

**KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday, May 1, 2011 - Mission Awareness Sunday - Anne Krauss**

Yesterday as I was putting together the final preparations for today's service I got an e-mail from Rachel informing me that she was ill. She has not been well for several days and her voice has gone. So she sent her regrets for today, she did not feel able to preach the sermon and she had only prepared part of it. As you can image.... panic set in. What was I going to do?

Now before you feel sorry for me, I did have Rachel's notes and a sermon from the material sent for today's service. I was able to use these resources as well as my own thoughts.

The theme for today's sermon is about Ambassadors. An apt topic considering the dilemma I was in. Who are ambassadors? What does the term mean?

If we look at the Wikipedia definition it is a high ranking diplomat who represents a nation in another country or several people who represents one group to another group. Today when we think of the term ambassadors we think mostly in political terms. As Canadians we have ambassadors to most countries in the world. As an example Canada's ambassador to the United States is Gary Doer. Before he even came to be an ambassador he worked in the civil service in various capacities. He started his working life as a corrections officer, he then became president of the Manitoba Government Employees Union, after that he became a governor of the University of Manitoba, and finally he was premier of Manitoba for 10 years. A very impressive work history before he was even appointed to represent Canada within the US. And reading that you would think to be an ambassador is a job requires lots of training and dedicated service within ones country.

However the term was used long before Canada was a country. Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth shared his own calling to be an ambassador for Christ. Paul represented God to the people of Corinth, encouraging them to be reconciled to God, entreating them to accept the mercy and the grace that God offered through faith in Christ. When we apply this term ambassador within the life of Paul we would call him a missionary. Paul also went thru training and preparation to become an ambassador.

So when we talk about the word ambassador we probably think it does not apply to us. We are just ordinary people; we are not diplomats or missionaries. You might say that we do not have the experience and training. Unfortunately as Christians this term applies to us as well. We are called to serve in similar capacities. As we live in this world and as people of God we are seen as representatives or ambassadors of the Christian faith. Our role is important. We are Christ's hands, we are Christ's voice and we are Christ's feet, we have the Holy Spirit and the example of Christ's life. We are equipped. It is through our words and actions as Christians that other people come to understand the church and the Christian faith. I would like to focus on a few examples where people have gone out in faith representing the Christian message, they are ambassadors. Some of these are people we know. They are ordinary people but they know that their small part within the bigger picture does make a difference.

My first example is Our Place and Rev. Al Tysick. I do know that Rev Al Tysick has left Our Place but he is still working with the homeless. We all know about the work of Our Place among the most marginalized people in Victoria and our Canadian society. Because of their situation, their poverty, and the biases and fears of many people in our society, most of our homeless feel isolated and fearful in trying to change and integrate back into society. Rev. Al and Our Place establish relationships with these people; they provide meals, a place to shower and a place to take the first steps to heal the wounds of isolation and addiction. Rev. Al and Our Place are ambassadors to the homeless representing our church's desire to serve the marginalized and the oppressed.

In the story from John's gospel, we meet one of the marginalized people of Jesus' culture "The Samaritan Women at the Well. The text tells us that because she is a Samaritan, she expects Jesus and all Jewish people to feel superior to her, "Jews do not share things in common with the Samaritans," We can also recognize that she is marginalized within her own culture. She has come to draw water at a time when she would expect to be alone at the well, the hottest part of the day. Most would be indoors resting. With her history of relationships, she would have been subject to ridicule and disdain from most of her neighbours. She was a woman living on the outside fringes of society.

At Our Place many of the residents/ clients are amongst the most marginalized people in our society. Mental health problems, poverty and drug addiction all contribute to the isolation of these people. These people walk the streets of our cities, sit on the benches of our parks, cower and sleep in the doorways of our business districts. Most of us walk past them quickly, avoiding their eyes, perhaps offering a small prayer- hopefully of concern for the person we have seen, but too often of thanksgiving that none of our family or friends has been reduced to such a pitiful existence.

Our Place reminds all of us that we follow the one who reached out to the poor and the marginalized, offering them life giving water of faith. Rev. Al and his staff are ambassadors to the community of marginalized people who live on the streets of our city. They call all of us to join them by offering prayerful, financial and active support so that more people can experience the reconciling power of faith in God through Christ.

The next person I want to highlight is a friend of mine Mike in Nelson a retired principle. Recently he went to Haiti as part of the Rotary Club. He is also very involved in a church in Nelson. The Rotary Club decided to sponsor a teacher in Haiti and he went to observe and see if their money was well spent. He observed overflowing classrooms with children eager to learn but also extreme poverty. This trip challenged Mike to question his life's priorities. There were many opportunities during the trip when he was deeply moved. Why did he go? Is it to bring education and caring into the lives of others? Maybe that was part of it. But it also made him realize that it was as much to do with what he learned about life, humility and basic human connection. The trip was an eye opener. He came home with many questions, one being why was he so blessed when these people had nothing. After much deliberation he came to the conclusion that it was not how blessed he was but how was he using his blessings. He went out as an ambassador not only for the rotary club but also as an ambassador of Christ. His experiences and observations will help to educate, to open our eyes to the injustices within our world. But it also gives us hope. Even in a desperate place like Haiti a difference is being made.

My last example is our minister Laura Kavanagh As we all know Laura has just returned from a mission monitoring trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The trip carried its risks. These are not countries or areas any of us would go to for a holiday. Laura went with representatives of the Canadian food grains to see how our money is put to use in these countries. She went because it was important in her role as a representative of PWS&D to support our work in distributing aid. But it is also to open our eyes to the work and financial aid that needs to be done abroad. Through her eyes we can become aware of the crucial role, education for girls and women have in lifting them out of poverty and the means for providing for their families. They are the workers. Today Laura is in Toronto reporting back on her findings. She is an ambassador for our church both in Victoria and the larger church body. She is representing us as part of the Christian mission in the larger world. She is sharing her faith of service. Her role as that of ambassador is one of action. We do not always need words to show and share the Christian faith. We can be Christ's feet, to stand up for the oppressed.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded that the lives we live in faith, we live for Christ. We must break free of our self centered goals for when we do, we are free for the service to others.

But where does that leave us. How are we ambassadors or are we. Do we have a role to play in being a representative for Christ? What can we do in this daunting task.

If we look again at the verse in Corinthians we see that all Christians are called to service. To be missionaries for Christ, We are challenged into action to represent the Christian faith. And a challenge it is. But we are not alone in the task. The Holy Spirit is there to help us, to spur us on, to give direction. And the task of being an ambassador is very important. We are the hands and feet of Christ. It is how the message of Christian faith is passed on. As ambassadors we carry the light of Christ to all who are oppressed, who hurt, who are downtrodden, who are in despair.

We have looked at three stories of ambassadors from our church and they show us that even though we are separated by distance, by culture, and by economics, we are connected through the body of Christ. As we support each other in being missionaries/ambassadors we learn from the stories and experiences, we too become part of the reconciling work of the church, bring life-giving faith and hope to all who are in need.

There are dozens of other ministries carried out at every level of society- internationally, nationally, regionally and locally- that are supported financially by our church. The stories of that work is available to us all through our church magazine, through our bulletin covers, bulletin inserts, and other resources produced regularly. These stories are records of the many and varied ambassadors who serve the church and the world.

As we listen to the stories, we learn about the work and the witness of these many ambassadors. We can also hear within these stories, the call of the prophets, which is still a call to each one of us, reminding us that our faith requires that we join in the work of bringing justice, hope and love to the world. The Lord says "Whom shall I send?" Our missionaries, church workers, and volunteers have said, "Send me". May we also say, "Send me" as our offerings, our prayers and our prayerful study make us part of these ministries and challenge us to be involved in our own ministry to the world in the name of Jesus.

Amen