

Sermon 21st February 2021

“Our Statements of Faith - Part 1 The 20 Articles of the Basis of Union” Mark 1: 9 - 15

Gracious God, be with us today
in this place, in the
Scriptures and in our
words.

May the words of my mouth and
the meditations of our
hearts praise your Holy
name. Amen.

This week’s message is going to
be a bit different from the
ones we are used to.

Today I am taking you back in
time to retrace a bit of the
history of our church ...
not just our church as the United
Church in the Haliburton
Highlands, but our church
as the larger United Church
of Canada.

I want to share a bit about how
the United Church came
into being, and why, and
how it was decided what it
was that we believe as a
United Church.

The United Church of Canada
forms the largest protestant
denomination in Canada
with almost 2.5 M people
and 2,700 congregations.

The history of our church is
intertwined with the history
of our nation.

The United Church of Canada
was born in June 10, 1925.

On that day several different
denominations joined to
form one united national
church serving Canada
from coast to coast.

One of the original
denominations was the
Methodist church.

* The Methodists in Canada can
be traced back to Laurence
Coughlan who arrived in
Newfoundland from Ireland
in 1765 to establish the
Methodist church in
Canada.

* Another of the original uniting
churches was the
Congregational Union
Church which had been
formed in 1759 when
British settlers came to
pioneer in Nova Scotia...
drawn to this new land by
the promise of free land
grants.

This denomination was found
only in eastern Canada.

** 70% of the Presbyterian churches in Canada also joined to form the United Church of Canada- Presbyterianism in Canada had arisen from 2 streams of Presbyterianism.

The French Huguenot stream and the larger more dominant Scottish stream.

And there was also a group of churches known as the Council of Union Churches which were a group of churches found only in western Canada.

* The vision was one of forming a national church which was united in vision and purpose; a church that could serve this country from one coast to the other.

The vast geographical expanse of our nation made that a challenge and small denominations found it difficult to build and supply ministry in remote and isolated communities, but as a united church the vision was that a strong and unified church could serve even the most remote areas of this nation.

The creation of the United

Church of Canada represents the first union in the world of cross denominational churches joining together.

There have been, all throughout history, lots of examples of churches breaking apart and dividing as a result of differences of opinion and practice, but the UCC is the first example of a church formed from different churches that agreed to come together.

At the time, there was international attention for this great achievement.

It was not easy to take several different denominations each with their own beloved ideas,

- ways of doing things,
- and beliefs and put them together to form one church.

There were lots of things that not everyone agreed about, but the vision of a national and unified church serving one great and growing nation from coast to coast was larger than the differences that could have divided them.

Their belief in the foundation of Jesus as Lord was held in common by all the uniting denominations.

Still, with all that being said, there was a lot of work that had to go on behind the scenes before the United Church of Canada officially came into being in 1925.

Some of the busiest years of preparation for church Union were the years 1904 to 1908 as representatives from each denomination sat down and tried to put together a document that set out clearly what it was the new United Church of Canada believed.

* Although church union did not happen for many more years- there was a world war that took precedence for several years... the doctrine that was articulated between 1904-1908 was the doctrine of the United Church at time of union in 1925.

That process of coming up with a statement of what this new church was to believe required a great deal of give

and take.

Not everything that everyone believed could be taken with them into the new church.

* There was compromise, there was discussion ...and there was an understanding that maybe in this new church, not everyone would think or believe exactly the same thing as everyone else, and that that was ok...

And in these years the idea was born that in the United Church of Canada, maybe we could be a church that could agree to disagree in some areas.

- in these discussions was born the idea that you can be a United Church without being uniform, and to this day this is one of the characteristics of our church that I most value.

* What did emerge from those years of discussion was a document called the Basis of Union which drew on the creeds and doctrines of faith of the uniting denominations.

The Basis of Union stated the basics of the Christian faith

for the new United Church of Canada.

The Basis of Union was not seen as the final word for what the United Church of Canada was to forever believe, but a statement of where the church was at that point in time.

* Thomas Kilpatrick wrote. ‘It will be the duty of those who come after us to find a more fitting expression for the inexhaustible truth of the Gospel for their time and context.’

The Basis of Union sets out in 20 different articles that our church believes.

These 20 articles still form the official doctrine of the United Church of Canada.

When I was ordained I had to swear that I was in essential agreement with these 20 articles.

Just to give you a sense of what these article are all about...

* Article #1...We believe in the one only living and true God, a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being and perfections; the Lord

Almighty, who is love, most just in all His ways, most glorious in holiness, unsearchable in wisdom, plenteous in mercy, full of compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. We worship Him in the unity of the Godhead and the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons of the same substance, equal in power and glory.

* Article XX. Of Christian Service and the Final Triumph.

We believe that it is our duty, as disciples and servants of Christ, to further the extension of His Kingdom, to do good unto all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's Day, to preserve the inviolability of marriage and the sanctity of the family, to uphold the just authority of the State, and so to live in all honesty, purity, and charity, that our lives shall testify of Christ. We joyfully receive the word of Christ, bidding His

people go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, declaring unto them that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that He will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We confidently believe that by His power and grace all His enemies shall finally be overcome, and the kingdoms of this world be made the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

I know I left out numbers 2-19 and if you fear you will not sleep tonight without knowing what they are, I posted a copy of the 2019 Manual on our webpage or you can find them on the UCC website.

...But some people, if you can imagine, didn't find those 20 articles riveting and exciting.

In fact, just 11 years after church union, a group of people suggested that these articles of faith set forth in the Basis of Union were neither

concise or intelligible to the average person and they asked for a new statement of faith.

Many things happened in our world in the years between 1908 when the Basis of Union was completed, and 1936 when there was a call for a new statement of faith

- **.. two world wars and a depression had brought great cultural, social, political and economic change and a new statement of what this new and United Church of Canada understood in the midst of all this change was needed.
- *And in 1940 the new statement of faith was approved by the General Council of the United Church of Canada.

Then several years latter there was once again a call for the church to produce a creed that expressed the beliefs of our church in a more understandable and relevant manner than the ancient Nicene and apostolic creeds of the church.

*So a new United Church creed

was written and many of
you here probably
remember that time.

* And then just a few years ago a
new statement of faith was
again put forth called the
'Song of Faith'

Each of these statements
attempted to articulate in a
specific time and context
the faith of the people of
the United Church of
Canada.

It has maybe been a few years
since a few of us attended
our confirmation classes
and maybe it is a good
thing to review what it is
we hold to be the truth of
our faith ,

*- what we hold to be true and
sacred as a part of the
United Church of Canada.

What do we believe as a church?
What do you hold to be sacred
and holy- what keeps you a
part of Christ's church?
Think about it and may God
journey with us as we
ponder and learn together.
Thanks be to God. Amen.