

*Good day. I have discovered that my dictation software will work with the recording of the sermon! So, what you have here is the actual sermon as it was preached. I am a “walker and a talker” when I preach. Take away my hands, and I really can’t communicate. Just the way it is in my culture. So, you will notice a difference. Hopefully you are getting a flavor for the experience of worship in this next chapter of Augustine.*

Good morning. I have discovered that I have dictation software that works on my computer. So, if I record what I say today. I don't have to write it down ahead of time! (laughter)

Let's take a moment to pray. Gracious and loving God, as we centre ourselves in your Holy Spirit, may we also centre ourselves in the Word that we share with each other today. May a sense of ourselves as disconnected from all things begin to decrease as our sense of our connectedness to our very selves, to you and to each other begins to increase. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts, all that we think and all that we feel, be in complete harmony with your love for us, your created children. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

When I was in high school, I was sent to a high school in a different part of the West Island part of Montreal where I grew up. I would hesitate to understand what that might look like in Winnipeg. But for those of you who don't know the geography of Montreal, it is of course an island. There's the centre city, there's the East End, and then there's something called the West Island, which is highly, highly divided in its neighborhoods. In the 1980s, if you were put on a bus and sent to a different high school, this was a highly irregular thing. My parents figured that they knew better that it was good for me to go to McDonald High School. (Which, incidentally, had one of the worst drug problems on the West Island. That's a whole other story that no one knew about because it had been swept under the rug.) It had a reputation for being much higher in terms of its academic performance. It was a small high school by West Island standards, about 400 people under the old system. So, we in Quebec, we only go to grade 11 and it started only at grade 8. So, grades 8 to 11, only 400 people that operated like a small village - where if you're different, you stand out.

One of the things that sticks with me from McDonald High School was the fact that it was a well-known fact that if you wanted to be part of the in crowd, you needed to listen to a certain prescribed list of 70s rock bands. Like Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Yes, Genesis, Jimi Hendrix, which we will get back to in a second. And **maybe**, yes, The Beatles.

This was particularly difficult for me to get my head around. Because my mother, having grown up a very sheltered Quebec based Italian Roman

Catholic, didn't even know who The Beatles were. She wanted me to have a curfew on Saturday night of 11:00 in high school. I was raised inside my house on Engelbert Humperdinck and Tom Jones. True story. The thing that sticks with me, though, is that I could never get my head around Jimi Hendrix. And you know, it still bothers me. When I was putting my playlist together on Spotify, I went back and said, "Is now the time that you can listen to this guy?" I still can't listen to Jimi Hendrix. Don't get him. The lesson is: is here I am at 57, needing to look myself in the mirror going, "Are you still different? And are you afraid to tell your friends that you love ABBA?" Which I do. (Laughter)

A little closer to home, God spoke to me about this sermon yesterday as we decided to watch the local news to see what was going on. There we are on City News Winnipeg and they're talking about zipper merges. Do you know what those are? (chuckles)

This is why everybody in the city is so cranky. I gotta tell you, when we came in in April and we were driving around the city, people would ask me, "so what's the traffic like there?" "Well, it's not too bad actually. It's a little bit all over the place and people have this tendency to randomly park in all of these different places. But once you get used to that, it's not too bad."

I get here in June, we get here, and we're starting to understand that, seriously, the personality of the traffic seems to have changed. Maybe it's us. Until we listen to this news report yesterday. Apparently, you all from Winnipeg don't really know what Zipper merges are. In Montreal, it's different. If you're in Montreal, it just means everybody stand, in line, and then smash together. Whoever is left standing, wins!" (laughter). Right. But there's meant to be this very polite merging, letting go, merging, letting go, and all of it.

This kind of reinforced to me is that if you're not really sure what the tradition is about how to mesh together, this is going to lead to a lot of cranky people. Which is what they were talking about. They're all saying, well, maybe people in Winnipeg or just not as nice as we thought we were. As if somehow there's this character flaw. Maybe we need more information. About what? Zipper merges are not new thinking. No, people have been driving in this city for a long time. If you can navigate the potholes, you can certainly do this. I'm from Montreal. I mean, we got something in common here, right? We have the same construction festivals in Montreal that we have here in Winnipeg. You don't even need to put them on billboards. Everybody just knows they're happening. (laughter)

But the very serious lesson that comes out of this is that a zipper merge where people are needed to let one go, then on goes, one goes (talking with my hands). The whole thing depends, not on you understanding where you're

going, but making room to let the other person tell you where they think they're at.

And if you do that, and everybody does it for everybody, there's nobody left out. That is in the scriptures - not the zipper merge, but the where are we all headed together part.

I talked to you a little bit during the Prayer of Confession about Paul, about Peter and about James, and in the preamble that Gareth shared to us about when these Gospels might have been written and why. So again, it's understood, generally speaking, that after the death of Jesus, James stayed in Jerusalem. Peter and his crew evangelized the nation of Israel within whatever bounds those were, and the Apostle Paul to the Gentile world. By the time Mark and Matthew are written, both Paul and Peter are now deceased. They've both been executed by the state. Peter crucified, apparently somewhere in Jerusalem, upside down as a way of compassion, and Paul, because he was a Roman citizen, executed in Rome, likely beheaded because that is the most compassionate thing to do. They had given their lives for this movement.

The middle piece that I'm going to add now is that somewhere in between this event, up in the region known as Galatia, which is somewhere in Turkey today, the Peter people, perhaps Peter himself or the Peter school goes up into Galatia. And he starts to evangelize Galatia, saying that if you're going to be part of this new movement, you've got all the traditions wrong. You have to eat kosher; you have to be circumcised. Paul comes in afterwards and says, "Wait. Wait a second. Now, who told you this? You foolish Galatians?"

And there's talk about "When Peter and I met, and we got this sorted out."

And so evidently, there is still trouble deciding what the right playlist is going to be. Or how to zipper merge by the time Matthew writes. There's still trouble with the playlist or the zipper merge by the time Matthew writes. Because if Doctor Henderson from McGill University is correct, Matthew is not interested in tearing the nation down. Matthew, and his if it wasn't him, the School of Matthew, is interested in building harmony. *The 12 tribes...no more North versus South...can we put tradition for tradition's sake aside for a second, and understand that it's what in someone's heart that counts most above all else?*

There was a day that I was sitting in seminary. We had this massive dictionary at McGill. I went to go have a look, and there was an etymological delineation of the history of the word tradition. It's emblazoned in my memory. Most of us, I think, when we hear this word, **tradition**, we hear "a set of rules that are there because they just are." Apparently, it's number 4 or 5 down the list. I tried again to find it online. I couldn't. But my memory is good because

the number one root of the word tradition is “to transfer” or “to hand over”, as in wisdom. Understand that every single rule that we ever have when we develop it is likely designed to prevent something bad from happening. Kosher law was developed in the desert. It is developed because somehow those people knew that disease was passed through the blood. That's it. By the end of it, people are not touching people who are who are bleeding because that's considered unsanitary and unholy, the untouchables of the day. How far away from the original intent we get when we think this.

So, what is your preferred way of transferring wisdom? I'm looking at the banner in the back: Canada's First Affirming Congregation in 1995”. I mean, then in 1994, there was no tradition of having affirming congregations in the country, right? Augustine chooses the first time to do it. First one to fly the rainbow flag. It seems like nothing today although I'm sure in some peoples hearts it's still happening.

I wonder. What was going on when somebody said we are going to break with tradition? “We're going to live out the decisions of 88, not just talk about them. Live them.”

I discovered, actually, that my next-door neighbour, his daughter, who lives in Alberta right now, was mentored by people here when she came out. That's the word she used, “mentored.” What is your tradition that passes on wisdom in 2023? And more important. If we are here in this room, how does having Jesus in your life inform for that tradition?

Certainly, for Mark, based on the evangelism of Paul, it meant joining something. And for Matthew? It meant healing something. What about you? What about us?

And if you were to say, “I know that Jesus is involved in my life, and I know I can move now because here, and I know that he is impacting my life, it is making it difference in knowing why I do the things that I do so that maybe I won't feel so uncomfortable changing because I'm evolving,” what would the markers be? What would they be? How would you know? Would it be because we sang the traditional hymns? Would it be cause we didn't? Would it be because we are still playing with the sound system that everybody knows that we had a 20-year tradition of worrying about this kind of thing? What would it be?

There are a number of lists that are out there. And most of the lists that I have ever read have to do with my understanding of my self-awareness. Modern psychotherapy has devolved into this: “Go into your inner self. Be close to yourself. Look yourself in the mirror. Tell yourself something like *‘You are enough just the way you are.’*” Taken to the extreme, it becomes “I don't even have to care what you think. Cause I have an opinion.”

Zipper merge, cranky city, there you go. As long as I get into line worrying about where I'm going to go, without worrying about where my neighbors headed, yeah, you're going to be cranky, cranky, cranky. Next thing you know, we'll be on Facebook. And people are gonna get cranky about zipper merges.

Here are five markers that will get you to pay attention to where your neighbor is headed. 5 preconditions for flourishing, regardless of why we do what we do.

When you are sitting with someone, do they know that they are not alone? Do they know in their heart?

Do they know that they belong? Understanding that you can be in a room full of people and still think you don't belong unless you conform.

Do they know that they are loved? We know that in the most dysfunctional of situations, some people get kept around just so that we can remind them about how unlovable they are. Sad as that is, we know that that happens.

Are they useful in a way that builds harmony?

And do they know that they are free? Not free in the sense of just to do whatever they want. Free in the sense that no one owns them. That too is very biblical. In Christ there is no East or West, no Jew or Gentile, no slave nor free.

All people need to know that they are not alone, that they belong, that they are loved, that they are useful, and that they are free. Because to judge someone else is truly a judgment of the self. The marks of faith are dependent on our ability to truly make room for someone else to journey with us. And then someone else, and then someone else, and then someone else. And then we will find that our traditions will just continue to evolve. And we won't need to repeat the mistakes of the past. And by some miracle, we will say that God has healed whatever divisions that lie in our hearts, lie in our pews, lie in our city. For God's sake, let's find a way to truly believe that.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

**Matthew 15 Notes**

Today's passage is taken from the book of Matthew, but first appears in the book of Mark. This is significant because it places the use of the passage in a particular historical context. Mark was written somewhere around 70 CE, and the book of Matthew approximately 15 years later.

Mark was likely written in Rome and Matthew, likely written within the boundaries of the nation of Israel. Thus, on a social level, these two Gospels may have been written with different focuses in mind – even though they make use of the same stories. Mark was possibly written to initiate people into the Christian way of thinking. Matthew may have been written to further reform the established leadership style of the day - remembering of course that in the life of Jesus there was no such thing as being “Christian”.

The passage we are about to hear is about religious dietary customs - what we would call kosher today. The bottom line for us to understand is that Matthew is essentially making an argument for expanding the vision of “*who gets to be included*” in the emerging church. It is a quintessential social justice argument. This is not so much an argument of Christianity versus Judaism, as much as it is an argument of unifying people through their diversity.

What is perhaps historically most striking, is that if it is true that Matthew was written essentially for a Jewish audience led by the apostle Peter and Mark was written essentially for a gentile audience led by the apostle Paul, then the passage that we are reading today is about the deep quest for reconciliation within the nation of Israel which had been divided against itself literally for hundreds of years.

As we listen to this passage today, we are being invited to consider what traditions within our own families, within our own church, and within our local context continue to polarize us when in fact they should be platforms for us to cultivate unity through our diversity.

Here now is today's passage, taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 15, verses 10 to 14.

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.”

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**