

Riverside United Church
November 3, 2024
Anniversary Sunday

Scripture Lesson: Philippians 4: 4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,
lead us to deeper understanding of you,
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

“Riverside’s Anniversary: Introduction”

Today we celebrate 62 years of the life of this community of faith. Some gathered here today may remember those early days of worship at Brookfield High School. Others have come along after this building was built in 1969 and others may have only been connected for a very short time.

I have learned this year that there is a special term for when you become the age of the last two numbers of the year you were born. Riverside is 62 and was born in 62. So, this is our “Beddian” birthday or anniversary. I am particularly fond of the year 1962 and I am so glad that folks in this area of the city had the vision and the faith to start a United Church congregation.

Earlier in the service we lit candles in memory of those who have died this past year and we give thanks for these 12 lives who are part of the great cloud of witnesses who have been part of this community. The picture on the bulletin includes pictures of others who have died before this year and it is only a sample of the many who have been a part of Riverside. I imagine that there are some here who can name all the people on the cover and probably some who don’t know any. If you want to start conversation over lunch, ask about one of the pictures and then hear the story. There are lots of stories, lots of witnesses, lots of faithfulness represented in the individuals who have gone before, let alone all that has been accomplished collectively.

In the lesson from Philippians, we heard the wisdom to keep on doing the things we have heard, and seen - that which is true, honorable, just, pleasing, commendable - and this community has seen and known many, many of those values and gifts.

Last Sunday, my home church - Woodlawn United in Dartmouth, NS celebrated its 140th anniversary. As part of the service, they used a paraphrase of Psalm 126. Psalm 126 is written out of a context of those in exile coming back to Jerusalem and the song they sing is a mixture of looking back and looking ahead. Roddy Hamilton has written a paraphrase that invites us to remember and to look ahead, and the whole while recognizing that the Holy in our midst and in our story. There is an invitation to worship and to sing - and dare I say it - even to dance. My favourite phrase in the paraphrase is: "On the grapevine, it is said, God is about." The rumour was changing memory into promise.

After we hear the Psalm, we are going to enter into a time of hearing some of the stories of how this community of faith has been a part of the lives of congregational members. What does Riverside mean to me? As we listen and reflect, we will intersperse the verses of the hymn, "Lead on, O Cloud of Presence."

Psalm 126 (Adapted by Roddy Hamilton)

When the tide of history turned

And tomorrow became possible

It was like a dream

Joy gurgled up within us

From our throats bubbled jubilation

Laughter danced with the air

Questions were whispered in the corridors of the powerful

"Have you heard? On the grapevine, it is said, God is about"

The rumour was changing memory into promise

Past was reborn as future

From what's aye been, a new thing was happening

And we found ourselves somersaulting and cartwheeling

In the house of the Lord

The dourest of places

Now burst with holy shenanigans

Our dried-out prospects have been seeded with new life

*We once spoke of the future through tears
Now at the mention of tomorrow we dance and play jazz
Those who left silently in the morning
Bent under the burden of worry
Return in the evening, singing
Bent under the blessing of harvest
The Lord has done great things for us
Great things for us all.*