

A Year in Review from Pastor David

One of my favourite expressions is “As I always say” – to the point where sometimes I feel like saying “As I always say, ‘As I always say.’” Sometimes I confuse even myself!

But I do like to say that as a faith community, we are like a people who sojourn – people who are in between places. I’m not the first one to compare the church to the children of Israel travelling through the wilderness toward the land of promise, and it’s one of my favourite images of Christ’s church. A pilgrim people, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, travelling along together toward our destination. A people who are living in-between, living in the already/not yet of the Kingdom of God. As someone has said (which is another favourite expression of mine), a people living with one foot in our culture and one foot in the kingdom of God, embracing all the tensions and ambiguities and questions that result. A people who have been caught up in God’s great salvation plan; who look back on God’s story; who look around at our present at what God is doing and where God calls us to take part in the plan; who look ahead to that day when we hear God’s voice declaring “See, I am making all things new.”

I have said before that one of the joys of a parish pastor is to be in a position from which we can see a lot of what God is doing in and through the Blythwood family. This continues to be the case. If we are a group of pilgrims travelling along a road, God is effecting situations and people far beyond the 60-80 people you would find in our sanctuary on any given Sunday. From our Out of the Cold ministry to a group of people visiting a reserve in Northern Quebec. From our summer camp to hosting a summer student from Pennsylvania via North Carolina. From the people coming to see us on the first Wednesday of each month to the people who gather around a table to read God’s word and talk about what it means in our lives and to pray. This wider church family encompasses both people that are served and people who help us serve, and oftentimes the lines between them become rightly blurred. This annual report is one of the ways in which we make these stories known, and it’s my prayer that we will continue to ask God to help us to know how we might continue to be caught up in God’s great story.

Part of travelling is venturing into unknown territory. Church life is about life, and all the joys, sorrows, gains and losses that life brings. We’ve known all of these this last year at Blythwood, and we’ll know more of the same. I know that there are some of us in stages of life that entail more unknowns. We have asked a group of faithful people here to help us to discern what we believe God wants for our service to him here in North Toronto. In all of these things, may we say along with King Jehoshaphat – “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

Speaking of stepping out into the unknown, 2018 marked a new beginning for me personally. I enrolled in the new Doctor of Practical Theology program at McMaster Divinity College. I plan to study the role of hospitality in ministry and to look at the question – What would a recapturing

of a theology of hospitality mean to the local church and its practices? God willing I'll be pursuing this over the next four years or so – an exciting and nerve-wracking prospect. Do remember me in your prayers.

God is doing so much in and through us here and I am thankful for all of it. I am thankful for all the lay leaders who give of their time and talents. One of the major advantages of a small church is that we can be nimble when it comes to change and adaptation. One of the challenges is that much work can fall on few people.

I am thankful for the staff with whom I work each day. My thanks to Pastor Abby for continuing to be an encouragement and collaborator – I continue to be inspired by her desire to seek God. It was a blessing to have Helen Lenz alongside in ministry as our Interim Assistant in Ministry during Pastor Abby's parental leave, and to see her heart for God evidenced as she grew into her role. I am thankful for all that Jennifer does to keep the day-to-day operations of the church going, along with her heart for people. Thank you to Dan for all he does to keep the church welcoming, for his drumming, and for good conversation. Adolfo keeps on adding what he does to our corporate worship, and keeps on putting up with my hand-scrawled chord charts and cryptic musical direction – thank you Ado.

Much love and gratitude to me wife Nicole. I could not do what I do without her love and support. Being married to a pastor carries its own unique challenges, joys and heartaches, and she faces them all with grace and wisdom. She continues to be an example of Christ to me as we journey along together.

You are all a blessing to me daily, and I pray I may be the same for you. I look forward to continuing along this pilgrim way with you all, remembering that holy mountain toward which we travel and knowing that God goes with us.

In Christ

Pastor David