

# Christ is our Unity

A sermon by Rev. Doug Martindale

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Young United Church, Winnipeg, MB

Text: Ephesians 4: 5

“There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all”.

In the mid nineteen fifties, my father said he would never vote for Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, because he was Roman Catholic and from Quebec. In the early 1960's I heard a sermon at an evangelical church about the full gospel in which the preacher said the only gospel was the gospel of salvation and that preaching that gospel was the only task of the church. More recently, my wife and I attended Orthodoxy Sunday, an annual service at which all the Orthodox churches in Winnipeg get together, including the Greek Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox. The priest who gave the homily that year said that the Orthodox Church was the only, one, true Christian Church. After the service and over coffee several people approached me and asked how that

made me feel? I said I felt totally excluded and I have never attended the Orthodoxy Sunday service since.

What has changed and what do we have in common today as Christians churches? Between 1962 and 1965 the Roman Catholic Church threw open the doors, let sunlight in and changed immensely. They became a part of the ecumenical movement and encouraged Christian dialogue and cooperation. In Thornhill, Ontario where my parents lived, the Catholic and Protestant congregations began Lenten worship services about 1965 and they continue to this day. My father never missed one of the six Sunday evenings in Lent from then until his death in 2007 and his attitudes towards Catholics totally changed.

Evangelical churches have changed immensely and there is hardly an evangelical church anywhere in Canada that doesn't have a food bank outlet or social program of some kind that they consider part of the gospel or at least putting their faith into action. Many evangelical churches belong to the Canadian Council of Churches or have observer status and send representatives to the board meetings, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Christian Missionary Alliance and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

I still worship in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church several times a year and the former priest at our local parish, St. Mary the Protectress is on the governing board of the Canadian

Council of Churches. Notwithstanding our differences in doctrine, we are both members of the universal Christian church and our unity is in Christ.

Why am I telling you all of this? First, because what we have in common is that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, Christ is our unity.

Second, I'm telling you this because I have the privilege of being a representative of the United Church of Canada on the governing board of the CCC.

I attended the governing board meeting in Ottawa from May 22nd to May 24<sup>th</sup> and I want to share my excitement and enthusiasm for the work and witness of the CCC.

You as members of Young United Church are part of a local fellowship of Christians and part of a wider fellowship made up of Winnipeg Presbytery, the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario and the United Church of Canada. In a similar way, because the United Church is part of the Canadian Council of Churches you are part of a much wider fellowship that includes 25 churches and 85% of all Christians in Canada. This is the broadest and deepest, cooperative, ecumenical coalition, in the world. The Canadian Council of Church includes five great streams of Christianity: Anglican, Evangelical, Free Church, Reform, Orthodox and Roman Catholic. And then we

are also part of the World Council of Churches. All of this is because we are one body in Christ and Christ is our unity.

Why should you care? What difference does it make?

Let me suggest three reasons:

- 1) Because your Mission and Service contributions support the work of the CCC.
- 2) Because what the CCC does is connected to your outreach ministry, West Broadway Community Ministry.
- 3) Because the CCC is making a difference for peace and justice in the world, as well as fostering positive ecumenical relationships.

So what does the CCC do anyway?

Let me tell you about several wonderful publications that the CCC has produced which, having read them, I can highly recommend.

One is called When Christian Faith and Genetics Meet: A Practical Group Resource. You could order this and use it for a study group and I think you will find it extremely relevant to current issues in our society.

How do we, as a Christian community, understand and respond to the issues of genetic technologies? When Faith and Genetics Meet is a curriculum that considers the

opportunities and risks of genetic sciences. The resource explores questions like:

*Does the science of genetics contribute to or contradict our belief that we are created in the image of God?*

*What ethical questions arise from the use of genetics in reproductive technologies?*

*How will increased knowledge of genes affect our social lives?*

Another wonderful resource is called The Bruised Reed: A Christian Reflection on Suffering and Hope. There are personal stories and theological reflection on topics that affect all of us, such as: “Aging, Suffering and Hope”; “Hospital Chaplaincy: Facing Death, an Experience of Fear and Trembling”; and “Life and Death of a Child”. This publication, prepared by the Commission on Faith and Witness of the CCC, is short, only 58 pages, readable and inspiring. I urge you to obtain a copy, read it and share it with someone else.

The Commission on Faith and Witness has also prepared the worship service for the Week of Christian Unity, which has already been published so you can order it and use it next January.

How is the work of the CCC connected with the West Broadway Community Ministry?

We have homeless people on our streets because the federal and provincial governments aren't doing enough to combat homelessness or poverty. The federal government has no national housing strategy and the provincial government has provided only minimal increases in rent allowances for people on welfare since taking office in 1999. This is particularly embarrassing for me because as the Family Services critic in the legislature I was extremely critical of the previous government for making substantial welfare cuts in 1996. The current government has not restored those cuts to funding. There is also a lack of supports for people with mental health problems, which affects the majority of people who are homeless.

The Canadian Council of Churches is addressing this in two ways. Project Ploughshares, an ecumenical coalition which is part of the CCC, does research, works with NGO'S and governments to advance policies and actions that prevent war and armed violence and build peace. Project Ploughshares recently publicized the Jenkins Report to Parliament, a report about military procurement, which projects that if present trends continue Canada will spend \$490 B. on defense procurement over the next 20 years. Project Ploughshares provides research and policy options. Let me make the connections. If military procurement, projected at \$28B per year, was reduced by 10% and

Manitoba was to receive 4% of that, based on our percentage of the national population, we would receive \$112 M. per year. The entire Housing budget in Manitoba is \$70.9 M per year and the entire budget for the Portable Housing Benefit and Emergency Shelter Allowance is \$3.6M per year. If we changed our priorities as a nation and diverted money from defense procurement into productive uses, we could put a lot of people into social housing and provide supports for them.

Secondly, the CCC is making a difference for peace and justice in the world because we have the numbers to be credible with the government, have access to them and take stands on important issues of the day. Recently, all of the church leaders in Canada signed a letter to the Prime Minister about the civil war in Syria and urged Canada to respond generously to the refugee crises, to lead in the protection of human rights and to hold firm to the obligation of all to respect international law. Why would we do this? Because Canadian churches are long time advocates for human rights and peace building and play a leading role in the resettlement of refugees in Canada.

During the CCC board meeting in Ottawa each year, meetings are arranged with Members of Parliament. This year meetings were held with two party leaders, three other Members of Parliament, one Senator, the Director of

Policy for Natural Resources Canada and the Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Three issues were raised by CCC board members in these meetings: Climate justice: A Canadian sustainable clean energy policy and a binding international agreement; Canada and the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty, and Human Trafficking, including a parliamentary study on missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

I had the pleasure of being part of the delegation that met with a high profile and highly competent MP, Carolyn Bennett. We were engaged in a thoughtful and respectful dialogue with an MP who, in this case, was familiar with all these issues.

Do we make a difference? That is a good question and only the MP's could answer that question. At the very least I think it is important to be there to counter balance the input of people like the anti-gun control lobby who will have a say on whether Canada ratifies the United Nations Arms Treaty, which is about international trade in arms and has absolutely nothing to do with gun control in Canada.

Another important question is, why do we do this? Why have a national ecumenical organization, called the Canadian Council of Churches?

We cooperate because “there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all”.

In a minute we will be singing “Deep in our hearts” which says we have *a common vision, a common song, a common story-which tells creation*, meaning everyone and everything-*that we are one. We have a common purpose, a common goal, a sacred message*, that *justice and peace* should be in harmony. *We have a common longing, a common goal, a common current, flowing to freedom.*

Our concluding hymn today is “Though Ancient Walls”, written by United Church minister Walter Farquharson. We can rejoice that some of the walls that stood when he wrote this hymn in 1974 have come tumbling down. A good example is that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops joined the Canadian Council of Churches in 1997. *Walls that divide* have been *broken down*, because *Christ is our unity*. “The truth we seek” as the CCC “*unites us in a common quest for self and world made new*”. Walls that divided have been broken down because “*Christ is our unity*”. Amen.

