



# THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council

WORSHIP SERVICE FOR THE EOORC – JUNE 9, 2019

## Order of Service -- Pentecost

*(all **bolded text** = congregational response) (\*\* = please stand in body or in spirit)*

### **We Gather Together**

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Lighting of the Christ Candle and Mission Statement**

**Call to Worship(Responsive):**

Winds of the Spirit, blow us to your new life!

**Fire of the Spirit, let your passion burn in our hearts!**

Comforting Presence of the Spirit, heal us.

**O Holy Spirit, prepare us for worship today.**

Spirit of God, descend on us and fill us with your love.

**Make us people who will proclaim God's good news in all that we do. AMEN.**

### **Opening Prayer (Unison):**

**O God, you who gives strength to a child and comfort to the sick, we remember as community that you came with a violent wind and tongues of fire to bring a new way of living to the disciples. Let the Holy Spirit burst into our lives today; encouraging us to walk into the gifts you have given us, into the ministry you have called us to and to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus. AMEN**

*(A time of silent reflection. When have you found yourself trying to live out other peoples expectations of you instead of accepting your unique giftedness and your unique ministry?)*

“Saul clothed David in his own garment; he placed a bronze helmet on his head and fastened a breastplate on hi. David girded his sword over his garment. Then he tried to walk; but he was not used to it. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk in these, for I am not used to them.” So David took them off.” (1 Samuel 17: 38, 39)

♪ **Opening Hymn: VU 625 “I Feel the Winds of God”**

**Greeting each other with signs of peace**

Prayer for forgiveness and assurance of reconciliation:

Oh God of mercy and grace, we confess that we too often disregard our own gifts and our own ministry, and feel compelled by voices that would give us 'quick fix' or easy solutions. Remind us, on the day when your Spirit descended and allowed people to understand your Good News *in their own language* that we are called for a purpose not to be just like the others. Forgive us for not honoring our own abilities and our own gifts. AMEN

My friends, remember our scriptures this morning: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave[a] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3: 16, CEV. You are loved and you are forgiven. AMEN

***We Listen to God's Word***

♪ Hymn: MV 161 "I have called you by your name"

- 1 Samuel 17: 24-40

Reflection: David and Goliath

♪ Hymn: VU 326 "O for a thousand tongues to sing"

***We Give Back to God***

Minute for Mission

**Offering**

♪ Dedication Hymn VU# 543 "We Give Thee But Thine Own" \*\*

Offering Prayer: For all the gifts you have given us, for all the ways you have called us, we give you thanks, O God. AMEN

Prayers of the People and **Lord's Prayer**

***We Go Out in Joy***

♪ Closing Hymn: VU 575 "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me"

Commissioning and Benediction

Our worship has finished but our service has just begun. Go from here recognizing that you have been called and equipped to face your own Goliaths. And may the Peace that Passes all Understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN

♪ Sung Benediction: MV 215 "Peace Be with You"

*Peace be with you, peace forever,*

*Peace be with you, my friends.*

*Till we meet again, may God be with you.*

*Peace, peace, peace.*

## **SERMON FOR THE EOORC – JUNE 9, 2019**

Our scripture reading today was the incredibly familiar story in 1 Samuel 17 of David and Goliath. I can still picture the Sunday School lesson and the flannel graph of David standing defiantly in front of Goliath with a sling shot and ‘felling his enemy with a simple stone’. All the boys in my Sunday school were thrilled with this story and spent most of the time pinging each other off with elastics and spit balls until my long-suffering Sunday school teacher put an end to it all.

As an adult my re-reading of the story always alarmed me a little. It smacked a bit of endorsing child soldiers and using violence to resolve conflict. My Western, middle-aged, white mama eyes wants everyone in the story to sit down and hug it out – you know....

And so when I was pondering what God would have me say this morning, I was a little taken aback by being compelled to read this story again. The story is different to me this morning....and I want you to hear to specific verses again:

The first is the section from verses 28-30:

*28 When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”*

*29 “Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” 30 He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before.*

The second is the section from verses 38-40

*38 Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. 39 David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.*

*“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.*

A couple of summers ago I went to Chautauqua – in upstate New York. Chautauqua is this whole other place in this world. It started out, I believe as a United Methodist training center for Christian Education and has morphed into a multi-faith retreat/education/arts Town complete with its own stores and restaurants. Its bigger than the communities that I serve and frankly has more money than this little corner of Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec could ever even dream of. The day at Chautauqua is full of activities; concerts, speakers, yoga, sailing, workshops and so on and so on. The key to managing the place is to strategic plan what you're NOT going to do, rather than what you WILL do. The day always began with worship – worship was in an open air amphitheatre that is bigger than any other amphitheatre I've ever been in. 1500 people gathered for worship every morning. The bass section of the choir was bigger than the congregations of both of the churches I serve combined. We heard from big-names in the church world: William Barber, J Phillip Newell, Diana Butler-Bass, Barbara Brown Taylor – to name just a few. It was at the same time both thrilling and incredibly intimidating. I would go to workshop after workshop and hear what other Christian churches were doing around the world – the service and outreach was just stunning. The good news of Jesus Christ is alive and well in the world.

Well – except for maybe in my pastoral charge. At least that's how I felt.

These people, after all, were talking about outreach programs that were bigger and reached more people than the population of the entire region. They talked about the movement of the Holy Spirit to bring justice and grace to neighbourhoods that were enormous. And God seemed to be sweeping through them and bringing people in to worship on a Sunday morning in droves.

When I returned to my little churches – and looked at my elderly and dwindling congregation I longed to bring this kind of revival into my world. David's lament of 'what did I do now – don't I even have a voice' seemed right here – in front of my face.

So I tried. I tried to put the armour on that they had given me. And just like Saul did for David, they gave this to me out of love – because they truly wanted me to be protected and to go into the battle of our every day lives and safely slay the giants of our world – the giants of a world that goes against God's commandment to do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly.

I tried with new and innovative programs – I tried with – book studies, bible studies, breakfast programs, prayer vigils, meditation, Lectio Divina. You name it, I tried it. I diligently tried on every piece of armour that my Sauls had given me in the hope that it would mean that I could slay my giant – my giant of rural depopulation, of secularization, of materialism, of the increasing perception of that we, the church are not relevant in this secular world.

And you know what – it hasn't worked. The pastoral charge where I serve is slowly being defeated by this giant despite the amount of armour I have been given. We are smaller than we were two summers ago. We are poorer. We are older. And we are tired. Lugging around Saul's armour is too heavy for us. And just like David, we can't use this armour because its not what we've been given - we are too busy trying to adapt to using Saul's borrowed equipment and not recognizing that we have been prepared for this time and place all along with our own strength and our own gifts.

David was considered to young and too small to be one of the warriors in God's army. David was accused of being negligent in his job and being conceited in his abilities when he offered to step up and help. David had to plead with people to be allowed to be part of things because what he was offering seemed like certain suicide to the other people in Saul's army. And then David had to have enough sense of his own giftedness to take off Saul's armor and use the equipment that he knew; despite Saul's well intentioned offer of help; despite the belief that it takes might to defeat might....despite everything that history said would be helpful.

David took off Saul's armour because he couldn't use it. And he took what he knew how to use, and he defeated the Giant.

As a church we are staring into the face of a really really big giant – aren't we. And its really frightening. I heard a stat some time ago, and I hear it in my own mind a lot. And that's the stat that tells me that we are closing 1 united church a week in this country. There was a research project that projected that the church would only have marginal existence within the next 10 years. The CBC recently had an article on the loss of significant religious architecture because of the decline of the church. And all of this makes me catch my breath.. My own pastoral charge had their annual meetings this past few weeks and we're frankly in huge financial trouble. And the research tells me that when organizations are downsizing or are competing for resources then the incidents of

workplace harassment increases exponentially – and so we have the Eliab's of this world dismissing our gifts, accusing us of things that aren't true and sending us away from the battle.

And maybe instead, we need to take off the armour that we've been given – the armour that says that we need to 'bring more young families into our church' or 'use more contemporary worship' or 'social media' or 'pub nights' or whatever it is that we are being handed as a solution by people and systems that love us, love the church and want us to be protected – our Sauls –

Maybe we need to take off the armour that means we can't move forward and instead use the simple tools that we know we've been given. The small, smooth, familiar stones of loving God with our heart, with our soul, and our mind – and loving our neighbours. Proclaiming loudly that we do this.

Because God first loved us.

Because God has gifted and equipped us to do this job.

Because that is who we are.

Thanks be to God.