

June 6, 2010 – Pentecost 2C

Galatians 1:11-24

### **IN WHOM DO WE TRUST?**

As our society has become more and more involved with hi-tech activities through the internet, by way of our blackberries, I-pods, and other hi tech gadgets, we have also become more and more suspicious. We are no longer sure just whom we can trust anymore. People are taken in every day by emails from around the world, offering to share virtually limitless amounts of money if only we would just send them \$5,000 to cover the cost of administration. And these scams are not confined to any one particular class of people. People from all walks of life are affected. It seems that one of the most important things we can do as people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to develop a sense of trustworthy sources of information.

A good friend of mine, who shall remain nameless, once said to me when we were talking about the Bible, "Harry, the Bible has no credibility for you or for me except what we give it." If I believe that the Bible is just a book of stories that have no basis in fact, that's what the Bible means for me. If you believe that every single word in the Bible is literally true, that's what the Bible means for you. Everyone has a different opinion and the credibility of the Bible (for me) depends on the credibility that I give to it.

Here at Bethany, as everyone knows, you are searching for a new spiritual leader. A person to come here and be your permanent minister for the next number of years. So, let's do some acting. Let's assume that I am the person that you have selected to be your minister, and you have asked me to come here today and tell you about myself. And after I've told you, you have to decide if you are going to trust me to be your new minister. I stand here in the pulpit and I say something like this: *"I have no formal education because I have never gone to a formal school in my life. I have never read a single word in the Bible. As a matter of fact, I don't know how to read at all. You won't find anyone else in the whole world who will tell you what it means to be a follower of Jesus like I will tell you. But I can't give you any proof of anything that I will say because it has never been written down anywhere – it is simply information that has been handed down by word of mouth from one person to the next. I have no references to offer you. As a matter of fact, before I went into this ministry I used to*

*go around persecuting any Christian that I could find. I hope that you will trust me enough to offer me this position in your church."* What would your response be to this applicant?

Well, eighty-five years ago the founders of the United Church of Canada believed that they had caught a glimpse or a vision of a brand new national church. A church that from sea to sea to sea would be intensely engaged in the mission of building God's peaceable rule on earth. A church that would influence all society for justice, integrity and peace. In 1925 this was considered by many to be a radical notion. The organic building of different Christian traditions – Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist people- banding together to preach the Christian message as they saw it to be. Did they succeed beyond their wildest dreams? No, they did not. No human plan hardly ever does. Was their work formative in the shaping of the Canada that we know today? Beyond any question.

What is it that makes the proclamation of the gospel credible in our time? When asked "which church do you belong to?" the preferred response of the second largest group of respondents for the first time ever on a Canadian census is "None." The social influence of organized religion is at a low ebb in Canadian history. We struggle to say what we believe because tens of thousands of us don't believe anything.

And we come together here to celebrate the 85<sup>th</sup> birthday of this new church. Our challenge is to recognize that new times bring new needs. Not a need for a new gospel, but a need for people of faith to come forward and be willing to promote the timeless messages of reconciliation, of peace and justice for all, of welcome, nurture and comfort as these things apply to the needs of a new era.

Paul would have said that his was not a new gospel. And I would say that we still don't need a new gospel today. But what we do need is believers and congregations who are prepared to try new things. New things which would have been as unacceptable to our grandparents in their day as they were to Paul in his day. The United Church of Canada, as we know it, is in decline. We can no longer pretend that we have a million members as we once did. Now we have to learn to operate on smaller budgets and with fewer people. And this may not be a bad thing once we get it into our heads that we have to adjust and adapt to be a smaller church.

Our theme for this 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary "Remember, Renew, Rejoice!" is an appropriate theme as we move along through time as the people of God. We have many reasons to remember and we will need to work on renewal of our commitment to respond to God's call. But through it all we can rejoice and give thanks to God. As we celebrate the sacrament of our Lord's Supper here today we will use a common loaf known as bannock. This bread was made by the good folk at Wilmot United Church in Fredericton, NB with flour that was blended from mills across Canada. As we eat this bread may we be moved from celebration to witness as we move out into the future together. May God bless us all. Amen.