

Sunday, Sept 25, both services, Ms. Julia Roberts, Nelson BC

**Meeting Place: On Footprints, Family, Friends, and Faith**

Joel 2:28-32

Psalm 26

Hebrews 10:19-25 or Rom 12:1-13

John 15:1-15

Ten years ago, my daughter and I went to England to visit our ancestral villages. On Easter morning, we cycled a few kilometers through the Somerset countryside to attend the Eucharist at All Saints, Wootton Courtenay. My Roberts family was in Wootton from at least 1579. As I sat in that damp, chilly church I noticed the varied stone work in different parts of the building and the memorials to past members including my own great-great aunt. Clearly, much had changed over the centuries since the church was built about 1250 and many people had lived their lives and died in that place. Yet, I felt an uncanny sense of belonging. I could have moved right into the village and felt at home.

I'm sure that here at St. Paul's a similar sense of family and belonging has developed over the years since this church began in 1888. Our sense of belonging develops from worshipping together; sharing life's milestones: baptism, marriage, and death; and working together on church projects. Actually, I think we bond best while doing dishes!

As we think back over the history of our church whether it is our ancestral churches in England or our own churches here in BC, we soon realize that our faithful ancestors weathered many difficult times including plague, wars, poor harvests, economic depression, and even the social upheaval of the 1960's. Through all of these difficulties the church has held onto faith and hope in God's love.

And now we find ourselves facing a new and daunting challenge called climate change. Because we humans are not all seeing, climate change has crept up on us. Since the industrial revolution, we have used our creativity and skills to build lifestyles that are increasingly comfortable, but also very energy intensive. Initially, we didn't notice the affects of adding more carbon emissions to the atmosphere. Since the 1980's scientists have been more and more concerned about the affects of increasing carbon in our atmosphere. In recent years, we have seen the affects of

climate change in changing weather in our own towns, massive forest fires, huge floods, and typhoons and hurricanes of unprecedented fury. So how do we as a faith community respond to this new challenge of climate change?

We can draw on the faithful examples of our ancestors stretching back to the early Hebrews. Today's reading from the prophet Joel sounds a hopeful note, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions." But I also noticed when I looked at the earlier portions of Joel that he was lamenting over the ruin of the country and calling for repentance and prayer. This reminds me of people whom I consider modern day prophets, such as David Suzuki, Naomi Klein, Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians, and Andrew Weaver and other scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. These people tell us repeatedly about threats to life on earth and call us to live with care of creation as a priority. We need to listen to them, avoid denial, and prayerfully seek to change our ways of living. We need to discern the workings of the spirit as we move forward.

In today's reading from Roman's, Paul exhorts his readers "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." The world, the culture in which we are embedded, bombards us with messages about consuming more and more. We are told that happiness and contentment lie in the latest gadget, a new car, or a vacation in the sun. The sobering reality is that in Canada greenhouse gas emissions per person were 20.6 tonnes in 2014<sup>1</sup>. Although this number had dropped from 22.1 t in 1990, it is still ten times the required emissions of 2t per person per year.<sup>2</sup> This is the level of emissions we need to reduce to in order to keep global warming to 2C. It also assumes that we are sharing emissions equally with all people on Earth, something that we are clearly not doing at the moment. So we need to consider whether we can continue to be conformed to the world or whether we can learn to live in ways that are less carbon intensive. Living a less carbon intensive lifestyle means considering the

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<sup>1</sup>Canadian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. Greenhouse Gas Emissions per Person and per Unit Gross Domestic Product. Viewed online on August 31, 2016 at <https://www.ec.gc.ca/indicateurs-indicators/default.asp?lang=en&n=79BA5699-1>

<sup>2</sup> Shrink That Footprint. Carbon Targets for your Footprint. Viewed online 31 August 2016 at: <http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/carbon-targets-for-your-footprint>

carbon footprint of each purchase we make, whether it is for our own homes or this church home. It means finding ways to reduce emissions from commuting and travel. It means buying food closer to home. It means always looking for creative new ideas that God will see as good and acceptable and perfect.

In Romans, Paul goes on to speak of the various gifts that we all bring to the body of Christ. He speaks of gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and being compassionate. I suggest that in the present climate crisis we need to cultivate the gifts of prophecy, teaching, exhortation, and leadership. Those of us, who are gifted with an understanding of science and the ability to predict carbon emissions from proposed projects, need to speak up, to be prophetic. Those of us who are gifted teachers need to explain the causes and cures for climate change at every opportunity. All of us need to exhort our leaders at all levels of government to take urgent action on climate change by increasing the carbon tax, funding programs to retrofit buildings that waste energy, and improving public transit. Our exhortations might take the form of petitions, postcards, emails or phone calls. As it happens, I have brought some postcards from the Nelson Citizens' Climate Lobby for you to sign after the service. I will see that they are sent to Christie Clark to encourage her to strengthen BC's Climate Plan. Those with leadership gifts need to organize local projects to reduce carbon emissions. These might range from food growing and preserving projects, to carpooling, to renovating this building to reduce its carbon footprint. And all of us must surround these efforts with prayer.

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the true vine, his Father as the vine grower, and each of us as branches of the vine. He offers the reassuring words, "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." I think the transition to a low-carbon economy that lies ahead of us could be very challenging. We may see job losses and a need for retraining, as fossil fuel jobs are replaced by renewable energy jobs. We may need to adjust our ideas of the vacations and new toys we are entitled to. We will need to find contentment and joy in simpler pursuits.

I know that I struggle with emitting carbon in order to visit family on Vancouver Island and even to drive here to speak to you today. One solution is to reduce travel by skyping with family and friends and using online meetings for work and church meetings. Another solution to emitting carbon for travel is to buy carbon offsets. This means giving money to organizations that plant trees, install solar panels in third world countries and the like. The idea is to fund projects that

absorb carbon from the atmosphere or allow the poor to stop use high carbon fuels such as kerosene in lamps. Air Canada offers offsets on its website and you can find more offsetting opportunities at [offsetters.ca](http://offsetters.ca) . Offsets are incredibly cheap. I recently paid \$1.68 to offset a flight from Castlegar to Victoria. Some people scorn offsets saying that they are like medieval indulgences allowing us to pay while we keep on sinning. There may be some truth to that thought, but offsets are a useful tool while we transition away from fossil fuels.

Through all these changes we will need to care for one another and for people in our community and the wider world. The changes we face may prove to be daunting and at times frightening. We will need to stay firmly attached to the vine that is Jesus to navigate these changes with compassion, grace, and generosity.

Some of us who are over 60 may find these changes easier to navigate than those who are younger. We can remember times when only a few families had cars, and we walked or biked everywhere. We learned from our parents to be thrifty, to use available materials, mend clothes, grow vegetables, and can fruit. We have gifts to offer younger folks by teaching them skills that are nearly lost.

Returning to the Gospel, we heard Jesus familiar commandment that we love one another as he loved us. He goes onto say that we are his friends if we do what he commands us. The challenge of climate change and reducing our carbon foot prints will require us to be faithful in loving one another and being friends to one another and all of creation. This is a tall order that we can only approach bolstered by our faith in Jesus. Some of us may feel overwhelmed by the tasks that lie ahead. I'm sure our ancestors in this church and in our ancestral churches in England felt overwhelmed by the realities of plague, wars and Depression Yet they weathered those difficult times by being friends, loving one another, and always keeping faith in Jesus. May we do likewise.