

## **'Worthy of the Gospel'**

**MRMC – April 28, 2013**

**60<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

**Philippians 1.27-30**

GARTH

How do you tell the story of sixty years in the life of a congregation – MRMC?

- Is it a matter of numbers: how many members we have? How many attend regularly? the size of the budgets?
- Is it a catalogue of programs that have been offered over the years?
- Is it a telling of the good times and experiences of the congregation?
- Is it the story of relationships – made, broken and restored?

CLAIRE

Perhaps it is a little bit of all of these and much more. It's all wrapped in an expression of gratefulness to God who has led and cared for this part of God's family.

GARTH

Perhaps we can take Paul's words to the church in Philippi. "Make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the Gospel of Christ." (1.27)

CLAIRE

I think Paul is encouraging the church to live into the Kingdom of God. You know, living each day informed by our life-giving relationship with God. That means not just dressing up in our best for Sunday morning, but living as if God's kingdom were already here in fullness, Monday to Saturday as well.

We have been blessed with a living tradition handed on from our foremothers and forefathers in the faith. Those original visionaries who planted MRMC in this neighbourhood bequeathed to us some foundational

practices which continue to inspire and sustain our life together. Let's name some:

GARTH

Our hymns.

We have moved from the Hymnary to the Mennonite Hymnal to Hymnal: A worship book to Sing the Journey and Sing the Story. And now we are learning to sing and enjoy songs from Voices together.

We continue to sing old favorites like

In the rifted rock,

The church's one foundation,

606, and Gott ist de Liebe -

while learning new songs from around the world like

Mayenziwe (South Africa),

Will you come and follow me (Iona), and

Lord, you have come to the lakeshore.

CLAIRE

Our congregational songs represent

the church we have become,

more diverse, more international, more complex.

We value highly congregational and choral singing tradition.

GARTH

Another part of our tradition is Anabaptist theology.

Our faith is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

with particular expression as Anabaptist/Mennonite disciples.

Our faith is a precious legacy,  
embodied in our stories from the past  
of triumph and travail in faraway places like Poland,  
Ukraine, and Viet Nam.

*CLAIRE*

*We have welcomed newcomers from various parts of the world (Colombia and Congo, Syria). We have attempted to help launch them into their new lives in Canada.*

And we have welcomed our neighbours from across the street - Westmount and Mount Royal neighborhoods through exercise classes, art classes, community festival days, serving at Friendship Inn and donating to Global Gathering Place and Prairie Harm Reduction. A more recent ministry of "making our everyday lives worthy of the gospel" includes serving with MDS. We strive to live into forgiveness, peace-making, service and reconciliation together with the larger Christian church and the world.

GARTH

This building is another resource with which we have been graced.

A church is not a building  
but we have been entrusted  
with this sacred space contained  
in bricks, mortar and glass.

CLAIRE

A church is not building  
but within these walls we create community.  
We worship, play pickleball and exercise,

celebrate families, weddings, and funerals,  
we eat, pray, and love.

And as we leave, the service entrance  
becomes the doorway to ventures new.

GARTH

In our efforts to "make our everyday lives worthy of the gospel".

We strive to keep what is best  
from the past while adding to it  
and re-invigorating it with new life.

CLAIRE

The key verse in our Philippians text  
appears to be verse 27.

It signals the theme  
of much that follows.

***But whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is  
worthy of the Gospel of Christ.***

GARTH

They lived in Philippi but held Roman citizenship.

They lived on earth but  
they held citizenship in heaven,  
in the kingdom of God.

And just as Roman citizenship  
determined their everyday behaviour in Philippi,  
so their citizenship in the kingdom of God  
determined, and often changed,

the way they thought and acted, wherever they lived.

CLAIRE

Every citizenship has its requirements,

but our heavenly citizenship comes first.

It informs, governs, and illuminates everything else.

How then do we live a life worthy of the gospel?

Well, there are some hints in what follows.

- stand firm in one spirit,
- strive side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,
- don't be intimidated by your opponents. (1:27-28)

GARTH

Paul expects the believers.

to practice unity of spirit, mind, and action.

He expects and encourages confidence in God,

such that they can withstand, with courage,

any opposition that comes their way.

CLAIRE

What is the lesson for us?

How shall we then live worthy of the gospel

whether in Rome, Philippi, or Saskatoon?

GARTH

I once read of a battalion of soldiers (1 st century BC)

who advanced into new and unfamiliar territory.

Not knowing whether to proceed or retreat  
the commander sent a messenger to his generals  
with the urgent request:

*'Please send new orders.*

*We have marched off the map.'*

We are moving off the map into our 61 st year.

There will be some leave-taking and some joining together.

There will be some life challenges that need to be navigated.

There will be pain and sorrow, and joy and delight.

CLAIRE

We have no answers for this time, but we do have some spiritual practices  
that may assist us in the process.

GARTH

First, continue to work with your passion.

What do you care about?

What makes this congregation's life sing?

CLAIRE

Secondly, don't be afraid of your pain.

Where have you been broken?

Claim the pain. But don't let the pain define you.

There is a difference between what we experience and who we are.

God's love defines who we are.

Remember, you are God's people living worthy of the gospel of Christ.

GARTH

Thirdly, work with the resources that have been handed to you and those yet to be discovered.

What has God given us that we haven't yet noticed?

Do we see the abundance of God?

Can we find God's purposes

in our small and great ventures?

Where is God waiting for you in your future?

CLAIRE

How can Mount Royal Mennonite Church live worthily of the gospel, everyday?

Paul's answer: Display a depth of faith,

a robust unity, and confidence in God.

Give your worries over to God - in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking ...with a thankful and expectant heart.

And here comes the big finish - peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

AMEN