

Reflection for June 9, 2024 – The Three C’s

Inspired by 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Three words, *Connecting, Collaborating and Cultivating*, framed the theme of this year’s Pacific Mountain Region’s Annual Meeting, which was held in Vancouver. I attended the various presentations, worship services and keynote addresses remotely, and I have to say I was inspired.

From the tone of the meeting and the spirit’s presence in music, prayer reflection, and from the number of new ministers ordained or commissioned (14 in total), one would not gather that we are a church in decline. Despite COF’s dwindling in membership, continued closures, amalgamations, and shortage of leaders, there are still many vibrant ministries like ours doing Christ’s work, while continuing to feed and nourish one another emotionally and spiritually.

While we unfortunately don’t see it in Peachland, youth and young adult ministries are robust in many areas. Our church continues to foster youth participation and leadership. Our Regional AGM was blessed again this year by a vibrant youth caucus. Over the last few years there have been various new “church plants,” initiatives like wild church, weird church, The Abbey Church in Victoria, Feast and Fallow in Vancouver and Sanctuary on 6th in New Westminster.¹ All of these point to a church who is on the move and recreating. More information on any of these projects can be found online.

The United Church is connecting, collaborating and cultivating new ways of “being church,” despite what we seem to be seeing around us. It is indeed not all gloomy.

Which made this verse from our Epistle reading this morning stand out to me. ***“So, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.”***

Paul has a message for the fledgling church in his time. There is a lot going on including internal bickering and even complaints about Paul’s leadership. Grumbling, divisiveness, and questioning are bubbling up in this unsettling time, and it is very challenging. The future is uncertain.

So, friends Paul says, despite all the challenges we face, despite the turmoil before us, regardless of criticisms and questing, remember something. Remember that whatever is going on “out there,” all the noise that takes us away from our purpose, is not God’s agenda. The ministry we have been given in Christ is threatened if we succumb to negativity. All that stuff that might dissuade us from our purpose is external. It is wasted energy if we focus on it.

What is external to us is changing too, and it will continue to change. It will affect us but we need to remember whose we are and what we are about. If we remember that, we will continue to be blessed by God’s ever-present love. It will renew us every day and give us strength to carry on our ministry here together.

¹ [New Communities – Pacific Mountain Region](#), accessed June 7, 2024

Paul is asking his “New Church Plant,” to stay connected, stay together and remain focussed. He is asking them to collaborate, to talk and not allow themselves to become divided. He is asking them to keep cultivating the love that was Jesus. He wants them to spread the good news of God’s enduring love for them, and for everyone, despite distractions.

“Keep your eye on the ball,” is how we might phrase this today. Stay focussed, stay present, stay engaged.

We might be tempted to give up and give in. Our hearts continue to ache in this world of despair, our hopes seem so totally unrealistic, our dreams beyond the realm of possibility. It is so easy to become distracted, to turn inward and isolated, to let fear control us.

Of course, if we do that, the fire of hope for peace and justice dies out in us. And if it dies out in us, there is not much opportunity to cultivate it elsewhere. There will be no seeds to plant, no good news to share in a world that really needs it.

Now we have been here before haven’t we. Well not specifically all of us gathered here this morning, but our parents, grand-parents, great-grandparents and on and on through history. And their insistence on a better way, their hope for the future, their belief in a God of love, tolerance and forgiveness, has laid the foundation for the church and its ministry today.

Just think of the connections necessary to begin the dream of this COF in 1911. What sort of collaboration would it have taken to gather the artisans that put up this sanctuary by hand, stone by stone and board by board? And look what they cultivated, a ministry today of gifted, kind, generous and loving individuals that still believe we can make a difference.

Is that a nonsensical dream? As we all grow a little older, a little less mobile, a little more arthritic, somewhat less able to hear our favourite hymn or see clearly what is on the screen, will we stop believing? Will our hope vanish and with it a reincarnated Jesus?

I don’t believe it will, not if we practice the Three C’s, **Connect, Collaborate, Cultivate.**

Your ministry planning team has begun that work. As a board initiative, you might recall that a few of us have been tasked with identifying who we really are today at PUC, what we value, how we do ministry and who we want to be in the future.

We have had three meetings so far to look specifically at how we connect with one another and in our community. We have looked at our strengths and our successes. We have also identified some of our challenges and gaps in our ministry. And it is time to bring that work to you.

Our ministry here is not defined by a few, but lives in each and everyone who takes a seat here every Sunday or joins us on-line. So, we need to collaborate and ensure that what we discern reflects the wisdom of all of you. That collaboration will start next Sunday, so please do plan to be here if you can.

Oh yes, and it goes without saying that, with your input we do plan to embark on cultivating our ministry. Actually, some of it will be some simple weeding and hoeing. But we might want to get out the rototiller and sow some new planting. That could be very exciting. What do you think we might like to plant?

And so, we do not loose heart, Peachland United Church is a vibrant, healthy, caring and compassionate ministry. Justifiably, we travel onward with hopeful hearts.

Thanks for listening this morning. Amen