Coram Deo

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura

Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi

Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Capt Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

**Stouffville United 170th Anniversary**

**“Honouring the Past, Embracing the Future”**

***November 19, 2023***

Isaiah 61:1-8

    Though we are celebrating 170 years as a church, the Story of Stouffville United really could start either 218 years ago, 198 years ago or 182 years ago. Let me explain.

Our community of faith was added to the *The Yonge Street circuit* which stretch 50 miles by 25 miles. Egerton Ryerson wrote that the Yonge circuit started in 1805 with then Circuit Rider Nathan Bangs and in 1825 that the Yonge circuit embraced York, Vaughan, King, West Gwillimbury, Whitchurch (Stouffville), Markham, Pickering, and Scarborough, and though the roads were primitive and rough the Methodist ministers -The pioneer ministers in 1824-25 were William H. Williams and James Atwood and, in 1824, James Richardson was appointed along with Mr. Hyland to serve the new settlement and Yonge Street circuit along with Egerton Ryerson. A report about the Yonge Street circuit in 1833 indicates that revival meetings were held in Tyler’s Meeting House, Petch’s barn in Whitchurch,

And Rev Edward Sallows having been ordained that very year in 1841 came to hold services in the old school house in Stouffville.

Now, a circuit rider or saddleback was a preacher who had a list of communities of faith that were not yet churches but would gather in homes in small groups for prayer, scripture and where the circuit rider would arrive and often stay for a weekend or more once every 4 months, to officiate weddings, funerals, baptisms and confirm people in the faith, preach the gospel, and admonish the backslidden. It was also at this time those who were deem faithful after examination, would be given a communion ticket that would allow them entrance to take Communion during the circuit riders visit.

 So, if you were ever wondering why we as a congregation only celebrate communion 4 times a year and not every Sunday like the Catholics, this is why.

The reason we are celebrating 170 years as a Church and not as we could 218, 198 or 182 years of ministry is that the fact was the Methodist Missionary Society did not consider a community of faith to be officially a church and thereby be allowed to have a minister of their own until they were not only self-supporting but able to commit to giving support to the local Methodist Missionary Society to support mission work in the region and internationally. A true Methodist Church was a church that was willing to think of others. And so it was, that in 1853 the Methodist church in Stouffville was born when we were able to support not only ourselves, and the work of the regional circuit riding saddleback preacher but the mission of the Methodist Church beyond.

Now, having heard that the first minister of Stouffville Methodist Church was Cornielius Flummerfeldt, it didn’t mean he was the minister of only Stouffville Methodist Church. Rev. Flummerfledt lived in the local area, unlike the circuit rider who would travel many hundreds of miles on horseback every week crisscrossing large parts of Eastern Ontario and then circling back to do it again and again arriving as I said 4 times a year to each community of faith.

Rev.C Flummerfeldt had a 5 point circuit including Stouffville, Bloomington Goodwood, Church Hill, and California Corners that he would travel by horseback to each Sunday. And given that each large community was approximately 7 miles away with smaller ones in between that allowed a man on a horse and buggy to get to the next community in 3hrs, and on horseback in 1-1.5hr. With the smaller communities in between the larger ones allowing the minister to arrive in the late afternoon for the final service and after which he would travel into the night to return home.

And this why the traditional day off of a minister had remained for the last 170 years – to be Monday. For after riding on a horse for 18hrs, it was unlikely that he would have wanted to get up in the morning let alone be able to walk.

Prior to my being ordained 34 years ago, I served as a student minister for two of the four years I was in seminary. The first year I did so preaching each Sunday on a 6 point charge outside of Saskatoon. Liane and I would start at 6:30am and drive north 3hrs to preach at our first point, and continue on throughout the morning and into the afternoon to the other 5 points on my circuit until we were 6 hours north of Saskatoon. We would then arrive back by 9 pm after having had lunch in one of the congregations members’ homes and sometimes early dinner in another or picking it up along the way. The only difference between Cornielius and I was that he had a horse and I a car – a rather big difference.

*Isaiah said, The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,* *to bind up the broken-hearted…freedom to the captured, comfort to those who mourn…and you will be called Oaks of Righteousness… displaying His glory…as you serve as ministers of God. ”* Given all that Stouffville has done and has gone through in these 170 years; the only thing that will stop us from being the oaks of righteousness displaying his glory as His people and ministers may well be that we fear we are inadequate to the task.

 Nelson Mandela stated when, he said

Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,
but that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.

And, as we let our own light shine, we consciously give
other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

You think about that. Amen.