

**Eden Mills Presbyterian Church 163<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary**  
**Luke 9:51-62**  
**“It’s not the same anymore!”**



Remember when going on a diet meant that we actually lost a few pounds? Remember when we could run and play, and skip and dance, and never get tired? Remember when our main worries in life revolved around whether our best friend was still our best friend or if we’d have a date for the school dance?

Remember when the Sunday school enrollment surpassed the number of adults on the roll of our churches? Remember when the pews were full, and how on Christmas Eve and Easter and Anniversary, we had to bring in extra chairs? Remember when one of the first things folks did when they moved into a community was find a church to which to belong?

It’s not the same anymore!! I can go on a diet, and even lose a couple of pounds right before I gain a pound and a half back. Running is now out of the question and I have to choose between a brisk walk and having enough air to carry on a conversation. And the things I worry about now are different from when I was 15 or even 30 years ago.

It’s not the same anymore!! Certainly not in our personal lives, as the years go along. Certainly not in our world, or in our society. So why do we assume that it should be the same here at Eden Mills, some 163 years after our faith ancestors established it ... or in the Christian church, over 2000 years after our Lord established it through the disciples?

Twelve years, and a bit ago, I officially retired, having spent my entire adult life either preparing for ordained ministry or “doing” ordained ministry. Now, in retirement, my life isn’t the same anymore!!

At first, I grieved the things that I no longer do, especially the things I no longer have the strength or energy to do – not just work things, but relaxation things as well. For a number of reasons, curling, a game of fast ball, and riding a motorcycle are now spectator sports for me; and dancing, which I have always loved, is one dance out on the dance floor followed by several back at the table. It’s not the same anymore. At first, I grieved. But now my thinking has shifted and I am realizing how wonderful it is that I could once to enjoy so many things – work and play – for so many, many years. It’s not the same anymore, but now I enjoy strolling along with a friend, conversing and laughing. It’s not the same anymore, but some wonderful things have replaced those left behind and some amazing challenges can now be taken up ... things for which there was never time or opportunity before.

I want to suggest to you – challenge you to consider this same sort of shift when we look at the life and health of the church, and specifically of Eden Mills Presbyterian Church.

You know, 163 years ago, if the Sunday school was overflowing, it was partly because families had upwards of 10 kids. Churches were full because, frankly, there was nothing else to do on Sunday and it was the longest, most boring day of the week if you didn’t get together at church. The churches were full because, not only did the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment say that we mustn’t work on the Lord’s day, but because of wringer washing machines and wood stoves, hay forks, stooked sheaves and milking by hand, outhouses and treadle sewing machines – people needed the rest and the quiet of the church service, a time to sit and be still.

There’s something to be celebrated in our current age, where people come to church, not because there’s nothing else to do, but because they choose to spend this hour with fellow

believers and the Lord. It's generally no longer because of boredom or fear or guilt that people join a congregation and participate in Sunday worship. It's more likely because they love the Lord and long to spend time in His House, praising, praying, reorienting their lives.

It's not the same anymore, but that may be the best thing that's ever happened in the church!!

It does however mean that we have to shift from doing things the way our faith ancestors did as a congregation, as the church. We can't have everything around us change, including our own lives, and expect to "do church" the way they did and get the results they got.

Perhaps, like Elisha, it's time to ask God for a double share of our faith ancestors' spirit – and mean it. Perhaps it's time to ask God – and mean it – to show us what God intends the face of the church to look like in our age.

As Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle, as a symbol of his covenant/promise to take up where Elijah left off in his work for Yahweh, so we are being called through that wonderful story and by our Lucan passage, to pick up and carry on the work begun in Jesus, that has been carried out in this place for over 163 years.

So, what might that look like? I confess I don't have all, or really any of the answers. What I do have are some "what ifs," some thoughts that just might tease out an ah-ha or two as we consider our future, as we consider our Lord's call.

First, what if we quit defining, thinking about the church as whatever happens within these walls. Yes, in our climate, it's essential to have a space to gather that is warm and has a roof and walls. Yes, in our current age of busyness and sound bytes, noise and confusion, it's vital to have a space that is sacred, quiet even, with room to breathe, to check up on our priorities and to re-evaluate our lives. Yes, with all the demands that often drain our lives, it's important to have a time and place to refuel. But what if we opened our hearts to recognize that the church is more than an hour or so a week, that faith and the good news are part of our core, our being, our souls and therefore wherever we go, whatever we're doing, we're the Body of Christ, we are church.

Secondly, what if we let the faith that is inside of us, out for a walk, whenever we are engaged in community events or casual conversations? What if we verbalized our faith to family and friends?

Thirdly, what if we begin to see the hockey teams, as one example, that claim our younger families as an opportunity for us? What if, instead of bemoaning the absence of our young people and their families, we dropped by the rink during the week, when they are practising or playing? What if we asked our young people how they're doing instead of trying to guilt them into coming here?

Fourth, what if we were to engage in conversation those who aren't involved in the faith community – to listen to that about which they are passionate?

Fifth, what if we were to invite people, intentionally, to come here, to grow in faith in and love for God; to belong with a people who love and respect, honour and value them? What if we were to share something absolutely life giving, life preserving, life defining, life saving with them. What if we were to tell people how much they are loved and cherished, valued and honoured ... how much the Creator of all that is, the Creator of each person adores them and longs to walk with them through whatever life has in store for them. By inviting them to come here, we are offering them a time and place where they can learn more about and experience more of this Creator.

Sixth, what if we become a people whose faith and hope, love and joy made us so attractive that people will ask, out of curiosity what makes us the way we are?

Life isn't the same anymore – not in our individual lives; not in the church. One thing that is consistently similar however is that following Jesus isn't always easy. It is always the call, but it's not always easy.

When we listen to the passage in Luke, we hear a bit about what Jesus expects of us when following him. Let's take a look.

We journey with Jesus and the disciples to a Samaritan village. The reception in the village is cool and inhospitable, to say the least. With centuries of feuding in their hearts, the Samaritans slam the door in the disciples' faces. And the disciples are furious. They hadn't wanted to come here in the first place. Now, they long to call down fire, as Elijah did, and annihilate these "heathens" who would dare to dismiss them and refuse the good news they have brought. Empathically, Jesus says "no." In fact, he rebukes the disciples for even considering harming those who reject them.

Then three people come to Jesus, sincerely wanting to follow him. And all three are told that it's all or nothing. All three want to do something first, to prepare to follow Jesus unencumbered. However, to the first potential follower, Jesus says, "If you follow me, don't expect any luxuries like a bed to sleep in." To the second, he demands, "Let your father's dead body lie there." To the third, he declares, "No, we won't stop long enough for you to call home."

What is Jesus saying to us?

In a nutshell, Jesus is saying that there can be nothing and no one in this world as important as bearing witness to the gospel. There can be nothing and no one in this world as important as following Jesus. And that unless we are giving everything we are, unless we are wholly committed to Jesus, to Jesus' way of life, to Jesus' example, then it is not enough.

Then Jesus made the disciples and us a promise. In keeping with Elisha asking Elijah for a double share of his spirit, Jesus promises his disciples – and us – "what I have been doing, you now will do – and greater things than I have done will you do."

We are Jesus' disciples. It's not the same anymore in our lives, in the world, or for the Church ... and we can wring our hands and shake our heads and wish it were. Or we can hear the call of our Lord and through prayer, find new ways to answer it, new ways to be His Church, to be His Body, in and for the world.