

Worship - June 23, 2013

Introduction

The 88th annual meeting
of the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada
took place in Sackville, New Brunswick.
This was a gathering of hundreds of people
from United Churches
throughout Nova Scotia, PEI, New Brunswick, and Bermuda.

It is at this gathering each year
that much of the business of the larger church gets done,
where networking happens,
where people are ordained,
and where the future of the church is explored.
And, intermingled with all of that is worship.

So, this morning, throughout our worship time,
we are going to give you a taste of Maritime Conference.

The theme of this year's meeting was just two little words.
It was: "What if...?"
It pushed us to ponder what might or could be possible.
So, throughout your time here this morning,
when you listen, when you sing, and when you are silent,
I want you to think about what might be possible
in your life and in the church
if you dare to dream.

Sermon: "What if...."

This morning, you have been doing a lot of listening.
In the words that have been spoken to you
by Rachel, Patricia, Graham, and Karen
much has been said.
They have told us about both the hope that they experienced
and the fear around the future that was present too
as the larger church gathered.

In the midst of their words,
we have heard other important words from two prophets -
from Isaiah and from Joel.

Isaiah mostly told us to not be afraid because God will always be with us no matter what.
and Joel told us that we should be brave and daring enough to dream dreams and see visions of the future.

So, **what if** we moved from fear to hope?

After all, in order to dream about what's possible in the first place,
we have to be able to let go of that which hold us back
and, quite often, that is fear.

Sometimes we are afraid of how our lives could be different
and we cling on to what we have always known.

Sometimes we are fearful to step out into the unknown
because we can't anticipate what might happen.

This is true in our own lives,
just as it is true for this United Church of ours.

What if we moved from fear to hope?

And after we decide to live into the future,
to venture forward in hope . . .

What if we dared to welcome everyone into our future?
I mean, **what if** we really welcomed everyone?

One of the big pieces that was discussed
was whether or not we, as a church,
wanted to start a process toward becoming affirming.

This is a label that we would give ourselves to say that
Maritime Conference works to promote the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender
people in the church and in society.

I want to give you a real example of what it means to be affirming.
It happens to come from this morning's Minute for Mission
which is entitled, "To Be Welcome, Just as We Are".
So, I share that with you now:

*Church is a good place to show our acceptance of differences,
whatever those differences are,
so that people may simply be who they are.
A wonderful example of this was lived out
at Lake Scugog Camp in Toronto Conference.
Listen to the story shared by one of the young male staff.*

*A camper arrived at camp for the first time.
On his application he had identified himself as transgender,
a boy who was beginning to identify as a girl.*

*Before he arrived,
camp staff reached out to national office staff
to learn about being transgender
so that they could welcome this camper.*

*Early in the week the camper said to a male staff person,
"I'd like to wear a dress today.
Can I do that?"*

*The staffer replied,
"Sure you can!
You can wear whatever you want here.
And if it will make you feel better,
I'll wear a dress too!"
The camper was beaming as he rushed to put on his dress.*

*The camp showed him he was welcome just the way he was—
and his being transgender
became a non-issue
for the rest of the week
because he discovered he was free to be himself!*

*Every gift to the church's mission and service
is used wisely and helps transform lives.
Please continue to give generously.*

In the end,
I am very proud to say that Maritime Conference
has decided to enter into the affirming process.

What if we all did some of our own dreaming?
What do you suppose would happen?

I hope that the folks at Maritime Conference,
inspire you to dust off your dreams.

What if...you dare to wade into the water of life and trust God to guide you?
What if...you dare to sing out a new song in your living?
What if...you dare to do the future differently than you have done the past?

This kind of dreaming and visioning and imaging
is not always easy.
It certainly isn't always fun.
But I do think
that it is in our dreaming
that we can more clearly see God.

What if...?