

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, January 27, 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**Faith, Starbucks and Twitter!**

Have you heard the latest humorous version of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm as it might apply to coffee?

Caffeine is my shepherd; I shall not doze.  
It maketh me to wake in green pastures:  
It leadeth me beyond the sleeping masses.  
It restoreth my buzz:  
It leadeth me in the paths of consciousness for its name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of addiction,  
I will fear no Equal™:  
For thou art with me; thy cream and thy sugar they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a carafe before me in the presence of The Starbucks:  
Thou anointest my day with pep; my mug runneth over.  
Surely richness and taste shall follow me all the days of my life:  
And I will dwell in the House of Mochas forever.

Social networking is changing the world right in front of our eyes. Look what Donald Trump has done with Twitter. No President before and perhaps after him will use Twitter as a no filter speech about the world.

Look what Facebook has done in the case of Alexander Dorf.

“MOMMY, Mommy, she found me, she found me.” Sixteen-year-old Alexander Dorf stood at the top of the stairs in his Tenafly apartment, N.J., a few years ago, grinning broadly at his mother, Jami. He had just gotten a message on his Facebook wall that he'd been waiting for all his life.

From a Florida woman named Terri Barber, it read: “Hi, I was just wondering if your parents’ names are Jamie & Jeff?” Alexander recognized the name; he had searched the Internet for it himself with no luck. It belonged to the woman who had given birth to him.

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A four-hour drive south of Tunis, you reach the birthplace of Mohammed Bouazizi - a poor vegetable seller whose decision to burn himself to death inspired a nation. On 17 December 2010 Mr. Bouazizi's vegetable cart was confiscated by the town council. They said he didn't have permission to trade. When he tried to get the cart back, a woman from the council slapped him in the face.

It was the final act that sent the vegetable seller over the edge.

He went to the governor's office and set himself alight. He later died in hospital.

The spot where he doused himself with gasoline is still marked with red paint. The local people call it the "place of martyrdom".

Moments after Mr Bouazizi's death was posted on Twitter and Facebook, the first protests began. Tunisians gathered around his abandoned vegetable cart and scaled the Governor's gates. The unrest then spread across the country and one month later it unseated the President.

In a world of Facebook, Twitter, climate change, mortgage meltdown economics, terrorism and a staggering world economy, do the ancient faiths have any relevance or meaning? Or are they out of date- like a model T Ford with a boiling radiator and a flat tire stuck on the shoulder when the rest of the traffic is moving along just fine in their Chevy volts and Hybrids, calling one another on their cell phones and illegally messaging while driving?

Starbucks was hit hard by the recession. In 2006 its stock market price fell by 42%. The great Icon Brand was in trouble and the founder Schwartz knew it. He wrote a confidential memo about 'the commoditization of the Starbucks experience'. It was immediately leaked to the internet. He was consternated at the lack of loyalty within the company. Who would leak such a thing? And then Howard Schultz learned a major lesson of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A wise woman came in to visit Howard. She had headed communications for Starbucks for some time but she had recently left to found her own consulting firm. He bled all over her about the leaked memo and then she said these realistic and prophetic words: "**Howard, she said, in her matter of fact tone, "nothing is confidential. This is the new reality."**" What was she talking about? A new reality that goes around everything; from adoptive parents, confidential business memos, government secrets and despotic powers. It's the world of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Wikileaks. Pandora's Box has been opened never to be closed again.

Today in the world, conversations about confidentiality are becoming much rarer because of the new reality.

The new reality is teaching us about transparency as the way forward. What is the new law? **Don't communicate anything that you don't want everybody to know.**

Fortunately, Howard Schultz is a fast learner and so he went to the press stating that every word in the memo was genuine, that he did not believe in entitlement and that success had to be earned every day. He turned what could have been a disaster into a home run through **transparency**. He moved into the age of Twitter and Facebook.

Could Starbucks be saved and returned to market dominance? How could that be achieved? Schultz knew that he had to return to **core values**. What business was Starbucks in? Was it

breakfast sandwiches or to make a coffee without an equal? Breakfast sandwiches with the smell of burnt cheese overpowered the aroma of coffee and Schultz knew the wisdom of Henry Ward Beecher “No coffee can be good in the mouth that does not first send a sweet offering of odor to the nostrils.” The aroma of Starbucks locations had become adulterated. They didn’t even smell like coffee anymore. They had opened too many stores too fast losing quality along the way.

Fortunately, Schultz loved coffee and returned to it to capitalize **on the human experience with coffee.**

Starbucks was all about people making **connections in a third location-** away from home and the office **with delicious golden individually brewed coffees.** It was about being ethical with one’s employees providing health care, rewarding initiative and being proud of the product served. It was about fair-trade coffee growing, and taste- as good as it could be with expertise, training and top equipment. For there was a secret that Howard Schultz knew- **coffee would sell itself if the quality was there and the experience of human connection was combined with it.**

As Honore de Balzac taught about the mystery of the effect coffee has on the person who drinks it: Coffee falls into the stomach ... ideas begin to move, things remembered arrive at full gallop ... the shafts of wit start up like sharp-shooters, similes arise, the paper is covered with ink ... Or as Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote: The morning cup of coffee has an exhilaration about it which the cheering influence of the afternoon or evening cup of tea cannot be expected to reproduce.

**Shultz intuitively and in practice knew all this.** He needed to return the company to **its original values** and hope that it would survive in these difficult economic times. He did in fact succeed and his story is fascinating.

It is also relevant to the question as to whether the Presbyterian Church in Canada and our own beloved New St. James can survive the modern world?

FDR once said: “Wise and prudent men - intelligent conservatives - have long known that in a changing world, worthy institutions can be conserved only by adjusting them to the changing time.”

What can we learn from Starbucks and Twitter and Facebook about the future relevance of even the Faith itself?

Here is the gospel according to Schultz that would apply to Christian Churches.

- **Churches that will survive need to make sense of the tension of the times, offering hope and even mending a culture in turmoil.** Over the centuries the great faiths and church pulpits have always tried to make sense of the times and offer hope or even the mending of culture. Faith played a huge role in the liberation of the African American. It is playing today a major role in the liberty of the gay community

worldwide. It is the conscience of government over climate change. It saved South Africa from a bloodbath.

- **Churches that will survive need to assert a cultural authority helping people frame the times they live in.** The great faiths have always had sought **moral authority**. When and if they lose that they lose their ability to frame the times.
- **Churches that will survive don't confuse history with heritage and always protect and project their values.** The values of forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, hope, love of God and neighbor must be protected, and projected, if the great faiths are to survive. Historical presence is no longer enough.
- **Churches that will survive disrupt themselves before others disrupt them.** It is no scandal when a faith tradition reforms itself. Protestant Christianity has reformed itself as has Catholicism several times. We also find reform in Judaism and there are many calls for Islam to reform itself in order to remain relevant and separate itself from its radical violent fringe. What reforms do we need to make in The Presbyterian church?
- **Churches that endure must be willing to sacrifice near term popularity for longer term relevance.** Churches are in it for the long haul. Gimmicks, fads and quick fixes don't pan out in the long haul, unless, and this is important, **they increase the connection between humans and God.** So, we need to ask ourselves here at New St. James: Are we increasing human connection here? Are we really there for people when they are hurting? Are we friends in the hour of need? I think that NSJ does this rather well.

What can we learn from Twitter and Facebook about the future relevance of the Presbyterian Church in Canada? What has changed?

If Starbucks was forced to get back to the basics of coffee, what are the core religious values to which Presbyterians need to return for relevance and meaning and mission??

We need to ask ourselves some very basic questions again:

- Who is God? Can God be known? Does God care for humans? Does God get involved personally in our lives or are we alone in the cosmos?
- Is there life after this life? What is the evidence for that? Does it matter if we live ethical loving lives? Or do we eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die?
- Do we care for the earth and get values that sustain rather than destroy?
- Is marriage still relevant? Does it also apply equally to the GLBT community? What does power to the people say? What is the most loving thing to do?
- Is world peace possible? Is it possible to get to peace without the world religions being at peace with each other? How do we build bridges between them?

Our religion is not coffee. It is prayer, healing, the wisdom of forgiveness, teaching that God is one, humanity is one and that the future lies in cooperation, understanding creative response to crisis and creating once and for all the rule of kindness and love as bottom line, especially to the enemy, for it was Christ's mission to love us all.

If we are faithful then the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm will stand in their original meaning with the addition from Jesus about enemies:

*God is our shepherd We lack nothing. In meadows of green grass, he lets us lie. To the waters of repose God leads us and there revives our souls. God guides us by the paths of virtue for the sake of God's name. Though we pass through a gloomy vale we fear no harm. Beside us are God's rod and staff to hearten us. God prepares for us a table under the eyes of our enemies who have become our friends. God anoints our heads with oil. Our cup brims over, Surely, Goodness and mercy pursue us every day of our lives and we shall dwell in the house of God Forever!*

Gilbert Romero ran away from home at the age of eleven. He had 13 brothers and sisters, all of whom ran away from an abusive father, all by the age of 13. After his mother had been murdered, he was desperate for attention and so he got into a gang who became his family for 17 years of drugs guns and jailings. Nevertheless, he felt that he belonged.

He tried to kill his father at the age of 12. He was sent to the juvenile Justice system. Incarcerated, he became an addict.

He married a girl he had gotten pregnant but couldn't keep the relationship together.

One day he decided to leave the neighborhood and the gang. He was tired of it all. He decided to become a member of the middle class by pushing drugs in a bigger arena. He was soon serving five years for trafficking drugs across the border.

**But then one day some church people encountered him.**

They took him in and loved him. They let him call them Grandma and Grampa. He smoked a joint and then relaxed and happy, went to church. He had no idea where this was heading.

The older ladies of the church found out that he had musical talents. One of them came and asked him to lead the music for the morning worship service. He didn't want to but he would do anything for those older women and so he consented. The next Sunday they asked again, and again, and so he did it. He had to give up his Sunday joint because leading a worship service when you are high is just plain hard. He still carried a gun but he was beginning to feel safer.

One day walking the beach he saw his bitterest enemy, someone who had pistol whipped him and hung him from a balcony and left him for dead.

Both men were fathers now, with a child in each stroller. Gilbert had his head down and wasn't looking where he was going and bumped into his enemy. Their eyes met and both instinctively reached for their guns. In a second the two infants in the stroller would be fatherless.

There was no movement, no sound. Even the babies went quiet as if waiting for a signal. And then a peace came over Gilbert and he dropped his hand from his weapon and extended it to the man he had hated. He reached out his hand to Gilbert's and they shook. No words were spoken and Gilbert had never seen him again.

By this time Gilbert had started a successful landscaping business and he was still going to church with Grandma and Grandpa. However, he stopped toting a gun.

One day he heard a voice talking to him which he believed was God. And the voice said “I **called you Gilbert.**” So, Gilbert went to his Granma and Grandpa and said “I think I am supposed to be your pastor.” They smiled at him and said; “What took you so long?”

Now he has been a pastor for 25 years plus. He established the Bittersweet ministries for drug addiction and alcohol rehabilitation. Thousands have now gone through the program successfully.

Gilbert had been loved into a new life - a life of peace instead of paranoia, happiness instead of heroin, a life of preaching love instead of packin death.\*

Do the ancient faiths have any relevance or meaning? Or are they out of date- like a model T Ford with a boiling radiator and a flat tire stuck on the shoulder when the rest of the traffic is moving along just fine in their Chevy volts and Hybrids, calling one another on their cell phones and illegally messaging while driving?  
Ask Gilbert Romero!

\*Gilbert Romero as told to Barbara Smythe