

October 31, 2021
All Saints

Meditation: “Living Into Change”

Well, today is All Hallows Eve. Just like New Years Eve is the evening before New Years Day, and Christmas Eve is the evening before Christmas Day, All Hallows Eve is the evening before All Hallows Day. Did you ever wonder what hallow means? It's a word we say every week – Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Hallow means to make holy or sacred. Our Father, who art in heaven, holy is your name. All Hallows Day is the day that we make holy the remembrance of those who live amongst us no more – of course, it is more commonly known as All Saints Day.

My daughter, Christina, and I were talking about schools the other day – what they taught, or no longer teach. I told her that for the life of me I cannot figure out why anything to do with Christianity is not allowed in our schools, but ancient Celtic festivals are okay. So now I've got you wondering too. What ancient Celtic festival is allowed in our schools. The Celts called it Samhain (sow-inn).

You see, the Celts believed in two worlds – a material world, and a spiritual world. At Samhain, those two were at their closest. It was a thin place in time. At that time, the spirits of the recently deceased could cross from the material to the spiritual world. In order to assist in the effort, they would eat sweets, which for them was usually apples. The catch was, that during this thin place in time, evil spirits from the spiritual world could also make their way to the material world. The Celts would try to scare away any evil spirit by carving ugly faces in turnips (they didn't have pumpkins), lighting fires, and wearing frightening masks. Samhain was, to the Celts, New Years Eve, and happened October 31-November 1. Does any of this sound remotely familiar?

At Samhain, the Celts were looking to the future, at what they wanted to happen, and what they didn't want to happen. They wanted the spirits of their dearly departed to transition to the spiritual world, and they didn't want any evil spirits to cross into the material world.

On All Saints Sunday we usually remember those saints in our community who passed in the last year. This year I want to focus on the future, rather than the past.

This weekend was the annual fall meeting of Antler River Watershed Region, and I want to share with you a couple of things that were shared with us yesterday. The first was shared by our new General Secretary, the Rev. Michael Blair. He reminded us, just in case we had forgotten, that over the past several years the focus of the denomination has been consumed with the structure of the church. We have moved from a four-court system to a three-council system. For the past several years that we focused on our structure and governance, we lost focus on who we are, and who we are called to be in our world. With restructuring behind us, it is time to look again beyond ourselves and to

look to the future and that changes that are needed. The denomination has renewed its mission statement and vision statement. A video of the mission statement was played, and I wish it was available online to share with you this morning. Maybe soon. The mission statement asks who we are, what we believe, what our focus is. The answer came in six words – Deep Spirituality. Bold Discipleship. Daring Justice. The corresponding vision statement is: “Called by God, as disciples of Jesus, the United Church of Canada seeks to be a bold, connected, evolving church of diverse, courageous, hope-filled communities united in deep spirituality, inspiring worship, and daring justice.” This work seeks to focus our attention both outward and forward, and that means change.

We heard about other change as well. There have been a number of changes at the local level where pastoral charges have amalgamated, have sought new ecumenical partnerships with other denominations, and, yes, sadly, have closed. Burdened with aging buildings and shrinking budgets, change is inevitable. And there was exciting news of new ways of being the church, of living into our mission in our communities through faithful stewardship of the assets we have. The chief asset referred to is our real estate. UPRC (United Property Resource Corporation) is a new offshoot of the United Church of Canada. It seeks to leverage the assets, the real estate, we have in ways that are both faithful to our mission in our communities, and that will help fund our ongoing ministry in those communities. UPRC works with congregations to redevelop properties to fund our ministries, and one of the primary ways they are doing that is through the development of affordable housing. UPRC is currently working with congregations from rural maritime areas to congregations in urban Toronto. Living into change, for UPRC, is about living into our local mission and funding our ministries into the future. Living into change, for UPRC, is also about living into the New Creed – to live with respect in Creation – as they seek to build net zero developments.

Our ancestors in the faith looked to the future and, in faith, lived to change their present into a better future. They built our places of worship, not just for themselves, but for future generations. They looked to a time radically different than their own, a time when “... the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

As for us, where is our focus? Is it on the past, or on the future? Are we living into change, or are we stuck in the way things always were, like the Egyptian army in the Red Sea? Are we excited and inspired about the possibilities for the future, like new ways of worshipping both virtually and in-person, or do they fill us with dread?

What the future holds is uncertain. That the future will come, whether we want it to or not, is certain. That the future will bring change is certain. The petroleum economy will come to an end. Climate change will drive human migration, and many other changes. Those two things alone will create all manner of injustices in our human systems. Will we resist the changes the future will bring, or will we drive them? Will we seek to remain in the past, or will we live into the changes of creating a better future for our descendants? Perhaps most important of all, will we be able to keep God's vision of a world of distributive justice in the forefront as we move forward? Remember, never forget, that with God, all things are possible, for God dwells amongst his peoples, easing every fear and anxiety, and making all things new. Amen.