

**June 24, 2018      Manor Road United Church      Rev. Debra Schneider**  
**Psalm 78 & Rev. 22 (Selected Verses) "In the Middle of the City.. A Tree"**

"In the middle of the city, stands a tree, and it's leaves are for the healing of the nations."

When I first came to Manor Road, our congregational logo was a tree... It's image was used on the order of service, on stationary and on other printed documents. Beneath the tree on the logo, were words that read: "In the middle of the city....a tree... and its leaves are for healing." This was a church that declared itself first and foremost as a place for healing. From the first time I saw that logo the image and the words touched me deeply. Perhaps because I was so deeply wounded, and so much in need of healing at the time.

And it was here that I began to heal as I experienced and witnessed again and again and again the kindness of the people who gather here. Over time, as again and again, I experienced and witnessed the dedicated kindness of so many of our members, the words rang true. They still do.

This past week, I was speaking with someone struggling with matters of faith and of belonging. She said, "All I'm really looking for is a place where people are kind....and again, a short time later, I'm just looking for a little kindness. I don't think that is asking too much, do you?"

Over the generations, people have come and gone from this little church that stands in the middle of the city, this church, whose leaves are for healing. And many have found it here. Some have found it through the challenge, the comfort and the hope found through worship or small group gatherings; others have found healing in creating a community of care for one another; and others still have found healing in working side-by-side with others to reach out in compassion and care to people outside of our community who are suffering in one way or another.

Of course, we are community of practice. We are not a community of perfection. While we aspire to live out our faith in words and deeds of loving-kindness and

generosity; from time to time, we fall short of our aspirations. We speak the wrong word. We fail to offer the appropriate gesture. We forget who we are. When we fail in our efforts with those who may have come simply looking for a little kindness... we know sorrow, and do our best to move towards reconciliation and right relationship once again. Sometimes we are successful. Sometimes we have to prayerful leave another's healing to God... or someone else down the line.

This Sunday morning practice of gathering for worship offers a spaciousness in time in which we are invited to reflect on such things, and given an opportunity to remember that we are not God, rather we are instead always pointing beyond ourselves, to a deeper source, to God, Spirit, Goodness, or Compassion...

This act of worship offers us an invitation to anchor our souls in that which resides in the depths of our souls. The act of worship reminds us that while we are not perfect, we are nonetheless beloved by God.

Over the past few weeks, as I have been coming near the end of my time here with you, (nearly 12 years!) I have been sorting-- deciding what to keep, and what to leave behind, what to give away, and what to throw away! Through it all, I have been remembering our time together.... the people who have come and gone, the weddings, the baptisms, the communions, the funerals we have shared... And then there are the round of annual events--Blue Radish, Rummage Sale, Fall Fair, and Santa's Pancake Breakfast.

I have been remembering the removal of pews... slowly at first, and the coming of chairs. Coffee hour moving up from Maude Clugston (revolutionary at first!), and the months of worship in Earl Nichol Hall, and the amazing overall transformation of this space, and the continual transformation of this space from season to season and

event to event. I've been remembering the joys, the disappointments, the laughter, and the tears.

I have been remembering the grand celebration of becoming an Affirming Ministry on our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. And the hanging of the Rainbow flag. A New Vision Statement proclaiming ourselves as open, affirming, and inclusive. A New Logo... A new tree... with a rainbow of colour.... it's leaves for the healing of the nations.

Then there was the decision, in the midst of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to begin the practice of acknowledging the territory during worship.

And the fund we raised... and share... as we contribute to and learn about good work going on beyond the confines of these walls. Suzi going off to Haiti... Teresa Group, the Massey Centre, Out of the Cold at Blythwood Baptist... A new park... opening out to our church... and by design...our church opening out to the people who come there.

Of course, most of all, I have been remembering your faces, your words, your actions. I have been, and am overwhelmed with gratitude. Thank you. Thank you for your faithfulness, your commitment, your love, and your openness to always being made new.

In the middle of the city stands a tree... and her leaves are for the healing of the nations. God Bless you every one.