



**Mennonite
Church**
Canada

Formation

Sermon

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Church: Mennonite Church Canada

Date: January 20, 2013

Scripture Text: Micah 6:6-8, Luke 24:13-35

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What is Required of Us?

Ecumenical Week of Prayer Service

What does the Lord require of us? I think this is a critical question for each Church House and of our corporate Christian community as well. Our assembly this evening is a good first step. This is an important worship service. A gathering such as this is an expression of solidarity in an increasingly fragmented world. Rising tribalism and societal discord begs people of faith to model an alternative sentiment. Because this is an expression of commitment to the entire human family, it is a gathering of solidarity as much with those who are not in attendance as with those sharing this space.

It is heartbreaking to admit, but admit we must, that religious tension has been and continues to be a contributing factor of global strife. But it is also encouraging to recognize that religion is one of the most positive influences in civil society. Interfaith initiatives such as the Canadian Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change in 2011 evidence the power of cooperation. People of faith across religious expression joined together to insist that our Canadian government take leadership in climate justice.

Movements such as the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada are a witness to the ability for Christian organizations to be in healthy relationship. And in Canada we are thrilled to have six Church Houses holding membership in both of these ecumenical circles. Canadian Council of Churches and Evangelical Fellowship of Canada worked together with other organizations to produce a call to our Canadian government in 2007, entitled Vision to Action: Faith Based Movement for a Canada Without Poverty. These

examples of cooperation are something to celebrate indeed.

It is striking to me that these efforts of cooperation centre on what we can do together for others. I think this is a focus applauded by our Canadian society. Even non religious people have two expectations of the church. The first is that the church gets along. Non-religious people recognize that if it feels as though we are competing with one another we are not displaying an attribute of the Divine. The second is that the church should be the leader in addressing issues of poverty and social justice. Again, even non-religious people know that those claiming to be representatives of God should be in the forefront of dealing with issues of pain and sorrow for the human family.

So while I think the focus of what we can do together for others is one applauded by Canadian society, I also think it is a focus celebrated by our Lord. I might even suggest it is a focus modelled by our Lord.

The Luke account of Jesus meeting the disciples on the road to Emmaus is an example of this modelling. It is a curious thing, is it not, that the disciples did not recognize Jesus until he once again broke bread with them: the symbol of his sacrificial act of redemption.

The theological discourse in verses 25-26 did not cause the disciples to recognize him. Neither did the recalling of the miraculous triumph over death in verses 22-24. It was not until Jesus returned to the posture of the suffering servant that the eyes of the disciple were opened.

This is not to suggest that the recollection of the miracle and the theological discourse were meaningless. Not so, the disciples testified that their hearts were burning during this conversation. So it is not that the miracles and theology were insignificant. But it does appear that they were insufficient. Only when theology and miraculous activity is encompassed by acts of sacrificial love are eyes opened and the Redemptive Christ is revealed.

This evening is an important gesture. It reflects the will of the Christian community to be in relationship. This is an important testimony. But the true display of Christ is manifested when we unite together in sacrificial love for others. A community focused only on being together has minimum impact on those not part of the community. But a community focused on giving of themselves for the benefit of others is a community of great impact to everyone. This is the type of community the People of God are invited into.

It seems to me that our Canadian context provides three concrete opportunities for us to be that type of community. Let me suggest to you that for the Church in Canada to have integrity it must be engaged in indigenous relations, climate justice and interreligious dialogue. These are three opportunities that beg for ecumenical solidarity, and in our Canadian context demand ecumenical engagement.

The Christian Church must be a full participant in the Truth and Reconciliation process. Healing and confession are inseparable partners. We have all been impacted by a common past in Canadian history. Speaking the truth must be accompanied by acknowledgement and humble acceptance. Our own spiritual health is dependent on our willingness to help make right a grievous wrong. Indigenous relations are a vital invitation for ecumenical engagement.

The Christian Church has an important voice in climate justice. As a reflection and representation of the broken body of Christ, we cannot

cooperate with consumption patterns that depict insatiable hunger and greedy gorging of the earth's resources. Even a simplistic concern for the human family requires just access and equitable consumption of that which the Creator supplied for our corporate survival. A political claim on any of the earth's resources must be governed by a global responsibility of stewardship rather than a geographical confinement of economic growth. Climate justice is a global call for ecumenical engagement.

The Christian Church also ought to be leaders in opening the door for interreligious dialogue. Religious conflicts benefit no one. Such displays of intolerance only serve to silence spiritual yearnings of all. When People of faith reflect the divine attributes of love, mercy, forgiveness and peace, it becomes impossible for nationalistic aggression to claim religious endorsement or favour. This is not to suggest that we gravitate to the lowest common denominator as religions. It is instead to suggest, that people of faith must be able to model healthy and respectful dialogue.

I applaud the Honourable Philip Lee, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba for initiating the annual Award for the Advancement of Interreligious Understanding. This is a spiritual request for ecumenical engagement. This is a model for other provinces across this great land.

Healthy and respectful interreligious dialogue is a request of peace, for ecumenical engagement. Our Canadian context compels us to embrace ecumenical engagement in indigenous relations, climate justice and interreligious dialogue. Our cooperation and shared worship is to be applauded and celebrated. But when we join together in causes that are beyond our immediate benefit, we imitate the breaking of bread and reveal the Risen Christ.

Our shared love for God and our mutual commitment to our neighbour requires such energy. May the Spirit of God and the Love of Christ guide us in this important activity.