

Red Door Chronicle



A newsletter of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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Happy
Thanksgiving

OUR BELOVED QUEEN DIED THURSDAY September 8, 2022, only two days after dutifully welcoming a new prime minister from Balmoral, Scotland, where she passed away. Needless to say, her death was long expected, but no less shocking, and heartbreaking, when it actually happened.

“Of course we knew the moment was coming,” wrote Jonathan Freedland in *The Guardian*. “When a photograph was released on Tuesday [September 6] showing the monarch welcoming her newest prime minister—her 15th—at Balmoral, her face looked unfamiliar-

ly gaunt. The Queen was in her 90s and we are all mortal, even those whose blood flows deepest blue. And yet the announcement that she had died on Thursday afternoon [shook] this country very deeply, for reasons we may not fully grasp.”

King Charles III immediately designated Monday September 19—the day of the Queen’s funeral—as a bank holiday. Within days Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had followed suit, declaring September 19 a federal holiday throughout Canada.

(Continued on page 2)

Predictably, Canadians soon began arguing about what this actually might mean. Will government offices be closed? (Yes.) Will schools be closed? (Unlikely.) Will the average person be given the day off? (No.) And so on. And so on!

Holidays. One wonders if they are more honoured in the breach, than the observance (to quote Hamlet, Prince of Denmark). Ours is a culture whose calendar is littered with special occasions: “holidays” we call them (like ‘Thanksgiving’). But what do they mean? Moreover, one asks, like a deliciously-spiteful Advocate Devil, “who really cares?”

How did we manage to become such a hollowed-out, disingenuous culture? So concerned with keeping up appearances, not to mention carefully ‘celebrating’ (i.e. sleeping and/or drinking and/or eating through) every last holiday, whatever it might be, that we have somehow lost our way? That we go through the ‘motions,’ but have somehow lost the ‘meaning’? What’s missing?

Once upon a time, I loved holidays of every description. I was the first to carve pumpkins, decorate Christmas trees, and set out great tables of Thanksgiving. But where has this exalted love now gone? Where? Have I—have we—lost our God-given sense of joy and wonder? And if so, how might we get it back, to the glory of God the Father?

I have a couple of suggestions in this regard. First, *let’s take back the word itself*. The English word “holiday” comes from the 14th century, and is simply the conflation of the words ‘holy’ and ‘day.’ Look up the word

holiday in the dictionary, and you’ll read something like “a day fixed by law (or custom) on which ordinary business is suspended, in commemoration of some event, or in honor of some person . . . and/or any day of exemption from work.”

But it is so much more than this!!! A *holy day* is a day in which the ordinary progress of life is brought to a halt, not only to rest and be refreshed, but to reflect on something important and regain its wonder. Holidays commemorate either a profound moment in salvation-history (like Christmas or Easter) or an occasion of national importance; or just something which should otherwise convince us of God’s goodness. In other words, *holy days* are meant to bring us back to living an intentional life, not an accidental life; a life in which every day—God being our helper—is filled with beauty; the beauty of the Lord. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever,” said John Keats, especially when it comes from God.

Second, *let’s do something truly radical*. Let’s invite God back into the whole question! Forget nudging, winking, and shrill laughter, and all that is bitterly arch and cynical. (Pretentious & boring & a waste of the human spirit!) Instead, let’s open the doors of our hearts to God. What glorious fun we’ll have! For holidays are much more than an accidental combination of “leftovers of the sacred,” as Allison Pearson puts it, with a convenient day off (to sleep in): they are the sacred, and teach us how to live a holy life.

Did I say ‘holy’? I did! For holiness utterly transcends ‘straining at gnats’ and ‘swallow-

(Continued on page 3)

ing camels,' like the pinched and/or pharisaical always do, to the popping of every last balloon. It's the longing for, and the living out, of **chosen** good, according to the inspiration of God's Spirit. Holiness, not unlike Father Christmas himself as depicted in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, is always "big and glad and real," not to mention "bigger on the inside than the outside." Like David before the Ark of the Covenant, holiness dances, and sings, and rejoices in every last snowflake that should ever fall from heaven.

It turns out that the ancient Jewish calendar was full of holidays, beginning with the Sabbath itself! The Hebrews called them ***Yamim Tovim***; literally, the "Good Days."

There are seven referred to in the Bible: Passover, including Unleavened Bread & First-Fruits (both Unleavened Bread and First-Fruits occur within Passover); the Feasts of Weeks, Trumpets, & Tabernacles; and finally, the Day of Atonement.

And wouldn't you know it, two of these are days of thanksgiving: First-Fruits, and the Feast of Booths (which Kenny Mackenzie has always helped us celebrate at St. Andrew's). Could it be that Thanksgiving is much more than a trite little holiday for the eating of turkey, and pumpkin pie? Could it be the door to a whole new way of life? Could saying

"thank you" to God restore to those of the "tired and jaded heart" the very wonder of the world, and delight itself?

No wonder Paul wrote the following to the Philippians, from prison no less: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus [emphasis mine]."

The world is a beautiful place! It's the gift of God for the people of God! Let's say "thank you, God" in all that we are, and do. Let's really begin to celebrate this extraordinary holiday as a *holy* day, *wholly* given to God. We'll never be the same again.

➤ Colin



PRAYER REQUESTS

PLEASE PRAY:

- for the continued well being of Fraser MacDonald; and for the diagnosis & treatment of Iza's unpredictable leg pain, which interferes with mobility.
- for Pat Mesic, for a good outcome of open heart surgery, which may occur in the New Year; also for her son, Shawn, and daughter, Teresa, who both have health concerns of their own.
- for Marlene Lane, who struggles with bradycardia (a slow heart rate) which makes breathing difficult.
- for Debbie Norris, recovering from injuries sustained in a car accident, that she experience more and more healing, and be given strength to care for the three grandchildren whom she is raising; also for her grandson in-law, Justin, who is suffering from a painful chronic condition; also for her daughter Jolene, who is currently experiencing breakdown & homelessness.
- for health & strength & uplift for Tony and Joan Vant Geloof.
- for to give thanks for Anna Proudlock's stable health—praise God!—while in care.
- for Charlotte, granddaughter of Terry Stewart's friend Ruby, to give thanks that she was able to enjoy some camping this summer; also for Ruby, that she recover from shingles.
- for those who have suffered with Covid 19, including Linda Middlestead, who has had to postpone her wedding.
- for "the peace that transcends all understanding" for Kathleen Brown; for her son Sean, under incarceration; and for Sean's father, Ian.
- for to give thanks that Ashlin Vant Geloof has of her own accord asked to enter treatment (God is good); also that an appropriate program be found, and provide long-term healing and benefit.
- for the children that we know and love, some of whom are in Sunday School, now relaunched for another year for the first time since 2020; Alexa, Oswald, Avianna, Jaxon, Adreanna, Sophie, Emma, and Lily (grandchildren of Debbie Norris); Arya and Darwin; Harris and Bear Emmerson; Mason, Jax, and Hanna (grandchildren of Shelley Eberle); Iliana (great granddaughter of Marlene Lane).
- for Bob and Nadia, now teaching Sunday School again; for Dennis Nordlund, our pianist.
- for Isobel Kay as she recovers at home after a long stay in hospital for complications from diabetes.
- for a proposed new December 2022 St. Andrew's Players play production, "A Christmas Carol," that it find sufficient cast; and having been cast, that the play enjoy a substantial buy-in from the community & an uplifting run, putting more and more people in touch with the work of this congregation.
- for those now increasingly impacted by climate change, including the untold number of people decimated by Hurricanes Fiona and Ian; and for the nation of Pakistan, also decimated by unnaturally prodigious monsoon rains thought to have been brought on by climate change; and those in BC who are (still) struggling from the aftereffects of severe weather, including residents of the Frazer Valley, Merritt, Princeton & Lillooet; for politicians that they would act courageously to address this issue.



COMING SOON!
A GLORIOUS HYMN SING
SUNDAY OCTOBER 16 @ 2:30 P.M.

The Peace of God which Transcends all Understanding

by BOB PUSHAK

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED A TECHNIQUE FOR REDUCING anxiety and stress called Progressive Muscle Relaxation in the late 1970s when I was working at a psychiatric hospital in Ponoka Alberta. This technique was developed for stress reduction and treating problems with anxiety. It is a healthy practice and beneficial to everyone regardless of whether they have a clinically significant anxiety problems. The first time I tried the technique for myself I felt a level of spontaneous relaxation that was very similar to the calm and deep peace I experience as I practiced silent prayer. I was reminded of a frequent saying of James Houston, the professor who taught prayer at Regent College, when he said, “the body and the soul are not two separate things; they are a single woven cloth.”

After that first experience, I started to use progressive muscle relaxation as a prelude to prayer and I found it easier to enter into and have a deeper experience of the “peace of God which transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4: 27). True theology is not merely about a collection of ideas; it is rooted and grounded in prayer. Part of the mystery of the incarnation, the entry of the divine into humanity, is that the Christian life is an embodied life.

To be clear, I am not saying that “the peace that transcends understanding” is nothing more than a relaxation response. What I am saying, however, is that the relaxation response is one component of the peace that transcends understanding. Part of prayer involves surrender to divine providence. True surrender involves letting go of tensions and frustrations and abandoning our-

selves to God. This does not mean taking a passive role with whatever happens to us. We still need to make decisions and take action. But while we are making decisions and acting, we are inwardly detached, open to God and not clinging to our own agenda.

If you would like to try a Christian version of progressive muscle relaxation that combines the practice with prayer you can access it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsXIH2N2wG0

If you decide to try progressive muscle relaxation and you struggle with pain then you should use the smallest increase in tension as possible when you focus on that area of your body. Or another option is to not increase muscle tension at all. Instead, just hold the spot light of your attention on that area and focus on the normal sensations of that body part, rather than focussing on the pain sensations. Even holding your attention on a specific area of you body while releasing any pre-existing muscle tension is enough to engage your parasympathetic nervous system, which will lead to a relaxation response.

If you practice this form of relaxation either prior to prayer or combined with prayer, over time you will find it easier to enter into silent prayer where you will become immersed in God’s presence and you will see for yourself how “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 27).



Do you have children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren, or regularly give care to little folk? Feel free to read them this story, from the annals of our many in-house-written Sunday School lessons.



by COLIN CROSS, FROM 2014

LONG AGO AND NO DOUBT FAR AWAY, when your great, even great-great grandparents were children, people had big families. It was not uncommon for boys and girls to have ten, eleven, or twelve brothers and sisters—or more!—especially if the family lived on a farm, where large families were not unusual. Imagine that! Twelve brothers and sisters, and only one bathroom! In fact whenever people heard the word “family,” they usually thought big—*very* big.

But no family, however large, is as big as **God’s** family. None. This is because in God’s family, *everyone* is welcome. Once upon a time, there was a man named John whom God took to heaven, to show him what it was like. (John, by the way, wrote a book to tell people what he saw. It’s the last book in the Bible, called the *Book of Revelation*.) There, he caught a glimpse of the family of God, all together at the same time. It was

astonishing! “After this I looked,” John says, “and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” Wow! Clearly, everyone is welcome in God’s family. ‘Big?’ That’s putting it mildly.

The sad thing is that not everyone down on earth has quite understood this. Some people have made it their sad and sorry business to stomp around the world pointing out exactly who does NOT belong in God’s family—*thank you very much*—people who don’t say the right things, or come from the right place; or worse yet, people who are sick and in need. “People who have a different colour of skin or different-coloured hair are just plain weird,” such people have said. “And as for those who are sick, they are sick because they are bad, or have done bad things. They do not belong in God’s family.” We call this sort of thinking and behaviour by a nasty, yucky four-letter word. That word? H-a-t-e. And you thought spiders and snakes and worms were yukky!

The truth is, however, that God is love. Yes, love. And it is love that makes a family—God’s family. And what is love like—**God’s** love, especially? This is what the Bible says, in a book called 1 Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always

with the truth. ⁷ *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

⁸ *Love never fails. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

This Thanksgiving, let's say **thank you** for God, and God's love, and for God's family. It's wonderful to remember that God's family stretches from one end of the world to the other, and includes people of every nation, tribe, people, and language; for God's love is big and glad and real. In fact it's bigger than the whole world, and everything in it—and more!

Let's pray. *Dear God . . . We love you! Your love is big, and glad, and real. Thank you for sending Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour.*

Help us to say thank you for all your good gifts: for food, for friendship, for family; for school, for chores (yes, even those!), for fun. Help us to say thank you, and live thank you, in all that we are and do.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.



A NOTE FROM JAN HIGGINS CONGREGATIONAL TREASURER



AUTUMN IS HERE! PERHAPS MY FAVOURITE time of year; a time to reflect on all we have and receive in this area. We have much to be thankful for here in the Okanagan, and in Canada.

At the recent meeting of the elders of St. Andrew's (otherwise known as the Session) we reflected on our own method of giving thanks, and supporting the congregation. All of the Elders — and many in this congregation — give monthly

through Pre-Authorized Renumeration (even Colin!)—otherwise know as PAR!

PAR is an automatic payment through your bank, and is carefully tracked and administered. Just fill out a form from our Office giving your banking information, and the amount you would like to contribute to the care and upkeep of St. Andrew's Presbyterian. Once registered for PAR, you may cancel and/or adjust the payment at any time. Our bookkeeper, Michelle, is happy to answer any questions you may have. Please call her at 250 492 8304; or better yet write to the following email address: doorwarden.godshouse@gmail.com.

We on Session would like to encourage you to consider this form of giving, as it ensures a steady income even if you are away travelling, or for any other reason.



COLOURING PAGE!

Hand-colour this image and bring it to church for posting! Prizes for the best work (adults and children judged separately), to be awarded by a famous artist.