

## Words Worth Repeating

If you haven't already been introduced to Moderator Gary Paterson's blog, there is no better time than the summer to immerse yourself in the wit and wisdom of a writer who touches people's hearts, stimulates their thinking, and delves deeply into the Gospel message.

See below for a sampling of excerpts and links to blog posts from the past year. Please share this e-mail with others in your congregation so that they too are aware of the Moderator's blog.

To receive regular e-mail notices of new blog posts, go to [www.garypaterson.ca/](http://www.garypaterson.ca/) and click on the +Follow box at the bottom, right-hand corner of your screen.

### The Descent of the Spirit

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/06/25/the-descent-of-the-spirit/>

Why not think of the Holy Spirit as the legendary Raven, the Trickster, who is always surprising us, turning things upside down, helping us to see in new ways. In truth, I've always thought the dove was a bit insipid, not perhaps the most appropriate symbol for the wild, disturbing energy of the Spirit. Holy Spirit as Raven stretches our imaginations, and ensures that the Spirit will never be domesticated.

### Happy Birthday – The Bird Still Sings

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/06/10/happy-birthday-the-bird-still-sings>

I was staying at a bed and breakfast in Providence Bay, on Manitoulin Island in Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, the largest freshwater island in the world, I've been told, some 100 miles long. The doors that lead to a small patio are open and the beach is only a few hundred metres away; the curtains are floating in the stir of lake breeze. It is the birdsong that has pulled me out of sleep, birds waking up, greeting the day, marking territory perhaps; possibly a pre- or post-mating twitter of joy; or maybe just a good morning song of anticipation, of delight. Music like this is rare in the city. I was glad to be awake, listening to the birds sing so early in the day.

Later, in the afternoon worship celebration, I shared a phrase that comes from the Bengali poet, Tagore; a definition – "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark." Exactly what I was hearing; perhaps a word that our church needs to hear too – a metaphor of hope, with an invitation to sing, to share good news even before it has arrived.

### Permissive of Joy

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/05/15/permissive-of-joy/>

So, things fall apart and we stand on the brink of the unknown. If we're honest, that's how it always is. No matter how well we plan and construct our lives (and our churches) we are only one "event" away from everything changing. The world is always on the move, our context constantly shifts, and since the God of the Bible is dynamically engaged in history, our experience of the gospel is also changing—new wine and new wineskins:

[Now thus says the Lord]... “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:18–19)

So, if this is normal and God is involved in these changes, then maybe we truly can believe that these times are “permissive of joy.” Not a wild, exuberant phrase, perhaps, but honest and real, and very different from “happy.” We are on the brink of the unknown, and that’s okay. No matter what we do or refuse to do, God will continue to do a new thing. But we need not fear—there is room for hope.

### **Giving Thanks on Mother’s Day**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/05/10/giving-thanks-on-mothers-day/>

In this time of sadness, I have been carried by a river of prayer from one day into the next, by prayers that hold and sustain; that help me remember I am part of a wide, wide network of care and love; that remind me that my life and my mother’s life are part of something much greater than any one of us, than all of us; that we are embraced by Love, by a God who holds us all, the living and the dead, from whom nothing in all creation, including death, can separate us; prayers that offer the hope of a peace that passes all understanding.

### **The Garden Remains**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/04/22/the-garden-remains/>

So...the old house had changed, but parts of the old were treasured and incorporated, and a new home was filled once again with the laughter of children and sweet garden smells. It was a good moment.

Change is always part of our living. Yes, there is the inevitable sadness of loss and goodbye; but there is also a pleasure in discovering how what emerges incorporates and reshapes elements of the past, so as to bring forth a new way that is full of life.

### **Sticks and Stones**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/02/27/sticks-and-stones/>

I remember my mother trying to convince me that “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Not true; never was—just made it harder to admit how much it really did hurt. I still remember Terry with a port wine stain on his face, and Randy with the cleft palate, and Drew, the overweight boy in grade 9, and how they were bullied, and what I didn’t do. That’s when I discovered that it takes a bully, a victim, and silent bystanders for evil to succeed. But I was scared, worried that I might be the next victim. Because I carried my own painful memories of being bullied; probably lots of us do.

### **A Day of Good News**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/02/25/a-day-of-good-news/>

As I ponder all the changes that are facing the United Church in these coming years, I can get caught up in fuss, worry, cynicism, and doubt. That’s when it’s important to recall the story of God’s people, where change seems almost to be a constant, where the Spirit keeps breaking in

to renew, transform, and enliven. That's when it's important to celebrate and give thanks for those times and places where we have already experienced such grace-filled change—which is what I witnessed that Sunday at MCC.

### **We're all in the Same Boat**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/01/30/were-all-in-the-same-boat/>

There was talk about this being God's work—that what is happening to the churches, to all of us, is the movement of the Spirit, similar in many ways to Jeremiah's understanding of the exile of Israel into Babylon. We are not being called to "fix it" but to discover new ways of being, to discover where God is already doing a new thing and join in. That is both scary and reassuring.

### **Let It Snow**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/01/25/let-it-snow/>

But for all my kvetching, there came an evening, as I was walking home, that snow began falling. Gently, drifting, a thing of beauty. Come morning, the world was changed, only a couple of centimeters, but everything soft, clean...a new creation. I was sure I heard God saying, "Behold, it is good!" And then my mother's voice,

A New Year lies before you  
As fresh as untrod snow  
Be careful how you tread on it  
For every step will show.

But then I realized that snowfall is grace, and all my off-track steps were now once again covered and the path was open and fresh. So I walked carefully, amazed and delighted—a "Thank you, God" on my lips, my cold lips.

### **Worshiplude**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/02/05/worshiplude/>

I think gatherings like this should happen more often, and not just for young people. All of us need to feel the kind of energy that comes when a crowd of witnesses gather to worship God. Sometimes we get caught in the solitude of our own congregation and forget that there are lots of "United Churchers" just down the street, around the corner, and on the other side of town. Coming together for celebration (not for another meeting) reminds us of a larger vision, when potential competition is laid aside, when we recognize that we are united—when we are simply called to "celebrate God's presence." And that's good for the soul.

### **Do You Take This Congregation To Be Your Wedded Partner**

<http://www.garypaterson.ca/2013/03/20/do-you-take-this-congregation-to-be-your-wedded-partner/>

Don't get me wrong—I love church buildings, filled with beauty, warm wood, classic stone, stained glass, and above all, memories, where prayers and worship, tears and laughter have created a holy space.

Nevertheless, in times like these, it makes sense to live into our name: the UNITED church. Surely this is the time to have conversations about co-operation with neighbouring congregations, combining our efforts, pooling resources, even talking about the “A” word—amalgamation—though I would prefer to talk about congregational romancing, leading to extended engagement, and then marriage, followed by a thoughtful discussion about whose house it makes more sense to move into, or whether it would be better to sell both houses and build a new one...together.