

Paul in Winnipeg

As part of Faith and Life Committee's Presentation
MC Canada Assembly, Winnipeg 2008

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Intro (by worship leader):

While Paul was in Winnipeg, he conversed with the Jews in their synagogue, he shared with the Muslims in their mosque, he held meetings with the Hindus at their temple, he met the elders in their sweat lodge, and had repeated conversations with the humanists down at the Forks. He was even a guest presenter at the Intro to Philosophy course at the U of W. Everyone's curiosity in what he was saying (not to mention the inexplicable appearance of a 1st Century figure) led them to organize an inter-religious gathering with Paul as a plenary speaker. His paper was entitled "Spiritual Restlessness in Canada."

Monologue:

Good afternoon. I bring warm greetings from the churches in Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Rome and the region of Galatia. It's been a privilege to be able to travel across Canada these last months, and I've observed a few things. I see how your souls are restless¹ for God in every way. As evidence, almost all of you, regardless of background, from BC to Newfoundland, are asking the ultimate questions: Where did we come from? Why is their suffering? What happens when we die?²

On a long stretch of highway between Manitoba and Alberta, I read James Fowler, one of your gurus in faith formation studies, who writes: "Faith is a universal human concern. Prior to our being religious or irreligious, before we come to think of ourselves as Catholics, Protestants, Jews or Muslims, we are already ... concerned with how to put our lives together and with what will bring life meaning."³

In concert with that, your social scientists say that 80% of Canadians believe in a God who cares for them personally.⁴ Half of your national population says that they have experienced God's presence. 3 in 4 adults who I've passed on the street or in the market

¹ Bibby, Reginald W. *Restless Churches*, p. 2.

² Ibid., p. 16.

³ Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith*, quoted in "Mantras, Menorahs, and Minarets," Faith and Life Resources, p.6

⁴ Bibby, p.14.

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here in Canada acknowledge that they pray privately.⁵ Is this not evidence of an inner restlessness that God has planted within each of us?

As I've traveled across Canada, I looked carefully at your houses of worship: from the stately cathedral to the Old Order Meetinghouse; from the towering minaret to the Buddhist pagoda; from the synagogue to the Sikh temple. How religious many of you are in every way!

Of course, the God who made the world – the Lord of heaven and earth – is not contained by shrines made by human hands or restricted to one building over against another. Your many houses of worship are simply symbols of your common search for God.

It is a *common* search, you know, because we're all God's offspring. God made us similarly so that we would each search for God, indeed grope for the divine. Not in futile desperation, but so that we would in fact find God, because God's not far from any one of us.

For in God, we all live and move and have our being.

So if this is unknown to you, I want to make it plain: This very God whom we grope for, this God who stirs up the restlessness in our souls, and is as close to us as the breath we breathe, this same God also chooses to come to us with open arms in Christ Jesus. Jesus reveals God's love – so clearly, so fully, so truly, that his life was confirmed as *the way*. Blessed by God in his resurrection. The raising of Jesus from the dead demonstrates God's intentions and God's love for the entire world. This divine action isn't a footnote in history; it's not a blip in time, it's not a point on which to waver. It's the crux of faith, a celebration in which everyone can share. In Christ's resurrection God appointed a righteous person to hear the repentance and confession of the world and through whom we're assured of the general resurrection on the last day. A glorious day, to be sure, when all restless souls, in Canada and beyond, will find their home and peace.

⁵ Ibid., p. 54.