

February 9, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: John 17.20-22

Message: That All May Be One

In exercise class this week, I was thinking about how Erin Furlong, our instructor, tends so carefully to what is going on in our bodies. Each of the participants, it seems, has at least one area of weakness. A hip, a knee, a shoulder, a back. She watches us all carefully, and she frequently asks us about our individual challenges. As we strengthen the muscles around the weakest parts of our bodies, And through our gentle guided stretches, we are starting to feel stronger all over, even with the wear and tear we have subjected our bodies to while on this planet.

And in this second last week of the season of Epiphany, I had an Epiphany! Our class is like the United Church.

Our motto, “Ut Omnes Unum sint” is a scriptural quote from John 17.21: ‘That All May Be One.’

We were formed as a United and Uniting Church, bringing together people from different traditions, different cultures, different ways of doing worship, different spiritual paths to God.

There are two aspects to our church:

1. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: Preaching, teaching, guiding, giving, leading, cleaning, caring, feeding, fixing, listening, being cheerful!
2. We are not perfect. When I was teaching, I listened to a particularly heated conversation among students and faculty at Queen’s about how terrible presbytery was. The faculty were as scathing as the students who were feeling judged by the candidacy process. “Do you think the church is a human institution?” I asked them?

“Yes,” they responded.

“Then why do you expect it to be perfect?”

The human institution that is the church will have differences. The United Church will have diversity in theology and culture even within one congregation. But it will also have weakness. One member might ask you to move because they sit there at 9.02 or 10.30. Another may complain about the minister. A third may forget a meeting. Because we are human.

Ministers often know the weaknesses of congregants intimately. I once had to bury half of Mrs. Jones on Monday and the other half of her on Tuesday.

My Epiphany in exercise class this week?

- That Jesus gave us this image of the church as the body of Christ. Parts of us sometimes strong, sometimes weak, with differing gifts.
- And Erin? She’s kind of like God -- or if not God, she’s like us at our best -- when we are using our gifts to strengthen one another to live as Christ like as we can in the world.

The other epiphany I had this week came when Fred Gotzmann and Mike Giguere and I met with the culture planners for the city of Mississauga at our Port Credit Campus as they learn what the ministry of our building is offering to the community.

Afterwards, the three of us talked, and listening to these two men exploring and sharing ways to care for the homeless, the neediest in our city, I suddenly felt that I was in the presence of greatness: their passion, commitment -- their assumption that this is what we are to be about. This is a sign of a church that is spiritually fit.

The challenge I threw out to those complaining teachers and students was this:
“Tend your church.”

Don't expect it to be perfect. Look after it, gather up the ravelling edges.

And that's what we do and what we are called to do. To exercise our spiritual muscles in caring for one another and the world. The church will be better for your tending. And the world will be too.

If you, like me, need to join a class to become more physically fit, then joining a church is a sure way to become more spiritually fit.