

June 2019

*THE*  *BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH*  
**Britannian**

985 Pinecrest Rd., Ottawa, ON K2B 6B4

Telephone: 613-828-6018

Web site, Facebook, and Twitter links:

<http://www.britanniaunitedchurch.ca/>

Peter Bain, Editor

Leigh Bain, Assistant Editor

## **Editorial**

### **Spring Cleaning**

When spring came around (at least on the calendar, if not in the weather), it was time to plan for the garage sale, and with it, came the cleaning out of the bedrooms, basement, garage, kitchen etc. That was our chance to say “do we really want this?”.

It was also a chance to do a spring cleaning on our events. As you will read later, Helen Hutcheson made us look at how we run the garage sale and say “do we really want it this way?”. As Myron Maxted was wont to say ‘the last six words of a dying organization are “that’s how we’ve always done it”’. Helen challenged us to take a fresh look at the overall goals and process and make some big changes, with big results.

As we come up to 150 years, what else can we dust off, fix up, bring back, give away, or bring in?

Peter Bain  
Editor

## **Minister's Message**

On the weekend of June 7-9, I was at a meeting of the newly formed Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Conference. This replaces our Ottawa Presbytery and Montreal Ottawa Conference. We are no longer affiliated with the former Montreal Presbytery, but we have a new association with the former Bay of Quinte Conference.

What that means for the church is that we have removed one level of governance - the presbytery – and with it the monthly meetings and an established network of volunteers and paid staff that have kept the Ottawa Presbytery running smoothly for many decades. It also means that the new regions are in a bit of turmoil as, in our case, churches from three Presbyteries and two Conferences are combined into one, and volunteers are needed to fill all of the vacancies. That's a huge job!

The organizers of this Conference recognized that many people are confused and concerned, so this event was planned with these things in mind: give the members an opportunity to grieve, encourage everyone to embrace the changes with a positive attitude and hope for the future, introduce the new executive and paid staff members, and vote on the new governance document that will add structure in this state of flux.

Music has always been a big part of Conference and this year was no exception. A “pot-luck” band was put together with clergy and lay volunteers and they kept us humming through our meetings. We were introduced to some wonderful new songs along with some familiar old tunes.

When we were given an opportunity to speak to the things we had to grieve or to celebrate in the format of our prayers of joy and concern, I think we were all surprised to see that the grief line was much shorter. I think that is because the same grief was being expressed by each person; “loss of relationships.” As one dedicated member of the former Ottawa Presbytery put it, “I miss the friends I’ve been getting together with every month for the past twenty years.”

For me, it was the loss of our association with Montreal Presbytery. I have been attending Montreal Ottawa Conference for over thirty years and still have friends that I made when I was ordained. We live too far apart to get together on a regular basis, but for three very intense days every year, we would work and worship together.

More than that, I will miss the character and spirit of the Montreal Presbytery. They brought a liberal theology, a metropolitan character, and the richness of French culture to our meetings that will be missed.

This meeting was much less culturally diverse, there were noticeably fewer visible minorities, and an obviously more conservative presence. Case in point: one of the first things I noticed was the number of ministers wearing clergy shirts. A member of the former Bay of Quinte Conference pointed out that it was mostly younger, female clergy who were wearing them, and said they were “making a statement.” Really?!? Are we back there again? Are there pockets of United Church members who still question the call of women to ordination? Montreal Ottawa Conference moved past that issue thirty years ago. Lord help us...

On the plus side...and there is always a plus side...we heard that the new restructuring means that our Conference is in a much better place financially. There is actually money available

for new initiatives (while keeping the treasurers happy by not dipping into the interest by more than four percent each year.)

Saying good-bye to old friends also meant that we greeted new friends, and said hello to some friends from the past. We were also introduced to the new staff members who will offer leadership and inspiration in the years to come. Some will replace committees that were staffed by volunteers, and will provide knowledge, experience and consistency that these committees sometimes lacked.

Saying good-bye to one of our urban presbyteries also meant greeting a new group of rural congregations that also bring a unique character and spirit to our church. While generally more conservative in their theology, there is no question that our rural churches have a work ethic and volunteerism that is unparalleled in more transient communities. Having ministered to rural churches in Saskatchewan and Ontario for the first fifteen years of my ministry, I can tell you that some of them are leaders in relevant theology and social justice in the United Church of Canada.

One of the surprising things I learned about The United Church of Canada had to do with the number of congregations we have in the church. Our Chair made a reference to news reports about the number of churches that are closing, and said “I wish they would say that it is buildings and not congregations.” This intrigued me. It turns out that at the time of amalgamation, when Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist churches joined together in 1925 to form Canada’s largest Protestant denomination, there were 2800 congregations. In 2019, we have...2800 congregations.

There are a lot of factors that go into that number, but what struck me, is that we are back at the beginning...and maybe all of these changes represent an opportunity for a new beginning in the midst of turmoil.

I’ve often told the story of the garden I had in Saskatchewan. I had turned over the sod in the backyard to make a garden, but didn’t have time to properly tend it. I was on a new pastoral charge, with five churches, a new baby at home and ordination around the corner. Before long the grass and weeds had taken over, and I had given up on producing anything worthwhile for that season. It was visual chaos. This was also the time when the national church was first discussing the ordination of Gay and Lesbian people...and our church was also in chaos. I even remarked on how it felt a little like my garden, whose weeds had grown up past my knees by then.

And then, one day I walked out the back door into the sunshine and was greeted by a most wonderful surprise: there in the middle of my garden, rising above it all that chaos, was the most beautiful, double red poppy I had ever seen. For me it was a symbol of hope, right in the middle of chaos. And it has always been a symbol of hope for our church; today as it was back then.

I have great hope for our church. I always have. And I have great trust in the knowledge that wherever the road takes us, God will help us.

Rev. Jim

## **In Memoriam**

We are saddened to announce the passing of a long time Britannia United member, Anna Farevaag on Sunday April 14, 2019, and of Georgina Neill May 30, 2019.

We also remember another faithful member, Janet Webb, who passed away on December 23rd, 2018.

## **Britannia Woods Community House**

The Britannia Woods Community House Food Pantry receives both donations from Britannia United Church and deliveries from the Ottawa Food Bank. On Monday mornings volunteers fill the space in the basement Food Pantry, unpacking the delivery and loading the freezers, refrigerators, and shelves. The volunteers include members from Britannia and Woodroffe United Churches, as well as local Catholic Churches.

In the last two months, there has been very welcome help from two younger Algonquin College students who are interning for qualifications in Social Work. The effort is also helped by two missionary elders from the Mormon church, one of them from the U.S. and one from France.

There is an impressive amount of food to be seen when the volunteers leave but sometimes there is conspicuously little left when they return the following Monday. Know there is a major need locally. Cash donations are used very efficiently to buy in bulk basic items that the Food Bank has failed to provide. Donations may be placed in the church envelope labelled as "Food Pantry" and will be included in your annual charitable donation receipt. Keep up the good work, people at Britannia!

Susan Aiken

## **New-to-You for New To-Be Canadians**

On Saturday, May 11, 2019, Britannia United Church organized a New-to-You Clothing Sale for New To-Be Canadians.

Held in conjunction with the annual Garage Sale, this Used Clothing Sale was a tremendous success: piles and piles of quality clothing were donated; countless volunteers set-up, sorted and sold the items; customers by the hundreds made purchases; and \$1,856 was raised for the Britannia Refugee Support Fund for Burundian Refugees.

Britannia United Church will use this money to pay the \$550 permanent resident fee for three Burundian refugees (with some left over). This will facilitate their integration into Canadian society and the community by eliminating the financial burden associated with the application. All refugees transitioning to a new life need support to become accustomed to their new communities and to adapt to life in Canada.

Not only will the Used Clothing Sale help local Burundian refugees, the surplus items were donated to the Salvation Army, thereby raising money for local programs and services and assisting others.

Helping one person may not change the world, but it can change that person's world.

Thank you for helping others to dream and achieve!

Helen Hutcheson



*A church had a special service followed by a barbecue. They called it "the Sacred and the Propane".*

## **Moving, Moving...Out of Town**

When you hear these words, what is your reaction? Is it feelings of “no” or “yes, I want to do this”? Does it make you anxious and nervous? “Oh! Not now! I am happy in the Ottawa area, where I have a nice place to live. All my friends and family are here.”

Yet, every year, military, diplomats, seniors downsizing, people seeking new employment or new educational challenges move to new cities and places. Now, part of our Syrian refugee family will be moving to Kingston. Rim Artin, the former obstetrician-gynecologist in Syria and new midwife here will have a permanent position there. So, on August 1, her husband Abboud and sons Jack, 13, and Christian, 9, will join her in Kingston to live in a new environment and adjust to new schools and challenges. Leaving their close friends and elderly parents Nadia and Raymond and brother Salem and his family will not be easy.

The family thanks all who have helped them: the Britannia United family and local community members, as well as host families in Toronto, Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo and Kingston, for the prayers, guidance, time and kindnesses they have provided throughout the past 3 and a half years.

If you wish to support the family in any way, please contact Don Cullen at [britunitedref@gmail.com](mailto:britunitedref@gmail.com) before July 15, 2019.

Don Cullen and Marie-Therese O’Sullivan want to thank all those angels who have been involved in the adventure of helping this family. God does exist and works in mysterious ways. May you know the PEACE, LOVE, KINDNESS and HOPE you give.

Don Cullen and Marie-Therese  
O’Sullivan

## **Audio-Video Help**

We are in need of at least one more volunteer to help run the sound system on Sunday mornings. Training will be provided. If you can help, please see Adam Batson or Ole Jensen.

## **Your Financial Support Through the Summer**

Whether or not you are there, the Church has financial commitments every week that need your offering, even in the summer. You can support the church all year long without effort or even cheque charges by signing up for Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR). Your bank account will be debited on or about the 20th of each month and you will receive a tax receipt at the end of the year. You can contribute any amount, and specify the amounts going to general funds, M&S, etc. and can change your donation at any time.

It’s easy to participate in the PAR plan. All you have to do is:

1. Decide the amount of your monthly offering. If you usually give a certain amount weekly, multiply it by 4.4 to get a monthly amount.
2. Complete the PAR Authorization Application (from Envelope Steward) and attach a void cheque or, if you use online banking, download and print a direct deposit form.
3. Enclose both application and void cheque or form on the offering plate or give it to the Envelope Steward for completion.

## **Baptisms**

Joel William Craig son of Paul & Tammy Craig – April 14, 2019

Ella Faith Guertin daughter of Pat & Lena Guertin – April 28, 2019

Auston James Zondervan son of Andrew & Jaclyn Zondervan – May 19, 2019

## Sunday School Year-End Graduation

At the end of each Sunday School year, we recognize what we have done over the past year, celebrate the growth and development of our students, and show appreciation to our leaders and assistants.

The 145th anniversary of the church was a highlight of the Fall session. The children sealed their art, worksheets and memories in a time capsule to be opened in 2023 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the church. They participated in the morning worship service and sang at the evening potluck.

In November, the children, under the guidance of Lana Czelenski and Jessica Carey, made Christmas ornaments that were sold at the Church bazaar and to the Congregation, raising more than \$60 for the Church's general operating fund.

Nine children and youth attended the Christmas Potluck, many in their pyjamas, and enthusiastically performed a selection of songs and drew the names of prize winners.

December was capped off with a very successful Christmas pageant with 16 children and youth taking part, and many volunteers contributing to coordinating the activity.

In April, under the direction of Danielle Nicholls, the Sunday School children baked four loaves of friendship bread which they served the following Sunday. They produced 10 starters, all of which were given away. One loaf of bread has been provided to a worthy recipient, and more starters were distributed. Our Sunday School would be nothing without the children and youth who participate in the program. They include:

Brookelyn Eva Ethan Ella W Carlie	Jane Elodie Adrien Mila Ella G	Chloé C Audrey Noah Sam Kaeli	Jake Charlotte Violet Hannah Hope	Sydney Vivienne Oliver Chloe H
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It takes a lot of leaders and assistants to run the Sunday School program, and special appreciation is extended to:

Mary Lou Farrell, Chair of Christian Development	Valerie Baldwin, Music	Jennifer Trewartha	Joanna Hughes
Helen Hutcheson, Coordinator	Mat Saindon	Danielle Nicholls	Jessica Carey
	Lana Czelenski	Kim Vail	

*“Children are important to me. I want to bend down and look in their eyes and tell them about God’s love. Let the children come sit on my knee—children like these are a part of God’s big family.”* (Spark Story Bible, pages 331-332)

Helen Hutcheson

**Thank you...**

... to congregation member Kim Zidichouski ([kimzidy@sympatico.ca](mailto:kimzidy@sympatico.ca)) at Coldwell Banker First Ottawa Realty for publicizing our church events on her promotional mail-out card!

## Friendship Bread

If you would like to bake Friendship Bread, we have several frozen starters available, with the recipe, for you to pick up after the worship service. Day one in the process starts when the starter is thawed. Contact Helen Hutcheson at 613-726-0113 or [helen.m.hutchesonh@gmail.com](mailto:helen.m.hutchesonh@gmail.com) if you would like one.

## Strawberry Social

Wednesday June 26!! 3 pm - 7 pm. Cold plate and dessert, Adults \$15, children (5-9) \$10. Dessert only Adults \$8, children \$5. Fresh Berry Sale and Bake Table. Tickets available at the door.

## Garage Sale

Earlier this year Helen Hutcheson approached me about holding a used clothing sale in conjunction with the garage sale. I thought, "what's the worst that can happen? It might even help the sale", so I agreed. Helen set about organizing a team to plan, organize, and promote the event.

Thanks to her motivation and the many new ideas from the team, we exceeded our wildest expectations: including the bake table, the garage sale revenues were double our previous record. We also showed Britannia at its welcoming best.

I cannot thank everyone who helped with the garage sale, but want to make special mention of Norm Toone, Gail Wyse, Kelvin Stanke, Heather Wallace, Tom Harris, Melissa McEwen, Bill Fenton, Don Cullen, Leigh Bain, and especially Helen.

Peter Bain

## The Haircut

A teenage boy had just passed his driving test and inquired of his father as to when they could discuss his use of the car.

His father said he'd make a deal with his son, "You bring your grades up from a C to a B average, study your Bible a little, and get your haircut. Then we'll talk about the car." The boy thought about that for a moment, decided he'd settle for the offer, and they agreed on it.

After about six weeks his father said, "Son, you've brought your grades up and I've observed that you have been studying your Bible, but I'm disappointed you haven't had your hair cut."

The boy said, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that, and I've noticed in my studies of the Bible that Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair, and there's even strong evidence that Jesus had long hair."

His dad replied "Did you also notice they all walked everywhere they went?"

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*Say your prayers.*

*Know your blessings.*

*Share your dreams.*

*Work daily on goals*

*Say thank you often*

*Don't gossip*

*Never bully*

*Breathe deeply*

*Stay calm*

*Smile more*

*There is always, always, always something to be grateful for.*

*Believe in yourself. You are gifted and capable.*

## 145 Initiatives

In June 2018, the Church Council created the Stewardship Campaign under the mandate of the Committee of Stewards. The purpose of the Campaign was to spark new life in the work, worship, and outreach of the Church, with the ultimate aim of improving its overall financial situation.

One of the goals of the Campaign was to take a long-range view to the implementation of special projects. As such, the Stewardship Campaign group set an objective of achieving 145 new initiatives within one year. 145 was a significant number in the life and work of the Church in 2018 because Britannia United Church celebrated its 145th anniversary on Sunday, October 28, 2018.

This ambitious objective was achieved! Some initiatives were significant; others were routine. The 145 initiatives were accomplished by many individuals working diligently as a team. Together the initiatives are more important than the sum of their parts because of the vitality that they contribute to the Church.

Here are some of the highlights of the activities; we don't have space to print them all. See the church web site for the full list.

- Rev Jim asked members to greet someone in Church, preferably someone that they did not know.
- Door greeters were re-introduced
- Dori Jensen and the Pastoral Care Team conducted Pastoral care visits.
- A monthly Men's Club was created to socialize over dinner.
- Announcements about Preauthorized Remittance (PAR).
- Enhanced advertising of the Strawberry Social.
- Suzart, hosted by Britannia, performed Mary Poppins Jr.
- Kelvin Stanke asked members to build the BUC Facebook page by inviting friends to the page, as well as commenting, liking, and sharing posts.
- A special stewardship appeal letter was sent to the Friends of Britannia United Church.
- A pamphlet was created and distributed.
- Susan Aiken and Helen Hutcheson made a presentation about their November 2017 trip to Israel and Palestine.
- A time capsule was created by the Sunday School to be opened on Anniversary Sunday 2023.
- Congregational members were asked to consider increasing their weekly or monthly offering by a multiple of 145: \$1.45, \$14.50, \$145.
- Three youth from Britannia attended a youth activity on October 5, 2018 at Woodroffe United Church, with Trinity United and Kitchissippi United Churches. The youth made bannock and watched a First Nations-themed movie.
- The Christmas bazaar brought in many customers from the community, raising \$6,698.66 in revenue.
- The Community Christmas concert raised \$1,400 for Ottawa West End Community Chaplaincy (OWECC).
- White Gift donations were made to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa.



- The Benefit for Baba hosted by Britannia United.
- The musicians of Grass under Fire concert donated their fee to the Church, thereby raising \$850.
- The company from which Rev Jim ordered the Britannia United Church volunteer name tags donated them to the Church.
- A grant in the amount of \$3,767.50 was received from Ottawa Hydro following the replacement of the Church's lights by LEDs by Don Jackson.
- 250 cups of hot chocolate distributed by volunteers from Britannia United, at the Queensway Terrace North Winter Carnival
- Board games, hockey, skating and a chili cook-off at a Britannia United Church Family Fun Day.
- The Irish Night and ham dinner raised \$1,285.
- The Sunday School and Youth Group baked 4 loaves of bread to share with the Congregation.
- Ten bread starters from the Friendship Bread were distributed to members of the Congregation.
- The Lenten Meditation and Yoga event attracted at least one individual to attend Church services.
- 25 participants attended the Lenten Meditation and Yoga session, facilitated by Jane Dawson, on April 6, 2019, with a free-will offering of \$265.50.
- Deborah Suddard hosted a Bible Study.
- Elaine McCausland created a pastoral prayer box.
- The Murder Mystery raised more than \$5,000 .
- The Garage Sale raised about \$2,630 for the Church's General Fund, twice as much as in previous years.
- The Used Clothing Sale raised nearly \$1,860 for the Britannia Refugee Fund for Burundian refugees, enough to pay the \$550 permanent residency fee for 3 or more Burundian refugees.
- Rev Jim and Valerie Baldwin invited the Congregation and friends to a luncheon following the baptism of their grandson.

Helen Hutcheson, on behalf of the Stewardship Campaign

## **Biblical Burglary Protection**

A woman had just returned to her home from an evening of church services, when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables and yelled: 'Stop! Acts 2:38!' (*“Repent and be Baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven.”*)

The burglar stopped in his tracks.

The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done.

As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar: 'Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was quote scripture to you.'

'Scripture?' replied the burglar. 'She said she had an axe and two .38's!'

## **The Hope of Resurrection**

**Sermon from February 17, 2018**

Luke 6:17-26:

*He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."*

I was 19 when I first experienced my call to ministry. I was in my first year of university, studying psychology, with a view to doing graduate work and opening a practice in family counselling. I had returned to church at 16 and attended worship every Sunday, I sang in the choir, I was an elder on the church council, and I participated in every special service and fundraising event. But when I felt the call and knew it would lead to becoming an ordained minister, I realized that even though I had been listening to sermons every Sunday for three years, I felt like I knew very little about the Bible. So...I registered for some religion classes at my university.

One of the first classes I attended was called “The Synoptic Gospels.” The word “synoptic” is an adjective that refers to a general summary...a synopsis. It is made up of two smaller Greek words: *syn* (that’s sYn) which means “together” and *opsis* – which means “view.” So the word literally means “to view together” and it is used to describe observations that give a broad view of a subject at a particular time. In the case of the Synoptic Gospels, it refers to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

What I learned is that the four Gospels are distinct and yet related. Mark is the oldest gospel, so most of Mark’s teachings are contained in the other three. Each gospel has material that is unique, many of the stories are shared, and each author or school of thought is speaking to a particular audience.

Matthew is aimed at a Jewish audience. His audience was familiar with the Old Testament and Jesus is portrayed as their Messiah. Matthew often refers to the Old Testament writings in an attempt to demonstrate that their teachings are fulfilled in Jesus. He even starts his book with Jesus’ family tree, to show that Jesus is the rightful heir to the kingdom that was promised to King David and his descendants.

Mark, on the other hand, is writing to non-Jews or Gentiles. These are people in the Roman Empire who are not familiar with the religion of the Jews. Consequently, Mark’s gospel does

not start with the birth of Jesus or his family tree; it starts with the beginning of his ministry. This is a gospel of action and Jesus is portrayed as the servant of God, doing the job that God has sent him to do. So the emphasis of Mark is on “doing.” Mark shows that Jesus got the job done, and to that end, he records the most miracle stories.

Luke was written to the intellectually minded. He is not writing as an eyewitness, but as one who is recording eyewitness testimonies. He portrays Jesus as the Son of God, who is also the perfect man. So, he focuses on the events of Jesus’ life that stress his humanity. The Greeks, in their art and literature were always looking for the perfect man, and the gospel of Luke says “Here he is!”

John, on the other hand, is writing as an eyewitness to the life of Christ. The stories he recorded were for the purpose of establishing the fact that Jesus was the eternal God who became a man, and his stories were intended to inspire faith in Jesus. He even admits to being selective in what he has recorded saying: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples; which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

As you can see, if we want to have a complete picture of the life and teachings of Jesus, we really have to look at all of the gospels together. But we also need to remember that each gospel had a distinct purpose and that shaped how the stories were told. In some cases words were added, in order to emphasize a point. At other times, bits of information were left out, because the author did not think they mattered to his audience.

Our gospel reading for today is a good example of how the same story may be told in two different ways, to make two different points...but rather than contradict each other...they may be viewed together to help us understand the life and teachings of Christ.

As we begin to read Luke 6:17-26 it begins to sound familiar as soon as we get to the blessings “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” These are the “beatitudes” – the blessings that are contained in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.” But half-way through there is a shift that is somewhat less familiar...”But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep...” The reason for the shift is simple...there are two different records of the same story...

Matthew records the blessings of Christ, or “The Beatitudes” in the Sermon on the Mount, which is found in chapter 5 of his gospel. It is actually part of a larger group of teachings that continue in chapters 6 and 7. In Matthew’s telling of the story, there are 107 teaching verses. In Luke there are only 30, but his version of the story includes the woes.

There is another very interesting fact about the two accounts. Matthew’s story is known as “The Sermon on the Mount.” Luke’s is called “The Sermon on the Plain.” Quite simply, Matthew tells us that when Jesus sees the large crowd gathering, he went up to the mountainside – away from the crowds - and his disciples followed him. Luke tells us that when Jesus sees the crowd, he comes down to a level place and stands among them.

But there is an even more significant difference in the telling of the stories. Matthew places it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, almost immediately after his baptism and temptation. Luke places it much later in his gospel after Jesus has experienced many conflicts: he has been rejected in his hometown, he has offended the religious authorities, he has touched a leper, forgiven sins, spent time with tax collectors, allowed his disciples to break Sabbath laws, and broken one of the laws himself by healing a man on the Sabbath.

In Luke's version, these conflict stories provide a background for Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. In these stories, scribes and Pharisees take offence at Jesus for violating religious taboos. They try to defend a traditional understanding of God's people and religious morality. Each time Jesus tries to show them a different way...but they refuse to see.

So Jesus delivers his Sermon on the Plain for all to hear and he turns their legalistic world on its head. In this sermon Jesus gives them a glimpse into the kingdom of God, and by their standards it is totally upside-down.

The scribes and the Pharisees are trying to follow the Torah law as faithfully as they can, but in doing so they have ignored the law and the prophets who expressed concern for the oppress, the broken-hearted, the captives and prisoners. Concern for the weak and the widowed abounds in the psalms and the prophets. In the Torah God provided for the poor to eat grapes and grain that were left over from the harvest, money lenders were forbidden to charge interest, slaves were set free in the Sabbath Year, and ancestral land was returned to its original owners in the year of Jubilee.

The prophets tried to move Israel from the Law to compassion, but the scribes and the Pharisees wanted to maintain the status quo...and they were totally unprepared for the message that Jesus would bring...so his blessings were followed by woes...and they knew exactly who they were directed to.

Matthew has nine blessings and no woes. Luke has four blessings and four matching woes. Matthew speaks in the third person, saying "they shall be filled." Luke speaks in the second person saying "you will be filled." Matthew spiritualizes the blessings saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" while Luke says "Blessed are you who are poor." And Matthew says "Blessed are you who hunger and thirst after righteousness" while Luke says "Blessed are you who hunger now." It's as though Matthew is speaking of a future hope in the resurrection, while Luke is putting the resurrection promises in the here and now.

And when he speaks about consequences...it is as though they are already happening.

So who is right? Perhaps they both are. Maybe this is why we need all of the gospels to give us a complete understanding of the teachings of Christ.

Jesus preached and demonstrated that God's way is about what happens in this world now: caring for the least, siding with the poor and marginalized. But Jesus also called us to believe in a deep and living spirituality that trust is God and not just in our own ability.

Jesus does speak about consequences, but what we do now cannot just be about getting us into heaven, or our faith will sound selfish. Our actions must be concerned with participating in God's ongoing work of resurrection; creating God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

The call then, is for us to become deeply spiritual and connected to the reality of God's presence and purpose, but also to be deeply connected to the world in which we live; participating in the immediate saving work of God, within our human, temporal world.

This is what happened in the story of The Good Samaritan we read last week. I don't believe that the religious authorities were bad people. They most likely walked by on the other side because they were concerned about the purity laws, and touching this man who was bleeding would have made them ritually unclean. The problem is if all we are concerned about is keeping ourselves righteous so that we can get into heaven...then we will be afraid to take the risks that might help others get there too...and in doing so, we expose our lack of righteousness...and if we are concerned that someone who is less righteous than we are might also get there...well, I think that kind of puts our own righteousness into question.

I'm reminded of the story of the nuns who went to mother Teresa when they were going to be working with AIDS patients, and they said "But what if we catch it?" And she told them what she told the nuns who first worked with the lepers. She said "Well...then you will die and go to heaven."

The religious authorities in their desire to remain ritually clean, exposed their unrighteousness, while the Samaritan, who exposed himself to the man who was beaten and left for dead by the side of the road, demonstrated God's righteousness in human form.

In our choir anthem today, verse three told the story of the generous landowner who hired men to work in his vineyard at the break of day. He went back to the market place several times throughout the day and each time there were men seeking work, and each time he hired them on for the day. When it was time to be paid, they all got the same wage, and when the ones who had worked for 12 hours saw that they were paid the same amount as the men who had worked for 3 they began to grumble and complain. But this was not a story about being rewarded by the world's standards – it was a story about grace.

The consequence of a faithful life...is a life of faith...it is the assurance of knowing throughout our lives that God is near...it is having the strength to endure the hardships...and the ultimate joy of the resurrection Christ. It is a state of blessedness that is experience in and yet transcends the world in which we live. When are less concerned about the righteousness of others and more concerned with how we live our own lives of faith...then the hope of resurrection is not something that is far away...it is here; when we live in Christ, Christ lives in us, and we are a resurrection people. Amen