

Summerland United Church
August 10, Stepping Out: Step In

Prelude

Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement

We Sing: VU 701 What Does the Lord Require of You?

Threshold and Christ Candle

On Friday, in Knox United Church in Calgary the United Church of Canada offered a Living Apology to 2s and LGBTQIA+ communities for the wrongs we as a church have committed in the past. They called it a Living Apology, because the work isn't finished know that an apology has been spoken. We don't get to brush our hands off and say – good, done, lets move on – because we know that this is just the beginning. For those of us who gathered here Friday morning, it felt fitting that this apology happened in Alberta, where anti-homophobic and anti-trans legislation is striping the human rights of so many of our citizens.

Today we'll hear in scripture not only that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, but that we also need to prepare a table of welcome to all who enter through our doors. Not only are we called by Jesus to step out – to take church beyond our walls, but to also step in; in our buildings and within ourselves and live into this call of Jesus to love all people without discrimination and without condition.

A Reading from “Beloved: Being Gay and Christian”, By Donald Schmidt (p132-133)

<https://revdonald.ca/product/beloved-being-gay-and-christian/>

Scripture Reading: Luke 12: 32-40

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give the money to those in need. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like the household staff who are waiting for the owners to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for them as soon as they come and knock. ³⁷ It will go well with those staff members whom the owners finds wide awake upon returning. I tell you the absolute truth, the owners will put on an apron, seat them at the table and proceed to wait on

them. ³⁸ Should the owners come during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those household staff.

³⁹ “Understand this: no homeowner who knew when a thief was coming would have let the thief break in! So be on guard – the Promised One will come when least expected.”

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Did you catch that first line? Or did you get caught up in trying to figure out the household and owner part of the story? Let me give you the first line again:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Hold onto that a moment – we’re given the kingdom - or kin-dom if you prefer - for no other reason than it simply pleases God - delights God - for this reason alone - God gives us the kingdom.

A kingdom where all are beloved, all are equal, all are cared for and all are welcome. That’s God’s kingdom.

In a commentary I read about this passage David Ewart writes, *So get over all your anxiety, guilt, shame, unworthiness, wretchedness, etc., etc. You don’t deserve it, but God is giving it to you anyway - not because of who you are or what you’ve done - but just because it tickles God no end to give it to you.*

Yet, the church, our Christian church who is supposed to create this kingdom on earth as contributed to the anxiety, guilt, shame, belief about worthiness that has barred so many from truly feeling beloved by God.

We did that. Rather than sell our possessions and give to those in need, we held tight to what we believe is ours and turned our backs on those who needed our love. We were not dressed and prepared with lamps lit. We locked the doors and pretended no one was home.

And now, we are starting to get better. We’ve known better for a long time, but we have been afraid. Fear has kept us from owning the truth of our religions history. it takes time to come to terms with our transgressions. It can take time to own up to our mistakes and step out of a place of fear and step into a place of love.

The journey to the historic United Church apology is a long one. It began in the 1970’s when Lesbian and gay church members began forming support groups within the church. In 1988 with the decision was made that sexual orientation would not be a barrier to ordination or commissioning in the church. In 2009 the church affirmed the

participation of Transgender people in ministry and the first openly trans person was ordained in 2010. In 2017 'Iridesce: the Living Apology Project' was launched – which eventually brings us to 2025 and last Friday where the official Living apology was expressed at the 45th General Council of the United Church of Canada.

As mentioned this is called 'the Living Apology' it is, as a Friday attendee said, a covenant made between church, its members and God. It is more than an apology as it is also a promise to keep working, keep aware, keep listening to the voices gone unheard for so long. The language of the apology was that it is 'from the church to the church' because for as long as there has been a church, there have been 2sLGBTQIA+ members. These members have participated in church while hiding, covering up and even denying their authentic selves from their communities and God out of fear. Bigotry, discrimination and oppression by the church has happened outside the church and it has happened within its walls as well. We had a first hand account of that discrimination and restitution in the reading from Beloved we heard today.

The apology is two fold – it is the church saying "we're sorry" to all members of the 2sLGBTQIA+ community in our country and world for the harms we've committed, for the trauma we've created, for the hurt so many have endured. And it's the church saying sorry to itself, because if we believe that all people are made in the image of God, then in hurting humanity, for oppression towards humanity we've hurt and oppressed God. We've hurt and damaged ourselves as reflections of God and all creation.

In the passage we heard today, We are called to 'be prepared' so that when the Promised one returns we are ready. And In the context of this passage, the Promised One is Jesus – and it is for his return we are to be prepare. The national apology is part of the preparation.

We are returning the church, the house to its authentic state where every child of God is welcome with unconditional love and compassion. Where everyone is beloved.

With this apology we've stepped outside the walls of conservative and traditional belief to share a progressive and open message. We're dressed and have our lamps lit so that when anyone steps into our house they will see they are welcome. For all people are the embodiment of the Promised One.

We are both the servants of the house and the owners of the house – where we are ready, willing and able to put on our aprons and welcome anyone who steps in at any unexpected hour.

May it be so.