



## **Sermons**

### **from Northwood United Church**

**“Loving us on our way.”**

**John 15:9-17**

**Will Sparks**

**May 13, 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.

On the long commute to the church every day I pass a gentleman who is a pure saint, a man of God, a courageous liver of the gospel of love to which Jesus was calling his disciples in our reading for this morning. Every day I see this man, probably in his 60s. Little guy, nearly white hair. And every day I see him, he is focused, deliberate and paying close attention because he knows that his vocation is a life and death vocation. What he is doing makes a huge difference to the little people he has come to know and love, for whom he would lay down his life, and offers to do so every day. And you have seen him too.

He is the crossing guard on 156<sup>th</sup> and just down from 100<sup>th</sup>. If you think about it for a minute, the crossing guard does an amazing thing. There he is with his stop sign at the crosswalk while traffic, great big dangerous vehicles, go by just meters away. And children come along. In this case, he seems to know them quite well, and he talks to them every day. And when there are enough of them, he looks up and down the street. He can see the danger as well as anybody. He knows the road. And at a certain point he lifts his sign and steps out into the traffic, steps in front of moving cars, and with his hands and his sign, he holds back the danger so that the children in his keep for a moment can cross safely. They know him. They trust him. He is the one who steps into the breach with them, knowing the danger and holding it back until they have reached the other side. He cannot cross over for them, but ventures in with them, holding back the danger for long enough.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another... No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends...” “This is the best way to love, put your life on the line for your friends...” These are the words of Jesus as he gathers his closest friends and speaks to them to try to prepare them for a huge transition about to take place. You see they have been with him through thick and thin, They have watched him turn water into wine at the wedding in Cana. They have seen him stare down those who wanted to stone a woman for adultery...” “Let the sinless one cast the first stone.” They have puzzled with his funny stories and outrageous behavior, letting a woman wash his feet with her hair. And now he has gathered them because he knows that in Jerusalem he will face great danger. And he cannot save them from it, so he sits them down and they talk about it, and pray about it. And he says, “The key is to love one another as I have loved you, not in a servant-master kind of way, but in a friend kind of way, laying down your life for each other.” Be a community that loves like that.

The church at its best continues to be that circle where lives are laid down for others. I tell people that I am the luckiest man in the world to be allowed to do the things I am allowed to do and to hear the stories and witness the lives of people at critical times in their lives in this amazing community of the church. And the longer I live the more beautiful the woven tapestry of lives gets. This summer I will have the honour of being with my friend Tyler whom I have known since he was in grade ten and now at the age of 26 he is getting married. He is heading out into the world with a lovely young woman named Kim. And I get to be with them as they prepare to and then promise to share their lives together in marriage. They are about to step out into the busy traffic of married life.

Now not only do I know a few things about marriage having lived in one that did not survive and now having had a second chance with my beloved Treena, but I have also walked a fair bit of road with a lot of people in their marriages. It is a busy street, crossing over into married life, and I get to step out into that busy street and hold back the traffic for a bit, while they cross over. What an amazing privilege.

It happens at other joyous and tragic times in life: children are born, people graduate and wonder what to do with their lives, people come together and come apart, people move into care homes, lose their drivers license, lose a loved one, watch a loved one enter the unknown territory of dementia, change careers, retire. Every one of these situations involves crossing over from one reality into another. And every one of these crossings has questions embedded in it- life altering, dangerous questions: What am I here for, what is the meaning of my life now, is there really lie after death, will my child be ok, how do I begin again? What an incredible honour to be allowed to venture out into the traffic of these situations and these questions with people.

But you know that is what the church is for, and it is not just my vocation as a minister but it is our shared vocation as a community- To venture in to the heavy and dangerous traffic of the big questions in life. I chuckle often when a parent comes to me because their child has stumped them. Has that ever happened to you? It's not just the "Where did I come from" question which sometimes makes parents uncomfortable. It's the "who created God?" question, or "Where did grandma actually go after she died" question. Often folks who left church as teenagers come stumbling back propelled by the questions of their children. I love it. Big questions. The beauty in it is that they want so deeply to be true to their children, to be faithful to their questions. They take the traffic seriously and know that it matters. That's our vocation folks, to venture in to these very questions together, with a gospel in our hands and a love in our hearts that propels us to lay down our lives for each other and the world.

Today is mother's day. And it was not lost on me that mothering, at its best, has a kind of crossing guard feel to it. You can't stop the traffic forever as much as you might like to. You can't make the journey for them. And at a certain point the roles change and they are less disciple-master, but the relationship becomes mutual. But in significant ways, mothering is stepping out into life with them. You can't live it for them, you can't cross the dangerous street instead of them, but you can, for a time, venture out into it with them, holding back the traffic for a time until they are able to cross safely on their own. It is a laying down of your life for them, and there is no greater love.