

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of September 20, 2009*

## The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same (Hebrews 13:5-8)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from Hebrews 13:5-8

"God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' <sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'

<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

This is the Word of God.

Sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, the more things change the more they stay the same. Our world is in a state of constant change and yet the essence of human nature and the basic challenges of life remain essentially the same. No doubt we have seen sweeping changes through history that have affected the way we live. Take the past century for example; we went from driving horse-drawn carriages to driving cars and taking buses and subways and flying in airplanes. This all happened within the span of just a few decades. Gone is the outhouse in the back. Now we have indoor plumbing; we have electric lights instead of candles; we have computers and the internet and cell phones. In 1903 the Wright Brothers flew the first airplane and by 1961 the world had sent the first man into space. Life has changed incredibly in a short time; some of you have seen some of these staggering changes firsthand in your lifetime.

Times have changed and yet much has stayed the same. The stock market crash of 1929, for example, devastated the world's economy and sent it into a deep depression for the next 10 years in the 1930s. And yet despite all our technological advances since that time we find ourselves in a similar though less severe situation since the stock market crash last year.

However, one thing that has been a constant during all these changes and throughout these challenging economic times is the presence of God. He does not change. As it says in Hebrews 13, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." And He is present with His people even in the most difficult of circumstances.

God foresaw the difficult times ahead when He planted Ascension Lutheran Church in Montreal and opened its doors on May 12, 1929. He foresaw the stock market crash and the depression that would ensue and yet He planted our church in the same year as the great stock market crash. Jesus has said, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12) and He says the same of His people who follow Him. In other words, in the midst of the bleak times of the Great Depression God planted our church to be a beacon of hope where people can find the Light of the World in Jesus Christ, and where they

might see the love of Christ displayed in His people. This is the challenge God has laid before us to continue today.

Friends, the more things change the more they stay the same. A lot has changed since those times. But the basic needs of people have not changed. For basic survival we need a proper home, adequate clothes, and food. On an emotional level we need friendships and relationships where we can love and feel loved. And on a spiritual level, most importantly, all people need Jesus. People need Him for eternal life and forgiveness of sins. As it says in First John chapter 5, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life".

Jesus serves our emotional needs as well. In John's first epistle he writes, "We love because He first loved us" (Jn. 4:19). God is the ultimate source of the love we crave. When He sent His Son into the world He showed us the immense size of His love. He revealed His love by healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. But He showed the full extent of His love most emphatically and clearly when He gave His life and paid for our sins on the cross.

God sent our church to point people to this love of Christ, to Him as the one way to the Heavenly Father; to welcome others into a church home so they might come to faith and be Baptized and be welcomed into their spiritual home in the Kingdom of God.

In His Word God gives direction to our lives. He has directed and guided us at Ascension for 80 years; here He has Baptized many and, as Colossians 1:13 says, "He has rescued many from the kingdom of darkness and brought them into the kingdom of the Son He loves." He has done this for us and He will continue to shepherd and guide His beloved people as long as they keep listening. As Jesus says, "Whoever has ears let him hear."

Friends, we come into this world spiritually lost. But God gives His Word to guide us, to find us and bring us home. Logically speaking if we don't know where we come from then we don't know where we are going and we certainly don't know how to get there. But in His Word God reveals Himself as our Creator; He tells us that His kingdom is our ultimate destination and He shows us that Jesus is the Way to get there. As the church our job is to point people to Him.

It is really a miracle of God that we are here today as a church after 80 years. It is His grace and mercy that has preserved us. It is a wonderful event. It was His faithfulness to His flock that established a Lutheran church in 1929 and then provided a building for the work of the ministry in 1952, as we moved from downtown Montreal to our current location in Park Extension.

In the Gospel reading today the Lord says, "Zeal for your house will consume me". Jesus is zealous for His church. He is zealous to feed and fill us with His Word and the good things of His kingdom, to guide His sheep in His path. And He is zealous to save the lost. Are we zealous for these things? Does zeal for the Lord and His work consume us? May the zeal of Christ ignite our hearts for the work of His ministry!

Today is a celebration and rightly so. Eighty years is a long time for the people of the church to weather the storms of life and still confess Jesus as Lord in the face of increasing opposition from a world that does not know Christ. There are many good memories and good friends that have passed through these walls and we thank God for them. But chiefly, however, today is a celebration of Christ and His love that does not end; His faithfulness to His people no matter what life throws at us. Today we celebrate what God has done among us and what He is about to do through His Word and Sacraments. God tells us not to chase yesterday but to look forward to see the amazing things that God is about to do. There are conversions on the horizon; there are people about to know Jesus as Saviour. It is an exciting time to be a Christian. God tells us not to worry about the future but trust in Him. He desires that we keep our foot on the gas and persevere in His Work. He will provide.

Eighty years ago our neighbourhood was largely Eastern European, many from Slovakia. God blessed us with many Christians at our doorstep. But now we look around and we see all the nations of the world in our backyard. In planting our church way back in 1929 God had a vision to make disciples and this vision has not changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The demographic makeup has changed dramatically over the years but God's desire to bring Jesus to the nations remains a constant. He has placed us smack-dab in the middle of a multi-ethnic neighbourhood with people from all different religious persuasions who don't yet know Jesus as Saviour. It is a glorious opportunity! Where people from different religious backgrounds are groping in the darkness to find God we can be that beacon of light where Christ is found.

Friends, God has been with us all these years and He does not leave us alone in this work. As Jesus has said, "I am with you always to the very end of the age." Indeed, the more things change the more they stay the same. In the midst of a changing world the changeless Christ reigns supreme. And He wants everyone be they Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist to know Him as their Saviour who died and rose for them, to come to repentance and a knowledge of the Truth.

Friends, God built this church on the Rock of His Word and Sacraments and this Rock will never falter. Jesus is sure and steady. As we sang in the opening hymn this morning, "Christ is our cornerstone. On Him alone we build; With His true saints alone the courts of heav'n are filled." Friends, God's Word will abide forever. Thanks be to God! Amen. Go in peace. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.