

September 20, 2009

Mark 9:30-37

### Last Things

Congregations are great places for the oral tradition – stories passed on from generation to generation.

Some of us may have heard the story about one of the ministers who served here long ago. Things were not going very smoothly.

This particular Sunday morning the minister came in to lead worship, placed his hat and coat on the first pew, went into the pulpit and said “it seems even my friends have turned against me”. He then left the pulpit, put on his hat and coat and walked out of the church via the centre aisle never to be seen again!

I have not brought my hat and coat in with me this morning!

This is not how I plan to make my exit!

It’s always interesting to consider what stories will be passed down about you after you leave!!

Seeing as this is my last Sunday with you, my sermon will be less preaching on the text and more an opportunity to give thanks for the time we have shared. I ask for your indulgence.

A number of years ago my wife Pat and I took in two teenage girls as billets. They were attending the Quinte Ballet School which was close to our home. On this particular evening Olivia was dancing around the living room. I had written some poetry throughout the years and it happened that I got out some of my poems and read them while Olivia interpreted them in dance. Both of us were taking a risk, revealing some of ourselves, me through my poetry and Olivia through her dance.

It was a magical twenty minutes, an intimate shared experience, both of us revealing some of our inner soul.

This is a good metaphor for church, for congregational life, for the relationships we form with each other here, for the privileged relationship we have as ministry personnel with you.

The invitation is to share ourselves in community, to risk knowing and being known, to share in being part of the body of Christ, the family of God.

This is the kind of community we are welcoming little James into this morning through the sacrament of Baptism - A community where we are invited to risk being ourselves, sharing ourselves, and receiving the other as they reveal some of who they are.

This is what God has done in Jesus. God took the risk of sharing God's very self. In Jesus, we see intimately who God is.

God says – 'here I am' and invites us to receive his intimate revelation of self into our very being and to offer up our selves to God and to those we share life with.

God's intimate sharing of God's self with the world invites us to share our intimate selves with God, with one another, and with the world.

In Jesus, God says 'here I am' and invites us to respond with 'here I am, this is me'.

In today's scripture reading Jesus takes us into his most intimate truth – that he will be betrayed and killed and on the third day he will be raised.

This intimate truth shakes us up, we aren't sure what to do with it.

It reveals more than the first disciples or we want to know.

What does this mean that you want from me God?

What risks are you calling me to live?

What parts of me are you calling me to live, to share?

Looking back on my two and a half year journey with you has given me the opportunity to count my blessings. I am thankful for the time we have shared. I see this congregation as a "Sending congregation".....a place where we are strengthened and equipped in faith and given what we need to live out our faith, our calling, in the world – where we work, volunteer, where we offer our time, talents, and dollars.

So many people over the years have come through these doors – been blessed by the gathered community and have gone out to serve God in their words and deeds.

There are times when I have missed the people who have come and gone from our midst, but I am encouraged knowing that they have experienced the good news of Jesus here and that this good news goes with them as they make a difference in God's world.

I leave this fellowship strengthened in my faith; with a deepened prayer life, blessed by new songs and anthems in my heart from the morning and evening ministry of music; and thankful for the people I have walked with, struggled with, laughed with, prayed with, and become colleagues and friends with. I will miss you.

I leave amazed at the wonderful group of people that God has called together in this place – the range of gifts and talents; the diversity of theological understandings – this eclectic mix!

More than ever I am convinced of the infinite value of being part of Christ's church.

I give thanks to God for the opportunity I have had to share in team ministry with Linda; it has been a blessing and a challenge working with you!

I have appreciated your deep waters, deep faith, your attention to detail and asking penetrating questions, your ability to hold together prayer and living out the gospel in your words and deeds. You have challenged me and I have learned from you. Thank you.

I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to work with and to get to know the other paid staff – Frank, Lynn, David and Andrea.

I have been blessed in being part of our Men's Circle. We have shared together and attempted to talk about some of the real stuff in our lives. This has been a safe and healing place for me.

I have been honoured to share the leadership of our Pastoral Care team with Janis Traquair and Laura Rossall. Our group of caregivers have established relationships with the elderly in our congregation and in doing this are blessed and are a blessing. The elderly in our congregation have a faith and stories that are to be shared and passed on. Pastoral visiting is holy ground, a sacred encounter.

Runnymede is blessed with young families. On my first Sunday here I remember telling my family and friends how many children came up for children's time. Lots!

We are blessed here with the energy and life that our children bring to our fellowship. I will miss the children.

I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to work with Katrina Hall and the other committed parents.

I have been honoured to work with and get to know the good people who make up our Church Board. Great is your faithfulness – Joan Howard, David Whitfield, Brian Traquair, John Goad, Stuart MacDonald, Kevin Chan, Judy Hauserman, June Pinkney, Gary Reid, Robin Pilkey, Eric Apps, Don Deweese.

I have been blessed by the fellowship and food shared at our monthly community meal.

I have been blessed at the fun of being part of our Christmas Pageant. Andreas and I still do our lines when we get together – “Down with Caesar” “Take him, take him away” .....

I will miss being pushed, prodded and having a weekly visit with our resident rabble rouser – Ann Gibson!

In May of this year I celebrated my 25<sup>th</sup> year of ordination in the United Church of Canada. I have been blessed serving congregations in Loverna, Saskatchewan, Compeer, Alberta, the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, Willowdale United Church, Stephenville, St. George’s, Boswarlos, and Heatherton in Western Newfoundland, Mono Mills, Adjala, Hockley Valley, Picton, Warkworth, and Runnymede United Church.

I now have felt God’s call to a new adventure and there is a big element of the unknown about it. I’m not exactly sure where this next adventure of faith will take me. I will be working with men in the United Church of Canada and in our communities across Canada.

I will be promoting our partnership with the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola and our commitment to work together to rebuild the Lutamo School in Central Angola, part of the Dondi Mission.

I will be travelling in Canada with a drummer and getting men to drum together, connect with the people of Angola and raise \$1 million dollars. In two weeks we will head West for our first road trip.

I was in Angola in July. I saw people.

I prayed and worshipped and sang with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I saw poverty. I saw need.

I saw faith, hope and love.

I saw people.

Two people who have influenced me are Rebekkah and Christina, children in our congregation. Both of them had loved ones die of cancer. Now they are telling their stories, baking cookies, making jewelry and selling it to raise money for the Cancer society. I think they're up to around 500 dollars. I want to be like them.

I will pray for you.  
Keep me in your prayers.  
Amen. Thanks be to God!

"Our Creed" 918 VU