

CENTRAL UNITED CHURCH WINDSOR

Called to be a caring and welcoming community of faith and witness for Christ in downtown Windsor

Website: centralunitedchurchwindsor.com

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New Sight Restored

Pastor Jeff Kolk shares a story of A young man, who had worked for years on the railroad, wanted a job as a signalman for the railroad. For his interview, he was told to meet the inspector at the signal box. The inspector asked him, "What would you do if you realized that two trains were heading toward each other on the same track?"

The young man said, "That's easy. I would switch the points for one of the trains." "The inspector then asked, "What if the lever broke?" The young man said, "Then I'd jump down out of the signal box and I'd use the manual lever over there."

Next, the inspector said, "What if the lever had been struck by lightning?" The young man said, "Then, I would run to the signal box and phone the next signal box to let them know what was happening." The inspector continued on, "What if the phone was busy?" The young man said, "Well, in that case, I would rush down out of the signal box and use the public emergency phone at the crossing up there."

Then, the inspector said, "What would you do if the public emergency phone had been vandalized?" The young man said, "Oh, well, then I would run into town and get my uncle." That answer puzzled the inspector. So, he asked, "Why would you go get your uncle?" The young man answered, "That's simple. Because he's never seen a train crash before."

Many folks today feel trapped or "stuck" they have tried everything that they know to do yet they still feel hopeless that anything will ever change in certain aspects of their lives, or their lives on a whole.

Oftentimes many of us become like the young signalman in the story I just shared. We are doing everything we know to do to prevent the disaster but we finally just sit back and watch it happen before our eyes. We may not like it, but we feel "stuck" in our situation.

Some feel "stuck" in a marriage or "stuck" in a job, or even in our "stuck" in our spiritual lives. When we are "stuck" often we stop seeking ways to improve our problems and just sit back and do nothing to make them better.

Sometimes we feel like it is our church that is stuck in a rut that we can't get out of. We may feel as though we are experiencing some spiritual stagnation, or that we are not growing together in the Lord. We may be growing in different ways to our brothers and sisters and we may be more involved than they are, and we may feel like some people are doing more than others to keep the church afloat. So it appears as though things are looking grim and that we may not survive.

I have news for you! We are not stuck if we have the Lord. We are not stuck if we have each other, even if we are not as many as we'd like. We are not stuck if we are committed to our work of Love and Compassion and Service to our community and to God. Things may look and seem to be a little bleak. Membership might be waning, the funds may be dwindling, but until we are willing to stand against the hope that Christ has installed within the bosom of this church, we will never be stuck.

Oftentimes we mistake changes with being stuck because we do not like where the changes are taking us. But I am here to tell you that God has a plan for us, for this church, for our United Church of Canada, for the Church in the world! If we are truly the body of God we can never be stuck....

To illustrate: Let us picture our life as a car traveling down life's road. We notice many people have gotten stuck in a ditch. Then before we know it we are stuck in a ditch? What do we do? Abandon our car and buy a new one? Or do we try all we can to get our car out of that ditch? We may ask for some help, or call a tow truck, or something. But there's no way we'll just walk away from our car and leave it in a ditch. We will try until we get it out.

In our scripture today a blind man named Bartimaeus knew Jesus was his answer and sought him. Most would consider Bartimaeus to be stuck in his life. He was a blind beggar. Some in that time and place may call him a hopeless cause. Yet, Bartimaeus was a seeker, he could not see with his eyes but he was not without hope. He never stopped seeking.

Verse 47 to 48 of our text shows how persistent Bartimaeus was. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus knew that he would never give up on the hopes of sight renewal, and he knew that as long as Jesus was within earshot, he had a chance.

Do you know something? Jesus is still within earshot. God is still within earshot. To those of you who feel stuck in a rut, God is within earshot. For those of us who feel like our church is in a rut, God's church is in a rut, God is within earshot, and God is present in his church. But you know, we know that God is here, don't we? We know that God is with us wherever we go. But sometimes it is still hard for us to believe that God could make a difference.

And so when we feel in a rut we call out to God. But we do it with uncertainty. And so we do a weak little shaky appeal that is soaked in doubt and in disbelief. Our scripture said that Bartimaeus started to shout Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me..

and when the others rebuked him he shouted all the more and all the louder Jesus son of David, have mercy on me.... There was no uncertainty, there was no doubt about his request. And when the others chided him he became more emboldened and faith filled in his desire.

How many times do we allow others to tame our faith in God? How many times do we allow others to dampen our confidence in God's ability to pull us from our rut? How many times do we allow people who don't believe to tell us that we're being silly to depend upon God's grace? How many times do our brothers and sisters in the church tell us that as a church we will die away never to be remembered?

Bartimaeus was unrelenting in his seeking of Christ, he was unrelenting in his seeking for his sight to be restored. He was unrelenting in his seeking for God's mercy. We have to be unrelenting in our seeking for wholeness and restoration. We can't stop, we can't give up...

And we must be ready to act on the opportunities that our seeking presents us with. When we seek God and ask for wholeness and restoration we must be willing to be open to the opportunities that come our way, we must be willing to embrace the blessings that are bestowed.

Sometimes there is work that we need to do that we don't really want to do to get out of our rut. We don't want to give up certain things that lend to us being that rut. We have become too accustomed or too addicted to these things or behaviors, and although we want to be lifted, we still want to cling to the things that are weighing us down.

In our scripture, blind Bartimaeus spent most of his time by the side of the street sitting, but when Jesus called for Bartimaeus to come to him verse 50 of our text says 'Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus'. No pause, hesitation, he even threw his cloak aside... nothing would impede his stride toward Jesus, his stride toward mercy, his stride toward his new sight.

And when he received his new sight, what did Bartimaeus do? Did he go back to begging? Did he return home? No, he followed Jesus along the road. What will you do when your sight is restored, when you are lifted from your rut, when our church is thriving again?

Will you set your sight squarely on God and his promises and follow him in faith? God is waiting for us to seek him out, so that we can become whole again. So that we may see again, So that we may be restored to the kingdom. May it be so.... Amen.

Prayers: Eternal God, we thank you for calling us by name. In you we live and move and grow. We pray for churches and Christians throughout the world. Remind us of our common foundation in Christ. May we grow together in faith and in love, until we attain that unity which is your will. Build us together in Christ, Make us your dwelling place.

Send down your Spirit so that we may know Jesus and bear witness to our life and unity in him. May we know the mind of Christ in order to speak God's wisdom everywhere. Strengthen us to work towards peace and reconciliation in church and society. Build us together in Christ, Make us your dwelling place.

We pray for all churches which are experiencing change – growth or struggle, reconciliation or conflict. Inspire and strengthen them in works of witness and service. Build us together in Christ, Make us your dwelling place. We pray for those who have no home, no land, no food, no work, no medicine, no peace. May we recognize and serve Christ in the suffering and the needy. We pray for our church, the sick and our shut ins.... We pray for the ones in our hearts....

We thank you for all your gifts of creation. Teach us to share with others our time, our energy, our resources and our love. Make us sensitive and responsive to the wounds in the human family and creation. May we be faithful to our calling and live a meaningful life on earth. May we give our whole life to seeking God, for we belong to God and in him are united all things on earth and in heaven. We pray this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray...