

2023 06 18 – The Possibility of New Beginnings

Scripture: I Kings 3:5-12

Matthew 19:16-22 (The Inclusive Bible)

I imagine that most of us have experienced new beginnings in our lives, whether it is a new job, a new relationship, a new home, or a new neighbour. These new beginnings can be filled with joy and excitement. However, they are frequently accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. So it is with the readings this morning.

Our gospel reading is especially challenging. I have to say that we struggled with it at Bible Study this week. In this story a young man comes up to Jesus and asks, “Teacher, what good must I do to possess eternal life?”

Now first we need to understand the question. What is it that this young man wishes to possess? What is “eternal life?” Often it is interpreted as life after death. But in this story, Jesus responds saying, “If you wish to enter into Life, then keep the commandments.” Not “eternal life,” but “Life” with a capital “L.” Biblical scholars tell us that what they were discussing was actually the kingdom or kindom of God. The young man wanted to know what he had to do to experience the reign of God, the life of peace and justice, the good news that Jesus was preaching about.

Jesus responds as we would probably expect. He suggests that this young person should follow the Ten Commandments and, of course, the commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself.”

The youth believes that he is already doing all he can to follow the Hebrew laws and he asks what else he needs to do. This is when Jesus' response gets particularly challenging. Jesus says, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to poor people, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." Jesus is telling him that in order to build a new life, a life based on peace and justice, then he has to give up what is familiar and comforting to him. He has to let go of that cushion of security that is his wealth. In letting go of his wealth, the young man would be letting go of his identity as well.

It turns out that his possessions were many, his wealth was substantial and the reading tells us that this young man "went away sadly." For him the lure of a new life, a perfect life, was not enough compensation for the sacrifices he would have had to make. And so I ask myself, "What would my response have been?" What would yours have been? What are we willing to sacrifice for God's reign of peace and justice on this earth?

Our second reading this morning is also about a young man. This time we know his name. It is Solomon, the son of David. At a very young age Solomon finds himself in a leadership position, as the new king. He is quite anxious about how to follow in the footsteps of his famous father, King David. One night, he has a dream where he meets up with God and asks God for wisdom and understanding. Solomon is seeking wisdom because he wants to be a good leader and make the best possible decisions for the people that he is leading.

God grants his wish and Solomon becomes one of the wisest kings that the Israelites ever had.

At this time in the life of our own congregation and in the life of the wider church we find ourselves facing many new beginnings. We find ourselves in a time of letting go so we can be open to new possibilities. We find ourselves in a time that is both filled with excitement and with uncertainty.

Today, on this Indigenous Day of Prayer, I want to focus on a decision that was made at that the 44th General Council in 2022. At that online gathering the National Indigenous Council indicated that they were seeking to create an autonomous Indigenous organization within The United Church of Canada and to that end, they proposed that the church identify and remove any structural barriers that would prevent such an organization from being created. The 44th General Council agreed to move forward with this proposal and now regional councils and the governing bodies of each pastoral charge are faced with this same question.

This question or remit is coming to every regional council and every pastoral charge because it requires a change to the Basis of Union of The Manual. If the remit passes then it will:

- enable the Indigenous Church to determine its own place and structure within the United Church, and
- enable the creation of an autonomous National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada.

It's important to note that Indigenous Peoples' rights to their own spiritual identities and to self-determination would be affirmed by the passing of this remit and this decision would be consistent with the [Calls to the Church](#) (that came out of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission) and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

As Chief Cadmus Delorme explained at our Regional Gathering in Prince Albert, "Indigenous people don't want pity, they want parity." They want to be treated as equals. They want to be able to practice self-determination. In order for this to happen, the rest of us need to be willing to let go of our colonial mind-set, and we need to be willing to let go of our need for control.

This is the decision in front of our Leadership Team and other pastoral charge governing bodies across this country. This is not easy. Like the young man in the story from Matthew, all sorts of new possibilities and opportunities are in front of us, but they are accompanied by uncertainty and anxiety. Are we willing to make this decision without knowing what the new Indigenous organization will look like, what it may cost? Are we willing to make this decision knowing that it will change the structure and possibility even the identity of the United Church? Are we willing to first dismantle the structure of the church and then wait for the birthing of something new? As you've heard this morning, Living Skies Regional Council voted "yes." But it is important that every governing body in every pastoral charge in Saskatchewan, and in all of Canada, also take the time to review this remit and to vote.

Even as the United Church of Canada is faced with this remit, so congregations across our country are facing our own questions of structure, identity, and property. We are being asked to make decisions about our own futures without knowing all the ramifications, without being able to see the final result. Unlike the rich young man, we don't have Jesus telling us what our options are. The paths to our new beginnings are less obvious and a little less certain. Will we accept these invitations to a new life, or will we be like the young man and walk away?

Like Solomon, we need to seek wisdom and understanding. Maybe this is the time for us to trust that there will be uncertainty, but collectively we have faith that we can forge a new future, whatever it may be. We proclaim to be a church with a commitment to seek justice. Perhaps this remit is one more invitation to live into that commitment.

So, today on this Indigenous Day of Prayer, may we be unlike that wealthy young man. May we respond more like Solomon. May we be wise and understanding people of faith with hearts open to the uncertainty of change. May it be so.

Amen.

Many of the words and ideas in this sermon were taken from the *Possibility of New Beginnings* by Debbie Hubbard

<https://united-church.ca/worship-theme/indigenous-worship>

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