

Luke 7:38-50
Newtonbrook United Church - June 13, 2010

It was no surprise when Moderator Mardi Tindal spoke about soul in her first address to the 86th Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference. Soul is what we have in common with each other. It is what was common between Jesus and the woman who appeared at Simon's home. Mardi asked us if we are taking time to connect our souls with our life in God's world – our "outer" life?

"What soul-full practices most help you experience God's abundant wholeness in your life?"

Moderator Mardi asked us that question because, she says, we cannot deal with the environmental crisis of our time without addressing how we live in community, and how we are in touch with our own souls.

Using the wisdom of Parker Palmer, Mardi told the delegates to our Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference that social change begins when people refuse to live, "divided no more"; that is, when the pain of separation from others, and from life in God's world, becomes too much for us. That is when we decide to connect our souls with our outer lives and we will discover a new JOY as we connect the longings of our soul with the needs of the world that we live in.

Mardi talked to us about soul as, "the BEING in human being."

She used an image from Parker Palmer in that discovering the longings of our soul is like trying to find a wild animal in the forest. If we go to the forest and behave as we do in our life in the City, rushing ahead to see the wild beast, plugged into our i-phones, Blackberries, etc, and making noise, it is unlikely that we will discover the needs of our soul, or find any wild beast.

Each day we tend to go about our lives – dropping off the kids at school – or the grandchildren; driving here and there; flying to a business meeting; or flying to a vacation; shopping at the mall; cutting the grass; trying to stay on our new diet – and realizing that something is missing in our life!

To discover the longings of our soul, like finding a wild animal, we need to sit quietly and become a part of / connect with our surroundings.

For Christians that means we need to take time for traditional Christian practices of prayer, reflection, Sabbath, and worship. Through those practices we will experience the abundance of God's creation, and our souls will be nurtured.

Although Jesus challenged us to love our neighbours as ourselves, Mardi is saying that we

cannot address the love of others – including the love of the earth we live on – without first of all taking care of our souls. That’s where we will find the energy to answer God’s call to be the church, as we promise when we say The New Creed.

In my life, a wise counselor once asked me to imagine that I was on an aircraft at a time when the attendant was giving the pre-flight instructions. Remember! They say to us – if an emergency happens, put your oxygen mask on before trying to help someone else.

Are we taking time to discover and nurture the longings of our soul?

“What soul-full practices most help you experience God’s abundant wholeness in your life?”

On Saturday morning Mardi invited author Alanna Mitchell to join her in a presentation that centred on the second question:

“How do you attend to the health of your community?”

“Jesus invited a group of friends to join him in caring for one another and for the larger community, including all God’s creatures. His response to a question about the greatest commandment speaks of the link between soul and community.¹”

If there was a “bad news” time at the Annual Meeting, this was it. Alanna used data from her book *Sea Sick* to illustrate the fact that we are presently involved in a time in the history of the earth called the SIXTH GREAT EXTINCTION. She showed us a chart of the number of God’s creatures that have been eliminated, along with some projections.

The projection that startled me most was one that indicated that humanity may decrease by 90 per cent, or more, if the current environmental crisis continues. If you love your grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, would you do something to stop this from happening?

What is happening with one oil well in the Gulf of Mexico is the logical result of our addiction to oil. More and more oil wells will be drilled deeper and deeper, and in increasingly fragile environments, to feed our addiction. Just imagine working to cap an oil spill in an Arctic winter – working in temperatures of minus 20 Celsius, and a wind chill factor. It makes the challenges in the Gulf Of Mexico look easy. As long as we provide a market for oil, as long as we do not change our lifestyle, it will be only a matter of time before we destroy more of the environment that life in the oceans depends upon.

I do not mean to brag, but are you measuring how little gasoline your vehicle uses? On Wednesday I put 39 litres of gas in my car – it had gone 891 km before need a fill. I confess that I use the car too much, I too have sinned.

¹ Leaflet from Moderator Tindal called, “An Invitation to participate in God’s Abundant Healing of Soul, Community and Creation”

As Christians maybe we need to re-introduce the language of sin and redemption into our discourse. How else can we describe lifestyles that destroy the abundance of creation?

In the story in our scriptures, the woman recognized that she had sinned; she acted with contrition, and she was forgiven because of her FAITH.

Mardi says that when we have the sense to choose community, we move away from a focus on scarcity (and actions that create scarcity) toward an attitude of abundance and generosity, thereby inspiring trust and more generosity.

“How do you attend to the health of your community?”

On Saturday evening Mardi had another guest, former Moderator Bob Smith. Bob really knows how to warm up a crowd – by telling a few jokes. One of those was saying that eternity is like the NHL playoffs – only shorter.

Mardi and Bob talked about her third question:

“How do you participate in God’s work of healing and mending creation?”

Bob spoke about the wisdom of Rabbi Joshua Herschel. Apparently, Herschel was fond of asking people to imagine a situation that helped them to take the longer view. “When God gets out of bed in the morning, God asks; “Where does my creation need healing today?”

Bob Smith says that the only reason for the existence of the church is the mending of God’s creation. Do you really think that when the Holy One woke this morning, the primary concern was the church? That was his question.

I could say much more about the Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference, and what I learned. I’d love to share more, but I’m out of time. I will be available after our congregational meeting.

I would ask you to remember these three questions and they will be in the copy of the sermon posted on the website this week.

As A Fire Is Meant for Burning – V.U. # 578