

February 2, 2020

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**Reading:** Matthew 5.1-12, The Beatitudes

**The Message:** A Defence for an Extraverted Spirituality

How would you describe a spiritual person?

For most of my ministry, I've felt rather intimidated by spiritual people. I remember sitting in church and hearing about Helen Houston MD who served the United Church in Nepal, where it was illegal to talk about being a Christian. And yet, people were not only physically healed by her; they were spiritually healed, and many became Christians. She literally inspired me to consider ministry as a child. Years later, as a young professor at the Vancouver School of Theology, I organized a programme for missionaries home on furlough to gather for support and also to speak with my students. Helen attended, and you felt the presence of Christ in her. We all, particularly the women, wanted to just touch her -- as the woman with the flow of blood touched Jesus' robe.

By then I had come to the realization that I wouldn't be that kind of spiritual person. I was too loud, too excitable, too extroverted. Too distractible. I found joy in doing things; spending time with people.

As such, I've often found myself alienated from other clergy. Impatient when people didn't speak their minds at presbytery meetings, disappointed when people weren't passionate about issues that seemed to me to be so important. During my terms as chair of Presbytery, I frequently found myself feeling like I was trying to energize people to accomplish more, reach higher, do more.

I finally realized that I was Tigger in a roomful of Owls.

Tigger is a bouncy, hyperactive, exuberant personality who doesn't mind trying new things, and doesn't fear failure. He acts first and thinks after and will dash rather than walk.

So how could I survive in ministry? Well, spending weekly lunch hours studying the scriptures we would preach with introverted ministers has given me a certain measure of humility. And I found a lot more Tiggers in congregations than among ministers, and I learned to value lay Owls who kept us on track in so many ways.

Today I am reminding us what it is to be members of the United Church of Canada and Christ First. Why begin as I have? Because I have a sense that the United Church of Canada, while benefiting from a mix of Tiggers and Owls, practices a more extroverted way of being Christian than some other denominations.

Which is not to say we are wrong. Often we have been told by others that we are lesser Christians because we don't spend a lot of energy on doctrine. We have been accused of not being biblical, of breaking away from Christian tradition.

But I have to tell you, we are totally rooted in the best of 19th Century theology. The Social Gospel Movement taught that the kingdom of God could be known on earth if we just walked the walk with Jesus. This movement spawned more social change for the better around the world and perhaps quite significantly in Canada.

We are historically rooted and we are biblically rooted.  
What does God require of you?

to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God

I checked with Ted Lutz, our resident Hebrew scholar. before he left for vacation about the meaning of one of the three phrases. I suspected that “to love kindness” was actually weaker than the Hebrew, and I was correct. Ted suggested his own translation: “to practice faithful love.”

These are all action words: **do** justice, **practice** faithful love, and **walk** humbly with your God.

And in the Beatitudes Jesus blesses a mix of owls and Tiggers.

the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the pure in heart, they have characteristics more in line with the wise owl.

Those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” “are “merciful,” “are the peacemakers,” they are known by their actions despite being persecuted for the sake of justice. They are the Tiggers who stand up for justice, mercy, peace, no matter what the consequences.

I guess what I want you to take away from this today, is, be proud of being members of the United Church of Canada and Christ First. Journalists may criticise us for taking unpopular positions, others may deny that we are ‘real’ Christians. But our affirmation of all the Owls and Tiggers in our midst is our proof that we are a biblical people rooted in these two scriptures, and that is enough for me.

Hence my defence of our extraverted spirituality. Enough said. If you’re a Tigger, be thankful for the Owls. If you’re an Owl, be patient with us Tiggers. And above all, be proud of your church.