

**June 25, 2107 MRUC Rev. Debra K. Schneider**

**Matthew 5:1-16**

**The Illumined Life**

According to the gospel of Matthew, *The Sermon on the Mount*, takes place early in Jesus' ministry. He has chosen and called the disciples, and has begun travelling throughout the region teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God, and healing those suffering from afflictions of every kind.

The wisdom and power of God is upon him and flows through him touching, inspiring, and healing wherever he goes. People have taken notice. They seek him out in large numbers. They want to see his face, hear the words he speaks—they want be touched and healed by him.

On this day, as a crowd gathers round, Jesus goes up on a mountainside so that those who have sought him out can see and hear him more readily. His disciples gather round his feet... keeping the crowd at a slight distance so Jesus can speak clearly to them all.

....In yesterday's Toronto Star there is an article by William Littler about Nora Shulman, principal flutist for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Littler suggests to Shulman that one thing which orchestral players agree on is that they hate the conductor.

Shulman's response is thoughtful: "We always hope to be inspired. You can sometimes tell what it is going to be like even before a conductor says a word."

"When Kurt Sanderling came, no one knew who he was and we were talking away. Then he held up one hand, said please, and everyone fell silent. He had that kind of authority."

Jesus has that kind of authority. He raises a hand, speaks a word, and silence sweeps across the jostling crowd.

Driven down those dusty roads by a deep yearning in their hearts, they are hungering and thirsting for a word of hope, a sense of possibility, they are longing to be made whole and well again in body, mind, and spirit—they are yearning for something they can't quite put their finger on... perhaps to simply know joy. Perhaps it is the possibility of joy pulls them to attentiveness.

I invite you to take a moment to imagine yourselves sitting amongst that expectant crowd as Jesus gazes out over you with loving compassion. Imagine hope being kindled as he speaks directly to the cries of your heart. Imagine his voice as his eyes search you out, one by one, and pronounces blessing after blessing after blessing upon you. Hear his words echo within your souls... "Blessed are you... blessed are you..., blessed are you.... blessed are you."

These words fall upon our guarded hearts like a gentle steady rain on a parched and broken landscape. Our thirsty souls marinate in his words soaking them in ... "blessed are you, blessed are you, blessed are you."

As his words begin to work their magic, your shoulders gradually begin to relax, your hands open as if to receive, your faces soften, your breathing grows steady and deep, and tears gather at the corners of our eyes.

Blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of heaven... and in that heavenly realm your lives, your words, your actions, and the quality of the relationships you create with one another make a difference.

You are becoming a part of something much grander than you have ever imagined. Together. Together. We are so blessed!

As each word of divine blessing falls upon our ears, a holy energy flows in and through our lives... our ordinary lives. Spirit flows in our rising up and in our lying down, in our going out and in our coming in, it flows as we share comfort and coffee with a friend, or patiently work out our differences with a neighbor, or make room for a driver in a hurry to move into our lane; it streams through us as we show generosity to a stranger in need, and as we offer forgiveness to a family member who has hurt us; that sacred energy

continues to flow as we stand up for what is right and good and just in this world—and as we stay strong even when doing so brings painful consequences to us.

Those who gathered on that long ago mountainside, and we who gather today are both blessed and called to be a blessing to one another. Through the generations, those of us who listen attentively for the sound of Jesus' voice learn that we are called to make a difference. Most of us are called to a ministry of small things... to be as salt in the stew, bringing out the subtle flavors of the world around us-- to be as a light, that others might catch a glimpse of God through us, and we through them. So that all of us together might find in one another a clarity of good purpose—We are all called to live illumined lives, to shine with the love of God.

### **Angel Presentations: Philippians 4:4-9**

I started offering this award several years ago, because I sensed (and also was told right out!) that we had a small group of people who had been carrying on the work of this church for a long time. They were faithful and deeply committed, and they were tired and more than a little discouraged.

This offering of an angel, this recognition of contribution, was a small thing, but I thought, perhaps this light-hearted and sincere award ceremony would offer a little bit of encouragement... both to those who had been working so diligently for so many years, and to those of you who might be considering participating more actively in the life of the congregation

2016/17 seems a very different year than the one in which I started these awards. There are more hands on board now, Executive Council, Trustees, Special Events, and most of the ministry teams have seen strong participation this year! While we are still small, we have a significantly broader base of support in terms of congregational volunteers.

Those of us who started 2016 together in Earl Nichol Hall were, for the most part, excited about the changes coming to Manor Road, and committed to seeing that everything was done and done well. It seemed that almost everyone pitched in in one way or another! When we walked in the doors of our renovated space on Labour Day weekend the joy was palpable. Since then we have enjoyed a strong and positive year together.

I thank all of you who have come out for worship, for study groups or lunch'n learns, you who have served on ministry teams, on Trustees, who have hosted coffee hour, greeted, ushered, and counted offerings, sung in the choir or played in the band, you who have visited, cooked for, and supported those struggling with health or personal issues, and the list goes on and on!

There is much to rejoice in, so much to commend amongst you all, that I swear to you that you are a community of angels! That being said, today I am recognizing three individuals in particular for the many ways they have contributed and continue to contribute to our life together as church.

**For those of you who don't know Suzi Morris**, you know she is one busy lady, and an energetic and smart one at that! While she has a big job, is a busy mom, and fits a personal life in there somewhere, she still finds time to volunteer and share her precious time, energy, and mad skills with us both as our Chair of Executive Council, as an active volunteer on Outreach, for our special events, and in other ways as well.

Whether at the head of the council table, working in the kitchen for Out of the Cold or Blue Radish, selling tickets at the door, or simply joining us for worship, Suzi comes with energy, enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and a strong commitment to her faith and to her church. Suzi, thank you for all you are and all you do! You are an angel, for sure!

I know without a doubt that our second angel will protest and refuse my claim. Betty Kelman has been around for a long time, and for many years, been in regular attendance to Sunday morning worship, and contributing in quiet ways to our ministry here; but since her retirement from an active nursing career, the scope of her contribution to Manor Road has been breath-taking.

Betty is strongly committed to the care and support of our members through the Congregational Care Ministry Team. Those of you who have experienced serious illness over the past couple of years will attest to what a blessing she is as she does everything from making soup, to helping tidy up when you don't feel well enough to do it, to accompanying you to and sitting with you through doctor's appointments.

Betty is a wonderful baker, frequently contributing her baked goods, to whatever event we happen to be hosting, and is also the cornerstone of our Power Point Team... and I use that word loosely! We need a team!! (And yes, this is a hint!) Betty, I know you don't agree, but today I declare you a Manor Road Angel!

Although most of you may know James Roth for his dramatic flair in the reading of scriptures, or participating in role-plays, what you may not know is that James (and his partner in life, Susanne) is one of those people who just tends to say, 'yes,' when asked to help out with something around this place.

He keeps his eyes and ears open and whether it is punch that needs to be poured and looked after on Christmas eve, furniture that needs to be moved on a weekday, or coffee hour that find itself without a host on a Sunday, when he sees something that needs doing, he just gets 'er done.

With little or no notice, I know I can call on James and if he is able, he will simply say, "Sure, I can do that!" He keeps me on my toes too, and let's me know when he thinks I don't have my facts straight! For those reasons, and many more, James, I declare you a Manor Road Angel!

The Message, Romans 12:1-3 <sup>1-2</sup> So here's what I want you to do, with God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

<sup>3</sup> I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace...