

## *Leap of Faith*

By 1911, Vancouver was already 25 years old – a bustling, developing port city on the West Coast. On the religious front, it was a time of exciting change, of ecumenical discussions and of church building and growth. Many of the older churches in Vancouver were built around this time. In her history of this congregation, (which you can now find on the website) Jessie How outlines what the time and area were like in these early years: *“It all started in 1911. Vancouver, with a population of 137,000 had its western boundary at Alma Road. Beyond that lay the northwest section of the Municipality of Point Grey, formed in 1908. In this area, West Point Grey, roads were being laid out; a one-track car line was in operation; Southeast Marine Dr. was being extended to become the scenic Northwest Marine Dr, and by 1911, the site of the University of British Columbia had been selected on the Point. People in the growing city saw good reason to move to this new district. West Point Grey was not the urban community it has become. From Alma Road to what is now Discovery Street, from 16<sup>th</sup> Ave. to the waterfront, was tall timber; the water system from the city had not been completed; streetcar service stopped early in the evening; there was a small grocery store on Sasamat St. at 6<sup>th</sup> Ave and very soon more shops appeared on 10<sup>th</sup>. Here were all the characteristics of a village, with not too difficult access to the city. With the vision of a university next door, West Point Grey saw a promising future. As more families moved here, a two-room school was built on Trimble near 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., and later, the eight-room Queen Mary School was opened. .... (But) something was still lacking. A community needs a centre for worship and service. In the early Fall of 1911, a committee of Methodists were appointed to ask the Home Mission Board to establish a pastoral charge in West Point Grey. There were 38 members ready for a new congregation. A site was chosen on Tolmie St. at 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. and .... the church was built in the summer of 1912 ... At the same time, the Presbyterians were on the move. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1912, a Board of managers was selected and the construction of a church building discussed. Construction was carried out that summer on a lot just east of Sasamat on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave, and the church was opened on Sept. 1, 1912. ”*

And so it began. Over the last few months as we've started to celebrate our 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I've often thought about those early people – their courage and vision in even contemplating such a huge undertaking – with limited resources and finances – and their faith and audacity in believing that if they did their part – God would do the rest. And yet – it is because of all those things that we stand here this morning. The logo adopted for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is "**building on the past for the future**" – and its more than this beautiful sanctuary, of course, that we're talking about. It's building on that same sense of daring courage and faith – along with the audacity to believe that God continues to open new doors and opportunities for ministry and service in our midst.

The world of 2012 is very different than that of 1912 – when the idea for a new church was conceived and given birth. This area has grown immensely and undergone huge demographic changes over the years. The attitudes toward religion and churches have undergone drastic transformation as well – from an era in which the church was the centre of society and community life – to that in which we find ourselves today – struggling to maintain a meaningful and relevant spiritual presence in a sea of secularism. And there's no doubt about it – that as we face an unknown future as a congregation and as the wider church – we are often anxious and fearful about what lies ahead.

The good news is that we stand in a long line of God's people stretching back millennia – who have often lived in uncertain times and circumstances – wondering what the future holds – or if indeed, there was going to **be** a future at all. We spoke last week of the Jewish people exiled to Babylon in 586 BCE – torn from their familiar surroundings, culture, language and spiritual life – and thrust into a situation not of their choosing or desire. And how Isaiah – a prophet and fellow captive – urged them to hold on and hold fast – trusting that God would give them wings like eagles to move into a future that was waiting to unfold.

In today's scripture, Isaiah further urges them to open their eyes and their hearts to the 'new thing' God is doing in their midst. *"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? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

And Jeremiah – at a similar time in their history – speaks of God's promise in the face of their unknowing and uncertainty. *"For surely you know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to give you a future with hope."*

That's the same promise that those people meeting in Queen Mary School in the Fall of 1911 risked their future on. It's our heritage. It's the past on which we are building our future – as our anniversary logo reminds us. But like our congregational ancestors in those early years – along with the promise must come the resolve to prepare ourselves for the future into which God is beckoning us. It is not enough to wring our hands and bury our heads – to mix metaphors.

About 4 years ago, the church Council began an intentional process of visioning – asking questions like: what will the church look like in 10 years – or even 5 years – and what are the resources, skills, talents and leadership that will be needed? Our church Council members have worked diligently and hard at exploring options like the redevelopment of the property – engaging in conversation not only with the congregational members – but also with the city of Vancouver, BC Housing, and other churches who have recently been involved in redeveloping their buildings and property. When it became clearer that many aspects of redevelopment were not feasible for our particular situation – we began to look at other possibilities and options that might help us to discern where God may be leading us in the future.

A little over a year ago, our church initiated an ongoing conversation with 5 neighbouring Westside United churches – Dunbar Heights, Knox, University Hill and Trinity – to look at ways in which we might support one another and explore together the future God might be unfolding in our midst. It has been a rich time of sharing – which has led to this exciting adventure upon which we are about to embark: a joint consultation of discovery throughout this coming year. A consultant, Chris Corrigan, has been engaged to accompany us – and to help us to obtain the tools we need to engage in deep and meaningful conversations that will lead to greater clarity about the decisions we will need to make to move into the future. The clergy of the 5 churches met with Chris in January to plan for an initial training event next weekend with reps from each congregation. And at that meeting, we explored together what might be some of the powerful questions we might consider diving into together over the course of the next number of months. Here's a sampling of some that we came up with – although it is certainly not a definitive list:

- Why or how does it matter for us to be talking together / what is at stake?
- What skills do we need / what can we learn that will help us enter into this together?
- What are our biggest fears and what are our biggest hopes?
- What commitments or practices will we commit to going forward that will help us trust each other?
- How will proceed when we make mistakes etc. that will keep us moving together
- What posture will we take with the resistance? With those who want to move too quickly?

- What are the real questions we face / are bringing on behalf of our congregations?
- Does God care if there is a United Church on the Westside of Vancouver? And how do we know?
- How important is this process/questioning? How high are the stakes?
- what is the significant question of our congregation that we cannot ignore, that makes us tremble, that will not go away

Next weekend, a Core Team of volunteers from each congregation will be meeting with Chris, our consultant, to learn how to help all of us engage these and other questions that will surface as we have deep conversations over the next number of months. It was also felt that if our 5 churches were going to be working together – we should get to know each other better. And so, the planning team has been working on ways to enable that to happen. Next Sunday is one such opportunity as the congregations of the 5 churches meet together for joint worship at Knox United Church. And another joint worship is being planned for the end of April, here at West Point Grey. This coming year will be an exciting time – one in which we can all participate at some level. I hope that you'll take the opportunity at lunch today to discuss some of this. The members of the Core Team will be sitting at different tables to listen to what is being said.

Our scriptures remind us this morning that God's people have always been called to adventure and risk-taking. Our God is not into status-quo – but is always calling us to stretch ourselves and take a leap of faith into the unknown – trusting that we are not alone as we do so – but grounded firmly in the love and grace of God, who holds our future. In our reading this morning from Luke, Jesus gathers his followers together, commissions them, and then sends them out to do the work of the Kingdom – taking nothing with them but the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Joyce Rupp, in reflecting on this passage, writes the following in her lovely book 'Out Of The Ordinary':

Heal and proclaim ...  
Were the twelve afraid?  
Did they wonder if they could do those things?  
Compared to the quality of your ministry,  
did they feel inadequate and unworthy?  
What persuaded them to go? Your words?  
Your friendship? Their enthusiasm?  
Your deep belief that they could do it?

And you said:  
"Take nothing for the journey."  
What did you mean?  
Trust or more than trust?  
Did you perhaps imply that we can't wait  
until we have all the possible things we need?  
That we can't postpone 'doing'  
until we are positive of our talents?  
That we can't hold off our commitment  
until we are absolutely sure  
we won't make a mistake?

I think of all the excuses and reasons  
we can give for not serving and giving:  
no time, no talent, no knowledge,  
no energy, no assured results.  
You say, "Take nothing.  
Don't worry about your inadequacies.  
I will provide for you.  
Go! Just go! Go with my power.  
Risk the road, risk the work.  
Go! I will be with you.  
What else do you need?"