

LIFE IS TO ENJOY

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All over the city I have heard people celebrate that the long weekend has finally arrived. Then the worry is the weather. Will it be good weather all weekend or will the rain mar the festivities? Plans are being made to make sure they have fun on this weekend. After all, is that not what life is about?

So here we are, Simcoe Day when we are to remember the very skilled and effective Governor of Upper Canada Lord Simcoe. What a tribute to a great man if we actually think about him. When I first travelled to Toronto when I lived in Vancouver, we were always booked into the Lord Simcoe Hotel, a hotel fairly close to the Royal York. This modern high rise mostly glass tower was usually in bankruptcy proceedings as owner after owner tried to make it work. Finally when Sun Life began the business exodus out of Montreal, the place was torn down for the towers of Sun Life highly visible on Toronto's skyline.

So, that hotel was not the best choice to honour Lord Simcoe. Now we have Simcoe Day in Ontario. In Manitoba where I grew up, it was called the Civic holiday, an excuse for a long weekend in mid-summer. Whatever the name, people are determined not to waste it and to find a way to have fun. Are you having fun yet on this weekend?

As I work three days at the Bay of Quinte Conference office of our church, I speak with many ministers who call for information, an interpretation from the Manual or a request as to where to find the right person to answer the question. So I always ask if they have plans for their vacation or has it already been completed. Over and over again, they tell me they are on holidays. What are you doing worrying about this when you should be off having fun or at least a change of pace? Answers vary but most hinge on the fact that many people can not let go and even feel guilty not working. Some worry about what they might be missing. Sad is it not and yet so common in our day where in spite of all the opportunities for rest and relaxation, people continue to find their definition of who they are by their work.

You might remember the story of Jesus visiting the home of two of his dear friends, sisters to Lazareth, named Mary and Martha. Mary sticks close to Jesus not wanting to miss one word spoken or waste one minute of this precious visit. Martha however is the perfect hostess and spends her time getting everything set up for the refreshments. Finally in a fit of annoyance she asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her sister. Clearly Jesus is fond of these two sisters. He quietly chides Martha for missing out on the essence of the visit due to her determination to get everything right. Mary has chosen well he says. In reality he wants Martha to lighten up, an expression a friend so often says to me. By the way I hate this phrase to lighten up but I do know what it means and why it might be said to me.

Jesus was not a deadly serious guy. He loved people and took seriously not only their physical and mental needs but also enjoyed the essence of who they were and what made them tick. He is rarely shown to be in a rush to get from here to there. Rather he took his

time in order to glimpse and experience all that was around him. This interest in everyone sometimes annoyed the disciples who were trying to handle the details of the day.

Today we have two interesting assigned scripture readings. This first episode in the life of Jesus' day begins as it often did. Someone in the crowd calls out for help in some way. Can you not imagine the disciples who tried to keep everything on schedule cringing when that happened? Here we go again. We will never get to where we are going and supper will be late tonight again.

The man shouts out: "Sir, please tell my brother to divide my father's estate with me." Again the disciples looked at one another and rolled their eyes. What a question to ask Jesus. However, Jesus stops and responds by asking who made him a judge in other people affairs and lives? Then Jesus turns this man's question into a teaching moment. Jesus was good at this. Beware my friend; do not always be wishing for what you do not have. Now listen to the next line: "Real life and real living are not related to how rich we are." I think intuitively we know this to be true. However at the same time, we would happily try being rich if we had the chance? Am I right on that – I think so.

Then Jesus tells that wonderful story of the rich man who had a very fertile farm always producing fine crops. His barns were full and overflowing and could not hold all the grain and produce he had. After wrestling with the issue, he brightened up and said. Now I have the solution. I will tear down the smaller buildings and build bigger ones to hold all my grain, my wealth.

What is most significant I believe about this story is what he says next. After I have rebuilt the barns and surveyed my good fortune, then I will sit back and say **now** I have enough stored away for many years. Now take it easy! Wine, women and song for you! In other words, he now plans to actually enjoy the fruits of his labours. He has waited so long for this moment.

How many of us are like that. I plan to travel when I retire, I will go and make that visit to my old friend as soon as I can be free of other things, etc. We put it all off until we have enough financial security to give us the freedom to enjoy. But is it too late?

Jesus story ends with the rich man now ready to have fun as he believes he has enough wealth, but that very night he dies. Now who will get it all and enjoy it?

Jesus then states this truth to the disciples: "every man is a fool who gets rich on earth but not in heaven."

Now Jesus is not against wealth per se; he warns of its insidious capacity to grab us, own us and make us think we never have enough.

Then he points out where the lack of wealth in nature or in the village does not preclude joy, fun and a sense of purpose in life.

What is the use of worrying, he asks? What good does it do? Will it add a single day to your life? Of course not. And if worry can not even do such little things as that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?

Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that each day we miss so many opportunities for joy and thanksgiving, love and friendship, because we are too busy to notice it is there all around us.

Jesus urges people to put as much energy in the important things in life including our faith as we do in storing up worldly goods. Memories, joy and experiences count equally in importance in a balanced, well lived life.

In our Colossians reading, Paul writes that Christian believers come alive with Christ when he rose from the dead. Our eyes and minds should be focused on what God has in store for us and the life to which God calls us. We should not be caught up in the frenzy of worldliness, but be aware of opportunities there are for service to God and others. Then we will experience joy and peace.

For so many people of faith in history, there was a suspicion of fun. As soon as it was fun, it was suspect. For so many of these folk, life was serious and should be taken seriously. We need to protect ourselves and our loved ones from the evil influences on us so as to be pure before God when God comes.

But, Jesus ministered to the world in the world. He did not hide away nor suggest his followers should do so either. "I have come into the world to save sinners." God is at work in the world and does not seek to have us separated from the reality of the life around us.

Jesus believed that we all can be more than we strive to be. So many of the stumbling blocks we perceive out there stopping our progress we have put there ourselves. It is easier to play it safe than to risk failure for trying.

As I look at the world from my vantage point of three score years plus, my perception is that so many of our young people, our middle agers and our soon to be retirees are worried about the future and giving huge pressure on themselves to work long hours in order to achieve. There is little time to belong to clubs, to socialize, to serve on community committees, even to spare the time for church.

We have so many tools today for communication with each other. People send and answer text message at restaurants, theatres, movies, walking on the street, shopping, as well as use the cell phone.

We know the value of face to face encounters as we enter into dialogue with those around us. Today, it is very different as we do so many things alone on our computers, Facebook, twitter, video games, U tubes and cell phones to name a few.

Jesus believed God calls us into community, hence his selection of twelve men to accompany him on his journey. It was in community that Jesus found comfort, caring, openness and peace. When he withdrew to pray before his crucifixion, he prayed alone but wanted his friends to be there with him.

Jesus by his actions illustrated to believers that we were called to be in the world not out of it.

When Jesus left the world he urged his disciples to share what they had experienced together with him for it was in those experiences and encounters that they had a glimpse of God.

May we all enjoy this weekend and the rest of summer.

Thanks be to God. Amen