed the former Guelph police station in the 1950’s.

His favourite story about his work on the church was his interaction with Isobel Hammond (whose picture hangs in the hallway overlooking the gym). John was a pretty strong-minded Dutchman (!) and I gather Isobel also was not afraid to voice her opinions. She took on a lot of the planning of the church building. John recounted that their major clash was over the building of a steeple! Isobel really wanted a steeple, John was adamant that the cost was prohibitive. He did tell me one time what the estimated cost would be – it sounded ludicrously inexpensive in today’s dollars. In any event I guess he won that battle. I have no idea how it would have fit into the A-frame design or whether that was a compromise. Is there anyone out there who can clarify that?



As we move toward the centennial of the United Church of Canada in June, the Music and Message service will be spending a couple minutes each month to look at the United Church's history-focusing on a twenty-year period beginning with the most recent. So in the History Corner, let's look at the history of Harcourt and the Brooklyn Mission using the same time frames.

1946-1965

By the 1940s, the Brooklyn mission was holding many activities in its Martin Avenue building. Besides the regular Sunday school classes, there were other things involving both youth and adults. In 1951, an informal survey of the neighbourhood had already shown that there were many who would attend regular Sunday services of worship in the neighbourhood but were not venturing downtown to one of the established churches.

The first Sunday morning service was held on October 23, 1951. It and those on the following Sundays were well attended, and the people of the Brooklyn neighbourhood wanted to take a further step. This



was encouraged by something that happened following the death of Carolyn Harcourt in 1953. She had been a strong supporter of the Brooklyn mission, and her will included an endowment fund that would provide money if the mission were to become a congregation.

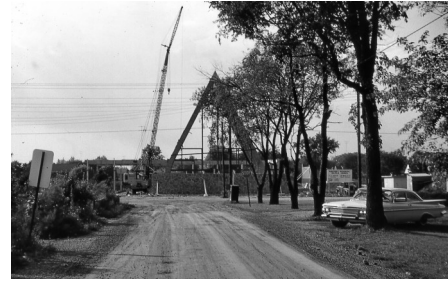
In February, 1955, the Brooklyn mission and Chalmers Church sent a joint request to a meeting of Waterloo Presbytery in February, and it was approved. The Brooklyn mission people worked creatively to transform the large meeting room in the Martin Avenue building so that it looked more like a church. The new, part-time minister, William Rose, proclaimed

enthusiastically, “Now it is a ‘churchy church.’” The big day of the inaugural service of the new congregation, Harcourt Memorial United Church, came on March 4, 1956. It was a grand occasion with George Dorey, the moderator of the United Church, conducting the worship.

The service opened with the singing of the hymn “All people that on earth do dwell.” Following the dedication of the new congregation and the hymn “O God our help in ages past,” people joined the Harcourt Memorial United Church by profession of faith or transfer from other congregations. Then, after solos and sermon and offering, the congregation united in the closing hymn, “The church’s one foundation.” The Sunday school mission had become Harcourt Church, a full-fledged congregation, looking forward to serving the community in a new way.



Now Harcourt was a congregation, not a mission. In 1959, William Rose resigned his part-time position, and the congregation called Robert Kaill as its full-time minister. The Martin Avenue facilities were inadequate for the growing church, and the congregation decided to build. A parcel of land on Dean Avenue was purchased, an architect was hired, and on May 21, 1961, the congregation broke ground for the new building. On January 7, 1962, the first service was held in the new building - the building that has been our home ever since.



Questions That Stand the Test of Time - Lisa Browning

I was “late to the party this month” ... so I am cheating a bit as I write this article. My first, automatic response to the question, “How do I stay faithful to the vision of Jesus, especially in these challenging times?” was “With trust.”

Now, for me, trust is not exactly the same as faith, although the difference is very subtle. In thinking about this difference, I was reminded of an article I published in *One Thousand Trees* magazine, back in 2013. For that article, I asked Barbara Susan Booth, founder of the (now closed) Sacred Wisdom Centre, Marty Molengraaf (then minister at Duff’s Presbyterian Church in Puslinch, as well as the staff person for the Ecumenical Campus Ministry at the University of Guelph), and (now) retired United Church minister John Lawson for their thoughts on the concepts of Faith, Belief, Confidence, and Trust, and the nuances between them. Following are their responses, which are as relevant today as they were 12 years ago ...

What is your definition of each of these concepts: Faith, Belief, Confidence, Trust? How are they the same, and how do they differ?

Barbara

Faith seems to me to be the most enduring of these concepts. It means to me an abiding knowing that what is in focus is so. It is usually used in a spiritual or religious sense and refers to an abiding and continuing confidence in something of deep value.

Belief is more of a thought than a feeling to me and may be more changeable. I believe something is so until I find out differently and it seems more in the head than the heart.

Confidence is a feeling that my actions and my heart are in alignment and something positive will result if I move forward.

Trust is an experience that something is authentic.

John

Faith – I come at things from a “Faith” perspective. And so I see it as having a perspective that comes from beyond myself. Some might call it a Higher Power. I call it God. And, for me, that “faith” is that, at the heart of the universe, there is something good and loving – and that God’s desire for the universe is good and loving. I see this as my worldview – my “foundational” orientation and “faith.” Basically I see faith as relational.

Belief – I see belief as the kind of framework that describes this “faith” relationship. For some it is a series of doctrines. I see these solely as descriptors – not themselves the object of “faith.” I think a lot of people in Christianity get invested in beliefs rather than see them as ways of trying to describe a mystery and mystical relationship beyond any of us.

Confidence – Confidence I associate with my feelings. These change – often day-to-day. Sometimes I feel grounded and rooted. Other days things shake my confidence and unseat me. Confidence seems like one of those inner orientations that I need to cultivate and pay attention to daily.

Trust – I see trust in terms of relationship. Over time I learn to trust certain people. It comes from walking with them and they walking with me. Likewise in my spiritual journey I have grown to “trust God.” But like any relationship it needs to be nurtured. For me it needs to be nurtured daily – hour by hour, day by day. It’s like relationship with the spouse or friend. It takes cultivating.

Marty

These are challenging questions for today. To answer them effectively, I think, we need to go back in history to before the Enlightenment. Indeed I think postmodern thought is a trip backwards in time a little. Before the Enlightenment, mystery played a stronger role in everyday life. The Enlightenment tried to dispel mystery with the advent of logical thought and reason. And there was much good that came out of that. Cause and effect as demonstrated in many scientific studies showed us clearly that diseases for example, were not evil spirits but rather micro-organisms referred to as pathogens. This dispelling of myths and mystery has had enormous positive effects in today's world. But science is also recognizing that not everything can be explained by cause and effect. There is a randomness to the universe as well. Post modern thought is more open to this randomness (mystery) than modernity ever was. So faith, I believe has more acceptance in post modernity. Within faith, there is mystery. Faith is making leaps in logic. Faith is making a decision about something without all the facts so to speak. Faith is a disposition one takes about life in general. It is a decision about how to view the world. One chooses a life of faith, for example faith in God, in spite of the fact that there is no empirical evidence to support the existence of God. Faith is a radical stance. To live in faith is to live radically in the world today.

Scholars like Marcus Borg help us to understand what belief is as well. Before the enlightenment, belief was not seen as a system of ideas that one adheres to. It was not a list of statements that people assented to. Instead belief comes from an understand of 'loving' something. To believe is to 'love'. To believe is to hold close to one's heart something or someone. To believe in God, for example is not to fight for an idea or God, or to argue for the existence of God, rather it is to have your heart longing for God. To believe in God is to 'love' God and to be beloved of God.

Confidence is very similar - confidence comes out of faith and belief. Confidence is in 'knowing' that there is nothing more powerful in the world than God and God's love. Confidence is in 'knowing' that regardless of who we are, what we have done, we are included in that love and in that forgiveness. 'Knowledge' in this regard is not a list statements, but rather an experience of faith - an experience of God. Knowledge comes

from those experiences - everyday experiences of sensing, seeing God's love through others, through nature, through spiritual practices of prayer and meditation.

In our society trust is not easy. Unfortunately the radical individuality that marks our western world results in relationships of competition more readily than relationships of trust. This is perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of our time. Trust is a radical option. To trust is to be vulnerable. It is to decide that vulnerability is worth the risk. This is true both in terms of a relationship with God and in terms of our relationship with others. To not trust however, is also a decision. And, unfortunately that decision limits our ability to engage in relationships that can be full of laughter and love, joy and happiness. From my perspective it is easier to trust if we have already chosen a disposition of faith and of belief (beloving).

How do you incorporate these concepts into your day to day life, and how does doing so help you?

Barbara

I don't think these words in definition but use these concepts as guideposts for directions as I reference my feelings and body-felt knowing. When they are lacking I stop to consider a situation more widely and see if the lacking is a guidepost to stop and turn a different way.

John

I think in all these there is a practice of attention – and setting a compass kind of direction – daily. It is so easy to lose one's grounding and centering. There are so many “stories” competing to pull us this way and that – that it is easy to lose a sense of ourselves, what is most important, what is most healing and grounding. What is most important in terms of relationships. For me I need to ground myself in the story of my faith, in prayer and nurturing my relationship with God for my spirit for me to be healthy. And this in turn builds my sense of confidence.

Marty

Living a life of faith is a radical option - some would even say it is an extreme option. To choose faith and belief and confidence and trust is to be an extremist - an extremist, however, for love not hate, for compassion not terror, for forgiveness not retaliation; an extremist who plants Incidents of Explosive Kindness in everyday life.

I try to do this by following a principle of 'ubuntu' in daily living. Ubuntu comes to us from South Africa and it is a recognition of our interconnectedness with each other and the world around. It is a concept within which I see the teaching of Jesus. It is recognizing that we are all human, all sons and daughters of God, all sharing a common human experience. We are not radical individuals but part of each other in a cosmic community. "A person is a person through other people", Nelson Mandela would say. "I am because we are", Archbishop Desmond Tutu would say. "Love one another as I have loved you", Jesus would say. Being a person of faith, belief, confidence and trust is being a person ready to live out love radically every day. Small acts of kindness, seeing the humanity in each other, offering care, compassion freely - all of these things are what I strive to do. In addition the spiritual disciplines of prayer and of meditation mark my daily life and enable me to find both the courage and strength to live this radical life of faith.

What is your definition of hope, and where does it fit into the picture?

Barbara

Hope is a wanting or longing for something that has not yet happened and a desire that it turn out in a certain way in the future.

John

Hope is something that calls me forward – a future promise to live into. If I trust God – I live into the hope that somehow, that good, that center of love at the heart of existence – will find expression. It's irrepressible. I need to practice living into that hope – even when

some- times, I don't feel it. And ultimately, that hope lives beyond me. It is something that is true – eternally true.

Marty

As I say so often to my children, hope is the understanding that the way things are right now, will not be the way they are forever. Hope is to hold fast to a new tomorrow, an unprecedented future, a time when people will live in harmony with one another and in which the love we share for each other is reflected in our love and care for the earth and all non-humans as well. Is this vision of the world possible? Only if we can envision it and make strides towards it in faith, belief, confidence and trust. The Mauri people of New Zealand do long term planning not in terms of months or years or even decades. They plan for the next 500 years. 500 years! It is the recognition that anything truly worth doing is not going to be accomplished within our lifetime or even the lifetime of our children. It takes years and years to accomplish. Ours is not the task to bring it all to completion. Our is the task to take the first step confidently. That is hope!

Life Events:

Passages



MURRAY, Marilyn Robinson
December 16, 1932 – March 15, 2025



JACKSON, Peter,
March 19, 2025

