

POST EVERYTHING: IS THE UNITED CHURCH STILL A PASSIONATE PROJECT?

Berwick Camp

Friday, July 31, 2015

AGENDA FOR FRIDAY MORNING

- ▶ **Passion meets Pluralism**
- ▶ **Can our history help us now?**

BREAK

- ▶ **Activity Time**
- ▶ **Moving on (once more) from the “Ancient Pines and Hemlocks”**

“POST-EVERYTHING”: CHURCH AND WORLD

1985-PRESENT

- ▶ **21st Century** has intensified the challenges for humanity, including the churches
- ▶ **Global social/political/economic systems** create wealth but also ecological catastrophe, loss of community, refugee crises, demographic decline (e.g., Maritimes) desperate need for “care for our common home” (Pope Francis, *Laudate Si*)
- ▶ **“Postmodernism,”** initially a movement in art and literary criticism, has been applied to all aspects of human knowledge
 - ▶ *Skepticism* about the trustworthiness of ideas and assumptions
 - ▶ Imparts a sense that *nothing can be declared “true” without being oppressive*
- ▶ **Religions** are often portrayed as purveyors of superstition and violence

IS THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA STILL A “PASSIONATE” PROJECT?



Sandra Beardall/ July 2015 Berwick Camp



THE UNITED CHURCH RESPONDS

- ▶ Decisions about Human Sexuality
- ▶ Apologies and Follow Up
- ▶ Ecumenical and Denominational Activism
- ▶ Interfaith Engagement
- ▶ Congregational Development
- ▶ New Faith Statement
- ▶ Commitment to Inter-culturalism
- ▶ Proposals to Restructure the Church
- ▶ Proposals to Redefine Ordered Ministry
- ▶ WHICH OF THESE ENGAGE OUR **PASSION**, and HOW?

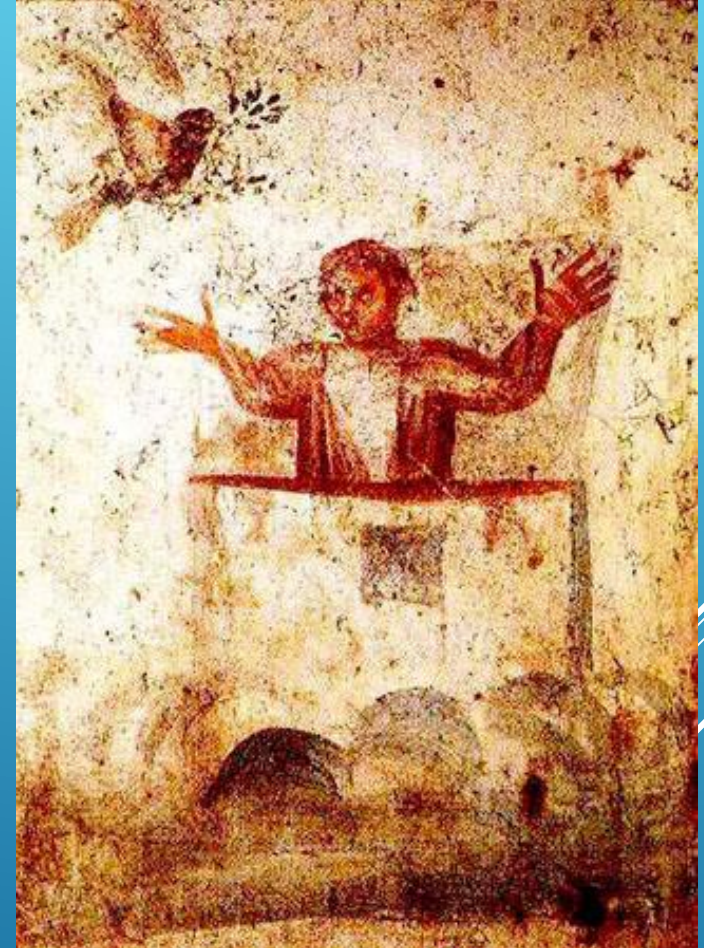


PASSION MEETS PLURALISM

- ▶ **Beginning with Jesus' passion, Christian "passion" has tended to be engaged in attempting to deny, overcome, reform, or transform the world**
- ▶ **CHALLENGE: Can Christians express their passions without hiding from OR trying to take over the world?**
- ▶ **In a world of many faiths and ideologies, how can we express our Christian passions with integrity?**

CAN OUR HISTORY HELP US?

- ▶ **WARNING:** Historians are trained to look *backward*, so may not be trustworthy in looking *forward*!
- ▶ So we will look back:
 - ▶ What have we learned about Christians “expressing their passion” in history that can help us now?
 - ▶ What might be the role of the “Camp Meeting” in continuing to help Christians express their passion?



YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID ... BUT (I):

- ▶ “Every 500 Years, the Church has a Rummage Sale”
 - ▶ Selecting every “500 years” of Christian history for import is a feat of numerology
 - ▶ It eliminates many other important upheavals
 - ▶ The church rarely “throws away” anything – it sometimes “repurposes” ideas or practices
 - ▶ Most Christians throughout history have believed themselves to be living through change and upheaval



YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID ... BUT (2):

- ▶ “History Always Repeats Itself”
 - ▶ Acknowledges the patterns that appear as we review human activities over time
 - ▶ Reminds us that humans often ignore the signs that point to certain outcomes – confident in their “exceptionalism”
 - ▶ **BUT:** Implies inevitability and victimhood
 - ▶ For Christians, this is contrary to the story of salvation

A better way to say it?

- ▶ “History doesn't repeat itself, Gamora, but sometimes it rhymes.”

▶ Dan Abnet, Guardians of the Galaxy, vol. 1



The Lesson:

- ▶ **Worship and Passion are always linked** (earliest Christians)
- ▶ **Passion includes suffering** (Martyrs)
- ▶ **It is good to hold passionately to one's faith "system"** (Nicea)
- ▶ **You should really love what you believe** (Augustine, Teresa)
- ▶ **Passion for God in creation is essential and cannot be separated from passion for God in human relationships** (Francis, Camp Meetings)

The Vulnerability:

- ▶ There is more than one way to express passion in worship
- ▶ Suffering should not be sought, or be imposed as a condition of faith, or preclude the desire to prevent suffering
- ▶ Temper tantrums don't advance understanding
- ▶ Theology must come alive in the *heart*
- ▶ Learning to "be in nature", including human nature, with all its beauty and struggle, is often counter-intuitive

The Lesson

- ▶ **Passion for the poor trumps all other Christian practices** (Gregory of Nyssa, Social Gospellers, Church actions for justice and peace)
- ▶ **Passion should be practiced in, and accountable to, a living faith community** (Protestant reformers)
- ▶ **The passionate life is an inner journey: from despair to confidence and hope in Jesus** (Bunyan, Wesley, revivalists, Camp Meetings)

The Vulnerability

- ▶ **Action for justice can erode Christian commitment, unless it grounded in faith practices: prayer, worship, Bible study**
- ▶ **Who “manages” this accountability? Attention to power dynamics is essential**
- ▶ **When does the inner journey become obsessive?**

The Lesson

- ▶ **Emotion is a significant component of passion**
- ▶ **It is good to spend time apart with those who share our faith passions** (Camp Meetings)
- ▶ **As children of “modernity,” we can not resist using the intellect: education and knowledge, to inform our faith”** (Chautauqua movement, Liberal Progressive Christianity, SCM)
- ▶ **Passionate Christians have arisen in every age to face the challenges of the day.**

The Vulnerability

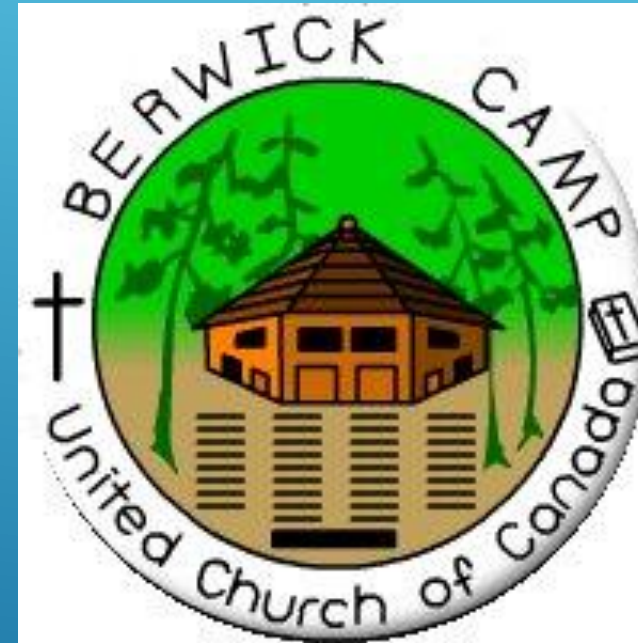
- ▶ **Emotion can become contrived or coerced**
- ▶ **It is also good to struggle to meet and know the “other” on mutual terms**
- ▶ **It is difficult to maintain passion, and even faith, when caught up in “reason”: it is a challenge to “re-disciple” ourselves**
- ▶ **We can easily forget that we are surrounded by “everlasting arms” and a cloud of witnesses, and believe that we must save the church by ourselves.**

ACTIVITY TIME

- ▶ **1. FOR ACTIVE BODIES:** Create a “tableau” that describes your ideal, passionate church. You may use props and words, if you wish!
- ▶ **2. FOR ACTIVE MINDS:** “That we might attempt great things for thee” (see handout)
- ▶ **3. FOR ACTIVE IMAGINATIONS:** How would you “image” your passion?

AS WE MOVE ON (ONCE MORE) FROM THE “ANCIENT PINES AND HEMLOCKS”...

- ▶ Was there a learning in these sessions stood out for me?
- ▶ What do I still have left to ponder?
- ▶ What might change in my life as a result of these morning sessions?
- ▶ ... and/or of this Berwick week?



“GOD BE WITH YOU TILL WE MEET AGAIN”

▶ 1. God be with you till we meet again;
By good counsels guide, uphold you;
With God's sheep securely fold you.
God be with you till we meet again.

▶ (Chorus)
Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet,
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.

Text: Jeremiah E. Rankin, 1828-1904
Music: William G. Tomer, 1833-1896

- ▶ **2. God be with you till we meet again;
When life's perils thick confound you,
Put strong arms unfailing round you.**
- ▶ **God be with you till we meet again.**

- ▶ **(Chorus)**

**Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet,
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.**

3. God be with you till we meet again
Keep love's banner floating o'er you;
Smite death's threat'ning wave before you.
God be with you till we meet again

► (Chorus)

Till we meet, till we meet,
Till we meet at Jesus' feet,
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.