



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“A Word from Joe Christian.”
2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Mark 5:21-43
Will Sparks July 1, 2012

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Its July 1st 2012, Canada day, the 145th anniversary of Confederation. I love Canada day because I love Canada and it is such a rare thing that Canadians get together and blow a horn in celebration of where we have been as a nation and where we long to be. By and large we are a self-deprecating bunch, not at all quick to claim our place in the community of nations, and pretty willing to give ground and make accommodations on most issues. It is one of the things I love about Canada, is that most of the time, we have tried to understand the different sides to different issues, and on occasion when we claim ground, it is pretty solid ground, like Medicare, like human rights. I mean we are not perfect (a very Canadian thing to admit), and we often are just happy to be seen as nice. But you know, there’s a part of us that wants to be a little more passionate, a little more outrageous, a little more out there.

So a few years ago when Molson Beer company came out with an ad featuring Jeff Douglas as Joe Canadian, it made us laugh and I just know there was a sigh of relief across the nation. Finally, someone is screaming the goodness of Canada from some stage somewhere. Let’s take a look.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRI-A3vakVg>

I know it’s a beer commercial but, as a Canadian, doesn’t it get just a little bit of juice flowing? Don’t you just feel a little bit of relief as you see a fellow Canadian launching an uncharacteristic volley of pride into the public arena? There are a few people who do this on behalf of what is precious in Canada: Rick Mercer, Rex Murphy. The rest of us are all quietly and humbly connected with the preciousness of our country, but we dare not get too passionate or we will contradict the very thing we feel so good about. It’s almost as if public displays of passion are un-Canadian, but we secretly love it when it happens.

It’s the bible’s fault really, this line of thinking on Canada Day. I was reading through the scriptures for today and I was struck by the passion. Here we have David. All through first Samuel, David has been in a certain conflict with Saul over who has control of the fledgling alliances of city states that would eventually become the Kingdom of Israel. It has been a kind of mafia fight within the family. So when, at the beginning of 2 Samuel we hear that Saul and Jonathan have been killed in battle, David is devastated. They had been so close, and although there was bad blood between them, all the grief of the years comes pouring out: “How the mighty have fallen, Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely... daughters of Zion weep over Saul...Jonathan... greatly loved were you to me, your love to me was wonderful... how the mighty have fallen...”

And if that story hasn’t got enough flavor in it for you, enough passion, try the two entwined stories from our gospel reading today. A wealthy and powerful father who is brought to his knees before Jesus because his daughter is on death’s door, daring to hope that this miracle man, Jesus, might save her. And the woman who had bled for 12 years elbows her way through the crush of the crowd in order to find some relief, some glimmer of hope in her desperation.. Remember that according to Jewish law, a woman in her state was considered unclean, and anyone in her condition would have been an outcast, a pariah. “Kid’s don’t let me catch you

going near that woman. She's creepy." At the end of her rope she reaches out, and in a moment, she knew that she was healed.

These are "out there" stories of deep need, deep anxiety, hope born of desperation and of passion filled attempts to make a critical difference at a critical time. This is life and death stuff. There's no moderation here, no seamliness, nothing measured, nothing vanilla. The late Bill Coffin, great American preacher and pastor of Riverside Church in New York City used to talk about "glandular Christianity" and I think that's what we are talking about- passionate unrestrained faith in the face of powerful realities. This is un-Canadian stuff, and dare I say not very United Church either.

Well friends, the United Church has not had a major hemorrhage for 12 years, no, it has had a slow bleed for 35, and I believe it is time for a little glandular faith from the liberal, progressive end of the spectrum. It is time for Joe Christian to rise up out of the previously believed to be nice vanilla United Church and show a little hormone, show a little of the passion that quietly courses through our veins. It is time for someone to come to the mic, tap it a couple of times and say...

"... excuse me. Sorry to interrupt but there's something I need to say. I am a Christian.

I am a Christian and no that does not make me bound by a whole pile of rules that means that I can't drink and I can't swear and I can't dance, but it does mean that I have edges, I have ethics, and I will draw a line where human dignity is at stake, where justice is denied and where compassion is required.

I am a Christian, and no that does not automatically make me bigoted or homophobic, it makes me believe that there is something good in you and me and I will never give up on that.

I am a Christian and that does not make me see the world in black and white, but it means I am open to all kinds of shades of grey even when it hurts and besides all that, my faith makes the colors in this Kaleidoscope world dazzle me.

I am Christian, and I know organized religion which has been authoritarian, racist, sexist and abusive, but if I decided not to be political because politicians have done bad things and not to be an art lover because some art is silly, and not to be an environmentalist because the radical environmentalists have done stupid things, then I'd simply be a coward. So I choose not to judge my faith by the mistakes of its practitioners, but to try to redeem it with my imperfect life.

I am a Christian, and I know nothing about heaven or hell in a life after this one but I know what both heaven and hell tastes like in this life. And if I can lessen the pain of someone's hell in this life, I have done well, and if I can taste a little of heaven here on earth I am a lucky man. And that's a life worth living.

I am a Christian, and I have no idea whether you or I are lost or saved on whatever scale you choose to use, but I know that anyone who thinks they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps will eventually collapse. I know, 'cause I've done it- I've been there. And I in that moment, I wasn't alone.

I am a Christian, and that has not closed my mind but blown it open so that I think sex is a beautiful thing that is meant to be enjoyed, that science is an elegant way which will not save us but can open our eyes to the glory of this amazing world, that doubts are not a sign of weakness but simply God's way of getting our attention, that absolute is delusional, that our politics need to be loving and our love needs to be political.

I am a Christian, and whether you want to label me a liberal, a conservative, a progressive, a radical, I think labels are more likely to narrow the mind than to open it. I am Joe. I have found a home in a United Church and I am a Christian.

Thank you.