

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

Sunday, August 19, 2018

Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Living true to your own spirit!

Are you feeling dead or shriveled up inside today?

Do you want some real life?

Text:

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to **your** mortal bodies also, through his spirit that dwells in you!” Romans 8:11

Every fisherman knows that he she needs to be true to their own spirit, because as the saying goes: “There is a very fine line between fishing and just standing on the shore like an idiot.”

I was listening to the radio, to a woman who had made a very difficult decision to have an abortion in Texas. In Texas there is a new law signed by the Governor which requires that before an abortion is performed a sonogram is to be given for moral reasons, in the hope that the mother will be dissuaded from having the abortion and either give the child up for adoption or leave it somewhere safe under the Moses law or keep the child. Support services are to be provided for the mother who follows this course of action.

Before the abortion is performed the mother must listen to the fetal heartbeat and have a full description of the sonogram detailing everything about the fetus that the Doctor sees and understands. He then must read from a script which includes some unproved information about the consequences to future pregnancies and psychological effects on the mother. The Doctor must do this, or they will have their license to practice revoked. Then the Doctor and mother have to wait for 24 hours before the abortion is performed in order to give the mother time to think.

The woman in question had already had a sonogram which detailed that her child suffered severe neurological damage and in her heartfelt decision to terminate the pregnancy, she decided that her little child would have only a life of incredible suffering ahead, if he even managed to come to term, which the doctor said was questionable. She was heartbroken, but felt, along with her husband, that this was the best thing to do, all things considered. She had a second sonogram to confirm the results of the first.

Her doctor did not know that in fact this woman was not subject to the law because of the brain damage to the fetus where an exception could be made.

So, 24 hours before the abortion was to take place the doctor, the woman and her husband and a nurse met to obey the law as they understood it.

The doctor said he hated to have to do this but that if he didn't he would lose his license. He then gave the woman a description of the child including its defects in graphic detail. She had to listen to the heartbeat which almost alone of the organs appeared to be healthy.

The doctor and nurse, the woman and her husband, none of them agreed with the procedure, in fact it made them angry and the mother felt fragile to begin with. So, the nurse under those difficult circumstances, turned up the radio so as to drown out the doctor's required reading.

In listening to this I felt that the nurse, was being true to her own spirit and the spirits of everyone there.

Alan Cohen the author and spiritual teacher says that "If you know that something is right for you, then you must act on it. If you are walking true to your spirit, you do not need to defend, explain, or justify your actions to anyone. Those who do not wish to believe you will not listen to your explanations, and those who believe in you do not need any."

All the great religious Institutions, including our own, believe that God is close to us at all times, that we have an inner witness to God. But the problems come when the institutions, for whatever reasons, go off the rails.

One institution I worked for told me that I had to fire someone who at that moment was in intensive care in a hospital. I was supposed to go there, pray for her and then tell her gently that she was terminated so that the institution could get on with hiring for the position, instead of waiting until she was discharged from hospital. I followed my own spirit and did nothing of the kind and was written up for it.

Perhaps you have had a similar experience at work, or in a religious institution, or a nonprofit, or in working for the Province. It does happen all the time and that is why we have so much litigation in our society.

A lot of us react by putting our heads down and muttering or turning up the radio, as the best thing we can do in a bad situation.

But what does that inner voice counsel inside of us?

Swami Vivekananda says: "You have to grow from the inside out..."

Jesus was someone who lived true to His own spirit. He went against many of the mores of his day. He treated women as equals. Not done! He was friends with tax collectors, donkey drivers, publicans and outcasts like lepers. Not done by so called polite society. He did not teach the letter of the law but the spirit of the law. Always! He was kind to the marginalized, he healed the sick on the Sabbath.

Here is a snapshot of his free Spirit: "One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

What a freeing Spirit he had!

Ram Dass, who was born a Jew, left that religion after his Bar mitzvah, which was for him in his words “a hollowed out” experience. He later became interested in Hinduism. He writes: “The spiritual journey is individual, highly personal. It can’t be organized or regulated.... Listen to your own truth.”

Christopher Foster at the age of 80 is a spiritual teacher and blogger. In an interview he was asked: “What advice would you give to young people today, especially considering the drug and alcohol abuse issues that so many face?” He said: “I think the most important thing of all is to keep your trust in life. I know firsthand how difficult that can be at times, but I also know that if we can hang in there and keep listening to the nudges of our own heart, a new road will open before us and we will find an answer to our situation. We will find the wisdom we need to create a new life.”

In my own experience I have discovered that when I am true to my own spirit that I have been blessed with people who really love me. They see me clearly and tell me the truth and that is very helpful indeed. These folks are my true friends for they value my strengths more than my drama and they want nothing more than that I be happy. They see me through the eyes of love and they want me to be true to my own spirit. It is this sort of friend that I pray I may be to others.

The courage to live true to one’s own spirit is a spiritual path. On the spiritual path negative emotions have no use. Why? Because God is within us and God is positive always, comforting always, loving always, and when we are true to our own spirits we are true to the One who made them.

Christopher Foster says: “Love your own unconquerable spirit. Open you heart to it anew in this very moment if you so wish. It is beautiful. It is the very source of happiness and peace- and it never lets us down.”

Cynthia Mercati wanted to be a writer, against her Italian father’s wishes. He had been raised in a Chicago tenement and he wanted his daughter desperately to get a secure job. “People like us aren’t writers” he would shout at her in argument after argument.

Being a writer is no easy work. It is hard to get published and there are many rejections and after each rejection Father would have a point to make. But Cynthia remained true to her own spirit.

Her father kept his background buried in his past. He would never talk about the poverty in which he was raised but it absolutely shaped his experiences and heightened his fear for Cynthia.

In the last week of his life he asked her to go into the garage and get out a box which was full of the pictures of the life he had tried so hard to forget. He was there as a small boy with his folks. He talked to her about the coal he had carried up 4 flights of stairs, of the one bathroom they had shared with 5 other families. Life was about, not having enough food or clothes. It was about, not being able to pay for doctor visits.

In that last week of his life he tried hard to explain why he had tried to protect her from poverty and want. He still wanted to change her mind about being a writer because he wanted her to have something to fall back on.

But Cynthia laughed and said: “Father, it was your broad shoulders that I fell back on.” She told him that the roots that he had given her ran deep. Near the end he apologized for his attempts to try to clip her wings, but she insisted that he was the one who had given her the chance to fly.

On the last afternoon of his life as her mother and Cynthia were holding his hands, he beckoned the two hospice volunteers close. **“You know my daughter, he whispered with great effort. Well I just want you to know- she’s a writer!”**

Cynthia said: “It was the proudest moment of my life!”

May I encourage you to take the plunge and live true to your own spirit today? Your true spirit wants to grow and come closer to being happy, even if that means breaking out of the shells of other people’s expectations for you.

Live true to your own spirit and be free! Why? Because as St. Paul says, the miracle is that when we do so, we align ourselves with the Spirit of the God who made us like no one else. **THAT SPIRIT** gives life to our mortal bodies by living with us!

What a promise!