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CONGREGATIONAL EXEGESIS: TOWARD SHARED PROCLAMATION

by

TRACY CRICK-BUTLER

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2020

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ABSTRACT

Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation

by

Tracy Crick-Butler

Recognizing that theological diversity is a reality in many mainline churches, this thesis considers the value of exegeting the congregation to gain knowledge of the congregation's lived and local theology. That knowledge is then used to write and preach four sermons with the intent of helping both the listener and the preacher deepen their understanding of Jesus. An additional focus is on the challenge for the preacher to make clear and bold theological claims. Using an Action-Reflection method of research, interactive exegetical tools, questionnaires, surveys and a personal preaching journal, this project is carried out by a minister in a new call within a United Church of Canada congregation.

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They say, “It takes a village to raise a child...and to complete a Doctorate of Ministry!” I have been blessed with so many who are part of my village.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TUC	Trinity United Church
UCC	The United Church of Canada

CHAPTER 1

HOW WE GOT HERE

“They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus,’” (John 12:21).¹ For the first century Greeks who had heard about the signs that Jesus was performing, the desire to see and know and experience Jesus was real. After all, they had seen what Jesus was doing in their midst! The blind had received sight. Thousands had been fed in body and spirit. The dead had been brought back to life. It is understandable that they wanted to see him and learn for themselves if all they had heard was true.

For twenty-first Century mainline Christians the desire to see Jesus is not one that is always so clearly articulated. Nor does it always come as a result of people hearing about Jesus in their midst. And yet, learning as a parish pastor and from conversations with colleagues, deep within the hearts of many Christians there is a longing to see Jesus in a way that will help to shape and affirm their faith. With a two-thousand year time-span since he walked the earth people want assurance and affirmation about Jesus. Those who seek to follow Jesus look for answers to questions around his identity and what that means for us today. Who is Jesus and how do we come to know him when we cannot physically see him? What impact does his birth, life, death and resurrection have on us now? How might his teachings shape how we live our lives in the present day and into the future? Is anything that we have learned over the years about Jesus relevant in our world today?

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Many Christians, as least in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe, are today unsure how, or whether, they can continue to subscribe to the historic Christian confession that understands Jesus the Christ to be the One in whom God has been most fully revealed. It is not a lack of desire on the part of these Christians to hold such a view, but an uncertainty about whether it is now possible.²

In a post-modern world where skepticism is rampant and where meta-narratives are quickly dismissed or questioned, and in light of religious pluralism that opens eyes to the beauty of a variety of faith traditions, those who seek to live lives of Christian faith are left with more questions than answers. And the answers that are being provided can feel vague and lifeless to those who are looking to deepen their relationship with Jesus. Post-modernity and pluralism are a challenge for Christian preachers and theologians, in that postmodernism teaches us that there is not a universal truth upon which we can rely. Those “charged with proclaiming the gospel – a message we believe is true in all times and places – find ourselves rendered nearly mute.”³

I have proudly grown up in, been educated and ordained in, and shared ministry in the United Church of Canada. It is my home and it is the place where I feel called to preach and lead. However, this has become increasingly difficult as I have become more aware of the ways in which people struggle with their understanding of who Jesus was and who Jesus is for today’s world. I see a longing for deeper clarity about Jesus in some and a fear of doctrine in others. I also recognize that perhaps people have never been asked who Jesus is for them, nor have they been given the opportunity to articulate that understanding in clear ways. And yet, “telling our

² Catherine Faith MacLean and John H. Young, *Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine Isn’t Dusty* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2015), 39.

³ David Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 19.

story helps shape profoundly what we understand about Christ and who we are in relationship to Christ.”⁴

As a preacher of more than twenty years I have found the challenge of theological diversity and uncertainty affecting how I speak, preach and teach in my congregation, and in how I meet parishioners on the theological spectrum. This challenge has affected my ability to preach with confidence, integrity, and authority. In an effort to meet everyone where I presumed they were on the theological spectrum, I did not take the time to discern exactly where they were at, nor how to effectively create sermons that would speak to their lived Christology.

At the same time I have found it difficult to name my own theological core and to preach from it. The inability to rely upon my denomination’s tradition for a clear understanding and practice of our doctrine makes this even more challenging. What are the “tools” I have to rely upon for preaching? What can I proclaim with confidence? What supports, builds up, grounds, informs preaching? If I am to be a faithful and effective preacher what and whom do I preach?

While the answers have always been sought from other sources, perhaps it is in exegeting the congregation and listening to the expressions of faith of the congregational members, that I will gain clarity about the Jesus they know and the Jesus with whom they can deepen their relationship. Appreciating the congregation’s “unique web of signs and symbols—a distinctive idiom—that binds it together and distinguishes it from other congregations”⁵ will not only help me to understand that congregation’s particular identity, but also their lived Christology.

⁴ Christine M. Bellefeuille, “Preaching to Shape Christian Witness: He Cannot Be the Messiah, Can He?” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2018), 30.

⁵ Leonara Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 15.

If theology is “faith seeking understanding”⁶ as Anselm declared so long ago, then exegeting my congregation to gain a deeper understanding of their faith practices and experience of Jesus will give me insight into their lived theology. This, along with a more intentional understanding of my own theology, will give me the tools I need to preach sermons that lead to listeners having a deepened understanding of Jesus.

Statement of the Problem

As a preacher and ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, I have found that the task of preaching has become increasingly more difficult. The United Church of Canada is a theologically diverse church, and while throughout our history we have written and expressed our faith in creeds and faith statements, there are unclear theological convictions within the church, its’ ministers, and those who sit in the pews. The lack of a clear theological core, specifically a clear and agreed-upon Christology, impacts sermon development and preaching in the congregational context.

During its history, the UCC has signaled the importance of theology in several ways. It has not had a formal creed to which members must subscribe in a literal way. However, it has required members both to offer a profession of their faith in response to particular questions and to state their intention to live as followers of Jesus as conditions for formal membership in the church.⁷

While the intention of this requirement is to be commended, in my pastoral experience, the practice of this requirement does not call members of the United Church of Canada to fully develop, articulate or grow their understanding of or their relationship with Jesus Christ. If

⁶ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1991), 2.

⁷ John H. Young, “Introduction,” in *The Theology of the United Church of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 2.

asked, many in the church would struggle to identify who Jesus is for them and what impact his birth, life, death and resurrection have on their daily living.

In their book *Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine Isn't Dusty*, authors MacLean and Young state, "A faith statement about who Jesus, as the Christ, is for the Christian stands at the very center of the Christian tradition. It is that confession that defines us."⁸ The authors believe that the uncertainty that many mainline Christians have about the identity of Jesus results in a weak Christology or even silence about who Jesus is for those who profess to follow him.⁹

Until we as individual people of faith and I as a minister in the United Church of Canada, have a clearer understanding and expression of Christology, preaching on Jesus Christ will always be a weak attempt at proclaiming the Word. It is difficult to preach on Christ and the Christian life when we are uncertain about who Jesus is and what his life, death, resurrection and ascension mean for us today. It is also challenging to attempt to base one's life on Christ, when we as mainline Christians, are uncertain who Jesus is and what we believe about him.

Out of fear of trying to speak to people on a diverse theological spectrum, my default position (and I hear the same from colleagues) has been to refrain from making bold claims about Jesus. This has perpetuated growing Christians who have a limited understanding of Jesus and influenced a church culture that more readily reflects a good and moral life of helping others rather than being the Body of Christ in the world. I agree with Anthony Robinson's declaration that: "the wells of Scripture, theology, and historic Christian faith are deep and refreshing, and

⁸ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 39.

⁹ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 40.

they are largely untapped in the ongoing life of contemporary congregations,”¹⁰ and I also see the role of preacher as being one that helps to open that tap.

In doing research for this thesis I was reminded that the United Church of Canada has done a great deal of work on studying, expressing and adapting its theology. Through the original Basis of Union Articles of Doctrine in 1925, the Statement of Faith in 1940, A New Creed in 1968 and the recent A Song of Faith (2006), the “UCC has always had a standing committee responsible for studying key theological questions or issues, for developing resources, and for preparing statements for the consideration of the entire church.”¹¹ Our approach to making formal theological statements has been both consultative and conciliar, and involves the courts of the United Church in the decision making. The statements themselves express clarity around the theology of the United Church of Canada and around Jesus. However, in the experience of this United Church of Canada minister, for many ministry personnel and lay people these statements are often unknown, forgotten, not well articulated, or in some cases dismissed as no longer being relevant to the faith we practice and profess.

Bringing even more diversity into the mix, those who serve as Ministry Personnel in the United Church of Canada

are not obligated to offer a literal subscription to the denomination’s doctrinal statements. Rather they are required to say that they are in “essential agreement” with them and that they see the UCC’s statement of doctrine “as being in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.”¹²

¹⁰ Anthony B. Robinson, *What’s Theology got to do with it? Convictions, Vitality, and the Church*, (Herndon, VA: The Albin Institute, 2006), 7.

¹¹ Young, “Introduction,” 2.

¹² Young, “Introduction,” 2.

For some this requirement of “essential agreement” suggests that the UCC has little regard for theology. For others it stresses the importance the church places on theology and its recognition that “while there were external verities in church doctrine, the language in which such truths were expressed was always contextual”¹³ and needed to be reviewed and reworked over time as it took into account changing circumstances and contexts. “Essential agreement” also recognizes that those who serve the church in ministry positions “could have new theological insights or understandings that got ‘lost’ when one required literal adherence or subscription to a statement of faith or specific answers to questions for which only one ‘right’ answer was acceptable.”¹⁴ For those in the United Church of Canada, “essential agreement” allows for fluidity and growth in theology.

While fluidity and growth are permission-giving for some, for this United Church minister it has impacted my confidence and my ability to preach with any authority. Rather than challenging myself to explore theology, discuss changing beliefs and embrace my own theological convictions, I have instead ignored specifically addressing issues of theology and doctrine in my preaching.

MacLean and Young, both United Church of Canada ministers, remind me that “doctrine is a gift. It is a breath of fresh air when everything seems routine. It is finding a new path of adventure when every other way looks predictable. Doctrine is meant to open our minds, to present possibilities, to engage us in transformation.”¹⁵ It is with this understanding in mind that

¹³ Young, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁴ Young, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁵ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 17.

I look forward to studying Christology through United Church of Canada documents, theologians, my own convictions and the lived theology of my congregation.

As a minister going into a new church as its' called minister to preach, having an understanding of a congregation's Christology through their own expression of it, and studying the congregation's context in a way that explores that Christology, will deepen my ability to preach the Word in a way that will speak to my people and empower them to deepen their understanding of Jesus and his call to be in the world as he was in the world.

The purpose of this thesis research will be for this minister, through exegeting the congregation and ethnography, to learn the congregation's understanding of who Jesus is in order to be able to preach to the congregation in ways that speak more engagingly to them and help them to deepen their understanding of Jesus. Understanding that "preaching needs to attend more carefully to cultural context in order that the gospel may be more clearly heard and understood by all sorts of people in all sorts of settings,"¹⁶ I will exegete my congregation to better shape sermons that will help the listener to deepen their understanding of Jesus. An additional purpose of this research will be to preach a four-sermon series on "Encounters with Jesus" in order to help listeners identify for themselves who they believe Jesus is and to enable them to articulate that belief in a way that informs and shapes their faith.

Justification and Rationale

A 2018 decision by the United Church of Canada to allow an ordained minister who publicly and proudly professes she is an atheist, to continue to minister within the church, has resulted in a great number of conversations and various opinions about what the United Church

¹⁶ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 35.

of Canada values and believes in terms of theology, and has left many ministers questioning what it is upon which we should be grounding our faith and our preaching. It has also raised questions for those in the pew as they attempt to determine what they, too, believe. Recent comments printed in the “Letters to the Editor” in the *United Church Observer Magazine*¹⁷ show the diversity of thought on the appropriateness of the church’s decision regarding this matter. These letters also reflect the diversity of thought around what we, in the United Church of Canada, believe and profess about God, Jesus, and the Christian life.

In a recent conversation with a friend who grew up Anglican, but has been an active and faithful member of the United Church of Canada for more than 19 years, she lamented that the United Church needs to figure out what it believes and what it stands for or it might as well not exist. Hers is a frustration with the lack of clarity around theology, doctrine, and what is being voiced at a national church level and within the pulpit. She wants clear theological commitments in which she can ground her faith and longs to be part of a church that will make theological claims that will shape how its members live and strive to be the Church of Christ in the world today.

The variety of ideas, beliefs, backgrounds, professed and suppressed theologies and points of view are vast within the United Church. Some “maintain that being a ‘non-creedal church,’ the United Church adheres to no creed or statement of faith, a view which some people, inside and outside the church, take to mean that the United Church has no theology at all.”¹⁸ Within congregations there are a variety of understandings, theologies and faith expressions.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rebranded as *Broadview* in April 2019.

¹⁸ Michael Bourgeois, “Awash in Theology: Issues in Theology in the United Church of Canada,” in *The United Church of Canada—A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 259.

¹⁹ In the last congregation that I served there were many for whom any doctrine was deemed to be archaic. A member congratulated me one Sunday when the communion liturgy did not specifically use the words “the body

For those who preach, this level of diversity and lack of clear doctrine or identity within the United Church itself makes the ability to craft sermons that speak to the hearts and minds of listeners increasingly more difficult. The challenge becomes, TO WHOM are we preaching and WHAT are we preaching? Or as Paul Scott Wilson stated, the questions might be “‘What truth?’ since truth is hard to find; ‘whose truth?’ since truth seems relative; and ‘which truth?’ since many truths may apply.”²⁰ In an effort not to offend, upset or ostracize listeners, this preacher (and thesis writer) often finds that when it comes to theological clarity it is easier to err on the side of making general statements rather than to make bold declarations of faith. The result is both a lack of conviction for the preacher and a lack of clarity for the listener.

In moving into a new ministry setting it will be important for me, as preacher, to identify my congregation’s understanding of who Jesus is. Allowing the congregation to teach me about their theological lens will deepen my ability to share the Word in a way that speaks to them. Such “teaching” on their part will allow them to find language for their beliefs and begin to articulate their own faith statement about who Jesus is and how this belief shapes their lives of faith. And their articulation of faith will challenge me, as preacher, to preach from a clear theological core that honors who I am as well as reaches the congregation I serve in a way that honors their context.

Thus the thesis topic I have developed is one that needs to be addressed in order to carry out my preaching ministry with integrity. Addressing this question will have relevance for my

and blood of Christ,” as he found those words offensive. I had a guest preacher and United Church of Canada colleague, in a former church chastise those in the congregation who would be foolish enough to believe in the virgin birth, and a woman walk out of the service, refusing to attend worship in a United Church ever again, in anger and horror at what he had said. A parishioner asked me why the United Church rarely speaks about salvation. Additionally at a church meeting one member commented how the real purpose of the church was to care for those less fortunate.

²⁰ Paul Scott Wilson, “Postmodernity and Preaching,” *Touchstone*, 32 no. 1, (Feb. 2014): 16.

new ministry context since the intent is to gain a deeper knowledge of the congregation and the individuals within it prior to preaching a series of sermons that speak to the identity of Jesus as found in scripture. Relying upon the exegesis of the congregation, scripture, tradition, experience and United Church doctrine, sermons will be developed for this thesis to not only be didactic, but also to enable listeners to find points of identification with particular aspects of Jesus' identity. Through participating in the research and offering feedback, it is anticipated that listeners will be able to more clearly articulate the Jesus with whom they identify and about whom they hear in the sermons. I further anticipate that this will, in turn, allow them to deepen their understanding of Jesus and allow them to have clarity around their identity as a Christian.

This thesis topic is relevant to the wider United Church of Canada in that the clear and long-standing reality is that we are theologically diverse, our understandings of Jesus vary and we continue to embrace new expressions of faith. As the church seeks ways to be relevant in the present culture, inclusive of all people and responsive to criticism of its teachings, clergy are being pulled in many directions with very little to ground them in the faith revealed in the New Testament. In recent conversations with colleagues I have discovered there is growing frustration that our lack of a theological core will lead to further decline of membership in the church and will also result in communities of faith that have little or no ties to any type of Christianity.

Anthony Robinson addresses the lack of theological content and clarity in preaching, suggesting that it may “be at the core of the current malaise of many mainline Protestant congregations and denominations.”²¹ By looking at Christendom, Modernity and Post-modernity, Robinson laments that “the term Christianity was emptied of theological content.”²² Faith has

²¹ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 5.

²² Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 10.

come to be viewed more in line with being a good person and living a moral life. Further, when problems arose in people's experiences of Christianity and the church, many changed their understanding and approach to Christianity and the church²³ rather than accepting the challenge to adapt their lives to the radical gospel of the New Testament. Robinson also stresses that "an integral and absolutely vital relationship exists between our core convictions, our theology and our health as congregations."²⁴

Having the ability to preach sermons that speak a clear Christology and that empower others to deepen their own understanding of Jesus has the potential of enlivening the church with those who know what they believe and seek to live it. As Christine Bellefeuille states in her recent thesis,

We as preachers must help people develop language and an affinity for telling the story of Jesus, of God, of the Holy Spirit by telling our own story in our own words. The message of the organization (the church) must be grounded in people sharing their own lived experience of God, and in this way shaping their Christian witness.²⁵

As I exegete the congregation, study theology and preach the sermon series, it is also my hope that this will challenge me to deepen my own understanding of Jesus and find theological expression for my faith. Not only do I anticipate this will transform me as a preacher and as a Christian but will also enhance the ministry I share in my new congregation.

²³ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 14.

²⁴ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 4.

²⁵ Bellefeuille, "Preaching to Shape Christian Witness," 21.

Exegeting the Context

In his work *Knowing the Context*, James R. Nieman states that “contextual study can be a crucial way toward more relevant and engaged preaching.”²⁶ While he expresses that exploring the context is not just another new gimmick for fixing problems in congregations, it is a reflection of his belief that “preaching bears a living encounter between the God we know chiefly through Jesus and a contemporary people that trusts this God as the source of their life.”²⁷ When we preachers preach contextually we are recognizing that God, in Jesus, comes to us in the ordinariness of our day to day lives and can help us to more fully grow in our relationship with God. “We preach contextually, then, not merely because our preaching becomes more relevant but also so it more amply embodies a genuine encounter with Jesus.”²⁸

For one to preach contextually, one must come to know and understand the congregation through a variety of ways. Nieman states that “learning about a context will not happen by chance or good intentions but requires thinking ahead about how you will deliberately study the situation.”²⁹ Through examining the congregation’s culture, participating in its life and work, listening to its stories, observing its interactions, inviting participation and reflection, and offering the opportunity for conversational feedback, preachers can begin the process of comprehending a congregation’s lived and local theology as she/he exegetes the congregation.

This thesis topic will explore whether exegesis of the congregation and creating sermons with knowledge gained from that exegesis can help people deepen their understanding of Jesus

²⁶ James R. Nieman, *Knowing the Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 6.

²⁷ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 6.

²⁸ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 7.

²⁹ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 25.

and give expression to that understanding. If it is found that exegesis of the congregation, specifically as it relates to their understanding of Jesus, can help shape the sermon, and if clear expressions of theology in sermons help people to more clearly define their own Christology, the research may be the catalyst for preachers to more intentionally spend time exegeting the congregation around matters of theology and then find ways to preach it. Again it is Nieman who states that “we have somehow come to believe that the more universally or generically we speak, the more widely we will reach, when in fact such talk actually stands apart from lived reality and therefore appeals only superficially.”³⁰ This statement supports the importance of exegeting the congregation in ways that encourage the preacher to gain a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and how the congregation lives out their Christology, and then preach to that place as an articulation of the congregation’s local theology.

The practice of exegeting the congregation and understanding its local theology can inspire “preaching that can be both local in its address and global in its vision, both fitting for a particular congregation of God’s people and faithful to a transformative gospel.”³¹ Being able to preach in a manner that is responsive to the lived reality and language of the congregation, while maintaining a clear biblical based theological core, has the potential of empowering listeners to deepen their understanding of Jesus and of enlivening the church.

It is also helpful for preachers to remember and to take seriously that “one’s picture of Jesus will always be evolving based on one’s experience with Scripture and the world, and so we might as well be cognizant of, and intentionally participatory in that process.”³² This supports the

³⁰ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 10.

³¹ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 33.

³² David J. Lose, “Texts in Context: Preaching Jesus,” *Word and World*, 29, no. 2 (Spring 2009):193.

importance of congregational exegesis as not only being a one-time event, but as an ongoing practice in the life of pastoral relationships.

As “an exegesis of the situation ought therefore to be done in tandem with an exegesis of the self”³³ another aspect of exegeting the context for this thesis will be for this minister to do some self-exegesis, specifically regarding my own understanding of Jesus and my theological convictions. It will be important for me to be able to identify my “particular theological perspectives in contrast to other perspectives, and also [become] aware of the range of theological perspectives that are present, implicitly and explicitly in [my] congregation.”³⁴ Being able to give voice to my theological convictions around Jesus, while respecting the voices of those in my congregation will allow for both me and others to “see in those complexities the promise of a gospel that is both succinct enough to be accessible and complex enough to be taken seriously in our complicated world.”³⁵ It will allow us to express our “wish to see Jesus” and deepen our understanding of the One we seek to know.

³³ Stephen Farris, “Exegesis of the Congregation, Denomination,” in *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 266.

³⁴ Burton Z Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 5.

³⁵ Lose, “Texts in Context: Preaching Jesus,” 194.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

In the previous chapter I introduced the reader to this writer's struggle with being able to preach a clear Christology in light of: theological diversity within congregations, a lack of clarity in United Church of Canada faith statements, and my own hesitancy to make bold theological claims that may not be held by listeners. I referred to the work of those within the Church who lament a lack of Christology in the pews and who are concerned that the inability of listeners to articulate who Jesus is will lead to further church decline in main-line Protestant denominations.

I further introduced the concept of doing deep ethnographic work within the church community in order to exegete the congregation in ways that will enhance the preacher's ability to preach sermons that will help listeners deepen their understanding of Jesus. This will culminate in four sermons being preached to determine if preaching clear theology in response to the congregation's identity and theological core, can deepen the listener's understanding of Jesus.

Chapter 2 will look at the biblical and theological justification for the work of this thesis. I will articulate and reflect upon my own lack of a clear Christology from which to preach and refer to scripture that convicts me to continue to learn and grow. Partnering with the United Church of Canada's A Song of Faith I will explore biblical ideas of being known by God and Jesus, and in turn, will address how encounters with Jesus deepen listeners' (and biblical characters') understanding of Jesus.

The “Question” of Jesus

As those who call themselves Christians, we have come to trust that our knowledge of God comes to us most fully through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Some theologians believe that we “gain access, as far as humanly possible, to the whole Trinity when we meet Jesus Christ.”¹ Jesus is revealed to us through the New Testament scriptures. In addition some Christians today speak about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

However, while mainline Christians have historically claimed that “one is Christian because one sees God most fully revealed in Jesus as the Christ”² many Christians today struggle with whether they can continue to make that claim. Interfaith relationships, a focus on the historical Jesus, and questions around the divinity and humanity of Jesus, make it more challenging for Christians to know what to believe and how to express their faith in Jesus.³ While it is important for preachers to recognize that “although we remain people of faith, the particulars of our theological convictions can and do change, both in our own personal history and in the history of the church,”⁴ preachers need to have a solid starting point from which to preach.⁵ This reiterates the need for preachers to have a good understanding of their own theology as well as to exegete the congregation they serve in order to know and deepen their listener’s understanding of Jesus.

¹ Mark Rutledge, “GOD: My Favorite Rock Band” in *Three Ways of Grace* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2010), 54.

² MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 36.

³ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 36-38.

⁴ Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 2-3.

⁵ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 5.

My practice of ministry is grounded in my belief that the Christian life, as modelled after Jesus, has to the ability to transform lives and bring healing, both to individuals and communities. The life of Jesus reveals how God is active in the world and Jesus' encounters with people, as written about in the New Testament, invite present-day Christians to deepen their understanding of Jesus and consider how that understanding can influence their lives. As a preacher one of my roles is to encourage listeners to explore and deepen their understanding of Jesus as part of their living faith (and I hold that this is a role for other preachers as well).

In John's Gospel, after Jesus has healed the man born blind, he is surrounded by his disciples, some Pharisees and the blind man. In the midst of his discourse where Jesus names himself as the gate through which people will go in and out and find pasture, Jesus contrasts himself to the thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:9-10). Jesus tells his listeners, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). As a preacher my prayer is to preach in such a way that sermons encourage today's listeners to discover the One who offers them abundant life. In order to do that, my sermons and those of other preachers need to clearly articulate aspects of Jesus' identity that point to the ways in which he offers abundant life.

The question for this researcher and preacher often becomes "Who is the Jesus about whom I preach?" In a denomination where there is a great deal of theological diversity about the identity of Jesus, trying to gain awareness and clarity about the Jesus whom I am called to preach is necessary if I am to preach with integrity. While the premise for this thesis is that exegeting the congregation will inform sermon development and preaching in ways that deepen the listener's understanding of Jesus, a further premise is that it is imperative for the preacher to exegete the self to identify his or her own theological convictions.

When I reflect on my own understanding of Jesus, what continually presents itself in my mind is Jesus' encounter with his disciples. In Matthew's Gospel they have entered into the district of Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asks them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). The disciples give several different responses before Jesus pointedly asks, "But who do YOU⁶ say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). As a preacher I feel that Jesus is asking me that question each time I stand up to preach the Gospel, and I do not answer it with Peter's clarity or conviction. Through exploring scripture, the United Church of Canada's statements of faith, exegeting myself, and in prayerful reflections and preparation for the sermons that will be preached for this thesis, it is my deepest hope that this researcher and preacher will be able to answer Jesus' question with a deeper understanding of Jesus. It is also my hope that while this work derives out of my personal questions and convictions within my own church context, that insight gathered will apply to other preachers and congregations as they, too seek to deepen their understanding of Jesus.

Having found beauty and wisdom in the United Church of Canada's A Song of Faith,⁷ I will partner with it as I explore the biblical foundations that influence the preaching of Jesus.

The God to Whom Jesus Points

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

⁶ Emphasis mine.

⁷ This 2006 document is an articulation of the United Church of Canada's faith as it is expressed in our current context. It, along with the 1940 "Twenty Articles of Doctrine and the 1968 "A New Creed" is a subordinate standard to the Doctrine section of the United Church of Canada's "Basis of Union". These documents will be further discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Yet,
in love,
the one eternal God seeks relationship. (The United Church of Canada A Song of Faith)⁸

Ours is a God who wants to be known. In God's self-revelation through the act of creating the universe, through the life and ministry of Jesus, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and in encounters that surprise and astound us, God continues to reveal God's self in ways to make God known to God's people. And yet,

many serious Christian people do not experience the presence of a living God in their lives. The church may talk about a God who is near to us, speaks to us, and works in our individual lives and in our world. But many people experience only the distance, silence and absence of God.⁹

The reasons for this lack of experience of God are diverse and are beyond the scope of this research, however Shirley Guthrie suggests that perhaps our distance from God is a result of many people continuing to maintain old conceptions of God that no longer speak to them.¹⁰ If Guthrie is correct, then it would seem that the role of the preacher is to invite the listener to explore their ideas, understandings and beliefs about God. The role is to teach the living traditions of our faith¹¹ and to "provide those who gather for worship with resources to enable their faith to inform how they live their lives. It is to enable them to make meaning. It is about equipping the saints. It is about the cure of souls."¹² It is about helping our listeners come to know God in a personal and intentional way.

⁸ The United Church of Canada, *A Song of Faith A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada* (2006), 1.

⁹ Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1968), 107.

¹⁰ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 108.

¹¹ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 6.

¹² MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 9.

“Scripture urges humankind toward a vibrant, ongoing relationship with the Divine. This relationship includes a broader “knowing” of God than a mere mental and conceptual acknowledgment of a divine being.”¹³ It is knowing God through encounters with God that shape people’s lives or call them toward transformation in some way. The Bible is full of stories of people encountering God as God makes God’s-self known to them.

In the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve encounter God as God walks with them in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2). God talks with Adam and Eve, provides for them and gives them instruction for how they might live full lives in the Garden. God also makes God’s-self known to them when God sets limits on them and they are banished from the Garden of Eden as a result of their rebellious seeking of wisdom and desire to be equal to God.

Hagar, the Egyptian slave-girl, conceives Abram’s child. When she is dealt harshly with by Sarai, she runs away and God seeks her out near a spring of water in the wilderness. After this encounter with God, where Hagar is assured of her son’s future, she names the God who spoke to her “El-roi,” for “she said, ‘Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?’” (Genesis 16:13). Hagar encounters God again, when Abram sends her and her son Ishmael away from the family, out into the wilderness (Genesis 21). In fear of watching her son die in the heat, Hagar begins to weep and in her distress and her isolation, God again makes God’s-self known to Hagar as God provides water to drink and a promise for Ishmael.

At the Jabbok River, having sent his family and his servants ahead of him to appease his brother Esau, Jacob encounters God in a physical way (Genesis 32). The biblical story describes that “Jacob was left alone: and a man wrestled with him until daybreak” (Genesis 32:24). And

¹³Cynthia Halvorson, “Real People, Real Faith, Real God: Encountering the Divine in Preaching Biblical Characters” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2018), 15.

when the wrestling is done, having knocked Jacob's hip socket out of place, Jacob knows that he has seen God face to face (Genesis 32:30).

In her thesis on preaching biblical characters, Cynthia Halvorson reminds readers of God's desire to be known and to be in relationship with God's people.

The prophets speak to a deep knowing of God that expands beyond intellectual assent. Jeremiah reported the Lord saying, "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart" (Jeremiah 24:7). The author of Jeremiah also states that The LORD declares, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Whether using "heart" language or "mind" language, having the entire being involved in relationship with the Holy is woven throughout the Bible.¹⁴

These encounters in the Old Testament recount some of the stories of the biblical witnesses who have experienced the God who wants to be known. We find further scriptural witness to God seeking to be known as God reveals God's-self through the presence of Jesus.

Encountering Jesus

We find God made known in Jesus of Nazareth,
and so we sing of God the Christ, the Holy One embodied.
We sing of Jesus,
 a Jew,
 born to a woman in poverty
 in a time of social upheaval
 and political oppression.
He knew human joy and sorrow.
So filled with the Holy Spirit was he
that in him people experienced the presence of God among them.
We sing praise to God incarnate.
(The United Church of Canada A Song of Faith)¹⁵

¹⁴ Halvorson, "Real People," 18.

¹⁵ A Song of Faith, 6.

God wanted to be known so much so that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. When “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14), Jesus revealed that “at the heart of the incarnation lie divine love and divine grace, a love and grace that come to us in human form.”¹⁶ Jesus embodied God’s love and revealed God among God’s people. Jesus came that we might experience that love in tangible ways, so that we might share it with others and reflect the reign of God that “Jesus came to Galilee....saying ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near’...”(Mark 1:14-15).

As Jesus walked among people in his public ministry, he taught them about God and how they could live in relationship with and in response to God, as they lived with one another. In coming to understand Jesus it is important to remember that Jesus’ identity and his actions cannot be separated, as “it is in the telling of the story of Jesus, in the narration of the whole gospel – his message, ministry, passion, and resurrection – that we hold together the person and work of Jesus.”¹⁷ It is through encounters with Jesus and the message of Jesus that God’s people have come to know God in Christ more fully.

In the calling of the disciples Jesus invited those he called to “come and see” (John 1:39), so that they might not just learn *about* Jesus, but so they might build a relationship with him and with God. In his interactions with others, in his teachings, in his prayer life and his death on the cross, Jesus pointed people to God in an attempt to make God known. He referred to culturally familiar situations and everyday images (coins, sheep, nets, seeds) to teach them about God. He told them parables that revealed attributes of God that he wanted people to know (such as the Extravagant Father and God as the Diligently Searching Shepherd). In the Sermon on the Mount,

¹⁶ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 38.

¹⁷ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 143.

Jesus as teacher assured listeners that God was with them in every situation of their lives (Matthew 5) and he taught his followers ways in which they could help reflect Jesus' way of being in the world and the reign of God he came to bring.

In his encounters with individual people, Jesus revealed God's healing love and grace. The Samaritan woman who was in search of water, astonishingly received the life-giving water of acceptance and transformation (John 4). After Jesus invited himself into Zacchaeus' home and life, Zacchaeus, the tax-collector gave half of his possessions to the poor and worked toward restitution with those he had defrauded (Luke 19). The man born blind was restored to his community (but sadly not to the synagogue from which he was kicked out) when Jesus restored his sight (John 9) and Lazarus' family found new life when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11).

Scripture teaches us that in their encounters with Jesus, people not only came to know God, but also came to know themselves more fully as loved by God. Their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth leaves them changed in some way.

Nicodemus sought out Jesus to better understand just who Jesus is. Saul asks, "Who are you, Lord?" as he lay stunned on the Damascus road. As Nicodemus and Saul grow to understand who Jesus is, they grow to understand who they are in relationship to Jesus. Saul is a remarkable example of professing who he is based on a certain set of assumptions about who Jesus is, and then, upon learning something new about Jesus, altering his witness and ultimately his self-understanding and identity profoundly.¹⁸

Many who encounter Jesus find themselves unable to contain their enthusiasm about his life and work, and they become evangelists. The shepherds who arrived at his birth place made known what they had heard and returned glorifying God (Luke 2). The Samaritan woman could not keep herself from going back from the well to the city and declaring "Come and see the man

¹⁸ Bellefeuille, "Preaching to Shape Christian Witness," 32.

who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” and thus becoming the first evangelist in the Fourth Gospel (John 4:29). The two blind men who have their eyes touched, regain their sight and follow Jesus (Matthew 20). After recognizing the Risen Christ, Mary Magdalene went and announced (the biblical term for preaching) to the disciples “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18). The disciple Peter went from one whose faith could waiver enough that he might drown (Matthew 14) to one whose faith in Jesus enabled him to heal a man born lame (Acts 3).

It is through their encounters with Jesus that people in the biblical stories come to deepen their understanding of who Jesus is and how following him might change their lives. Their first-hand experiences shape their relationship with Jesus and in turn have influenced how followers of Jesus have continued to know him.

Throughout history, and with growth and change in the Church, many in our churches have come to know Jesus as a result of the stories preachers and teachers teach, and the recitation of creeds by the worshipping community. The hymns that we sing, the sacraments we observe and the Holy Days that we celebrate have all helped to inform people’s images of Jesus. In the United Church of Canada we often speak of encountering Jesus as we come into community and are the hands and feet of Christ to one another.

We sing of a church
 seeking to continue the story of Jesus
 by embodying Christ’s presence in the world.
 We are called together by Christ
 as a community of broken but hopeful believers,
 loving what he loved,
 living what he taught,
 striving to be faithful servants of God
 in our time and place.
 Our ancestors in faith
 bequeath to us experiences of their faithful living;
 upon their lives our lives are built.

Our living of the gospel makes us a part of this communion of saints,
 experiencing the fulfillment of God's reign
 even as we actively anticipate a new heaven and a new earth.
 (The United Church of Canada A Song of Faith)¹⁹

The Church is the living Body of Christ in the world today, and as such, if we are to be that Body it is imperative that we have an understanding of Jesus' identity. While the world has benefitted in many ways from a Church that focuses on a Social Gospel (the social reform, outreach, and sense of community has shaped the country of Canada), the Christian Church in Canada has not fared well in maintaining its core beliefs as many have moved further and further away from our ability to name and claim Jesus. This movement has resulted not only in weak Christologies but has also diminished the understanding of the incredible potential of the Church to be that living Body. This thesis will attempt to provide some evidence that preaching is one way of reaching listeners and equipping them with a deepened understanding of Jesus and also to potentially shape their faith and living.

Proclaiming Jesus in the United Church of Canada

For the United Church of Canada, Jesus Christ has been described as the “chief cornerstone” of the of the church's understanding of the faith.²⁰ The UCC “has typically sought to understand Jesus in a way that is faithful to scripture and the ancient creeds, and open to what it hears the Spirit saying to it in the present.”²¹

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word
 passed on from generation to generation
 to guide and inspire,
 that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place

¹⁹ A Song of Faith, 7.

²⁰ Don Schweitzer, “The Christology of the United Church of Canada” in *The Theology of The United Church of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 127.

²¹ Schweitzer, “The Christology of the United Church of Canada,” 145.

from the human experiences
and cultural assumptions of another era.
God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.
(The United Church of Canada A Song of Faith)²²

“The church’s faith is grounded in truths that are timeless. These truths, however, must be embraced anew by Christians of each generation and stated ‘in terms of the thoughts of their own age and with the emphasis their age needs’ (Statement of Faith, 1940).”²³

Because Jesus is fully God, he cannot be captured in a creed or a church, in our best ideas or our best plans, in our temples or our institutions. There is an otherness, a transcendence, and a mystery about this one who is fully God.²⁴

Since the 1940 Statement of Faith, the UCC has emphasized the need to understand Jesus in relation to its current context, affirming the teachings of the ancient creeds, but not simply mechanically repeating their teachings. Instead, it is important to keep “employing them as guidelines for articulating who Jesus is and what he means in the present.”²⁵ That said, our knowledge of Jesus cannot be solely academic or historical. It needs to be “faith knowledge”²⁶ that affirms that in Jesus, God is present and working to bring God’s people into relationship with God and one another.

Colin Morris describes the church’s search for Jesus this way:

There is danger in all personal rediscoveries of Jesus. We may be dishonest or deluded in our portrayal of him and scale down his mandate for us to tie in with what we can comfortably meet. Basing all our action on a personal understanding of Jesus lays us

²² A Song of Faith, 5.

²³ A Song of Faith, 2.

²⁴ Robinson, *What’s Theology got to do with it?* 120.

²⁵ Schweitzer, “The Christology of the United Church of Canada,” 145.

²⁶ Migliore *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 142.

open to the egotism and partiality in our nature that distorts our vision. Yet the necessary corrective is not to dash back into the thickets of dogma and take the word of other ages for who Jesus is and what he asks of us. The answer, surely, is to pursue the search for Jesus in the company of others who are asking the same questions and risking the same challenges; who will offer us the wisdom of their experience and counsel, strengthening us where we are timid and curbing us where we are extreme. Because the truth by its nature is healing and redemptive, the search for it will create genuine community rather than intensify individualism. Community for Christians is a working necessity, not a dogmatic requirement for faithfulness.²⁷

Morris's description is a reminder that discerning one's understanding of the identity of Jesus and deepening that understanding cannot be done in isolation. The work of the community of faith is to intentionally spend time together exploring questions, sharing beliefs, seeking answers from lived experiences and growing in faith. The exegesis of the congregation then becomes not solely the work of the preaching minister, but also the ongoing work of the faith community.²⁸

Summary

The Risen Christ lives today,
 present to us and the source of our hope.
 In response to who Jesus was
 and to all he did and taught,
 to his life, death, and resurrection,
 and to his continuing presence with us through the Spirit,
 we celebrate him as
 the Word made flesh,
 the one in whom God and humanity are perfectly joined,
 the transformation of our lives,
 the Christ. (The United Church of Canada A Song of Faith)²⁹

²⁷ Colin Morris, *Include Me Out! Confessions of an Ecclesiastical Coward*, (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF and Stock, 1968), 112.

²⁸ The role of the faith community in exegesis will be further explored in the chapters that follow.

²⁹ A Song of Faith, 7.

Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" is one that followers of Jesus have been attempting to answer since it was first asked of Jesus' early disciples. Throughout history theologians, historians, homileticians, hymn-writers and many others both within and outside the Church have searched for ways to answer this question and express a living faith in Jesus. As the biblical accounts show, it is often through encounters with Jesus that people come to know him more fully and deepen their understanding of who he is and how he can impact their lives.

Christians today continue to search for a clear articulation of Jesus' identity. With theological diversity in the United Church of Canada (and one could argue, much of Christianity), this becomes more challenging for both those within congregations and the ministers who preach to them. Through exegeting the congregation and the self, and intentionally finding language and expression for one's Christology, preachers can help listeners deepen their understanding of Jesus as they speak with clarity and conviction.

In this chapter I looked at biblical stories that reveal the importance of knowing God and being known by God. Of specific interest were the scripture accounts of people being changed by their encounters with Jesus as he met them in their lives. Jesus' use of his community's vernacular, common experiences and tangible objects allowed him to speak to his followers in ways they could hear and that deepened their understanding of God through him. These biblical illustrations support the importance of preachers exegeting and knowing their congregations so that preaching may have greater impact on listeners, and thus deepen their understanding of Jesus. This chapter further grounded my argument for the importance of clear Christology as I looked at the United Church of Canada's A Song of Faith and how Jesus is expressed through its words.

Chapter 3 will review literature pertinent to the importance of clear Christology expressed in preaching. It will look extensively at works written by United Church of Canada theologians and homiletics, to better determine current practices and expressed beliefs within the UCC and will review literature on the task of congregational exegesis and ethnography.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 explored the biblical and theological foundations that shape the importance not only of clearly articulated Christology in preaching, but also the importance of preachers exegeting their congregations so that sermons can reflect a deep knowing of those who listen. In partnering with the United Church of Canada's A Song of Faith I addressed how knowing Jesus and being known impacts listeners and their understanding of Jesus.

In Chapter 3 I will review the scholarship, writings and practices of those who have influenced not only the research and writing of this thesis, but also have inspired my ministry and my love of preaching. I will introduce the writings of pertinent United Church of Canada scholars, theologians and practitioners, as well as a recent United Church of Canada DMin student whose insight into some of the theological challenges in the United Church clearly articulated the unique perspective of many in the UCC. Reading on the wider United Church of Canada and how its history has had an impact on its approaches to theology and doctrine over the years, provided a solid grounding for how to move forward with this research, however the extensive and informative history of the United Church is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹

¹ Supplementary material on important milestones and practices in the UCC and a more thorough look at the history of change in the UCC theological statements can be found in Appendix A.

The writings of trusted homiletics and preachers who are committed to theologically grounded preaching and who recognize the challenges of theological diversity in both preachers and listeners will be reviewed. Select works of James Nieman and Lenore Tubbs Tisdale, as well as the lecture notes and practical suggestions of Shauna Hannan have informed my understanding of the importance of congregational exegesis, ethnography and context.

The United Church of Canada

The work of Phyllis D. Airhart in *A Church With the Soul of a Nation* gives insight into the United Church of Canada and its role in “proclaim[ing] a social gospel—not an endorsement of a partisan political or economic agenda, but an orientation to life that connected faith and community.”² Through exploring the history of the UCC from the time of its origin with the founders’ intention of it being a national church, through to the 21st century, Airhart recounts how history and culture impacted one another and shaped theology. Complaints that its “theology was too liberal and its social agenda too politically left wing”³ came up against “proponents of the new reformation [that] had in mind a church that existed for the sake of the world”⁴ with worship that was designed to prepare the congregation for outreach out in the world. Airhart’s referencing of Pierre Berton’s book *The Comfortable Pew* and the impact it had on Canadian culture and the United Church, supported by statistical evidence of church decline, expanded my understanding of how closely culture was tied to the ministry and mission of the United Church of Canada. The author explained further division in the UCC through the

² Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), xix.

³ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, 225.

⁴ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, 231.

recounting of the history of the separation between a church focused on evangelism and one focused on the social gospel. Airhart's work reminded this researcher that while the history of the United Church of Canada is not long, it has had an impressive impact on the faith development of those in the church. The importance of the social gospel, inclusivity, justice and remaining culturally relevant, has shaped how faith is expressed and lived out in the United Church of Canada. While the UCC has been on the forefront of many societal changes, the connection between social justice and theology has not always been clearly articulated or relied upon.

In his book *After Evangelicalism: The Sixties and the United Church of Canada*, author Kevin Flatt looks at when the United Church parted ways with evangelicalism and the impact that this has had on theology, teachings, and church health. His address of the socio-political climate of "the sixties" (1958-1974) and the influence this had on the church helps to provide a deeper understanding of how greater theological diversity came into play, specifically as it pertained to The New Curriculum that "permanently changed the character of Christian education in the United Church and had thereby altered the character of the denomination as a whole."⁵

In *The United Church of Canada: A History*⁶, the writings of church historians and theologians further traced the inter-connectedness of Canadian history, culture and the UCC. Sandra Beardsall, Joan Wyatt, John H. Young, Tracy Trothen and others defined the implications that culture and the United Church had on one another, including topics of the War, the

⁵ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, 75.

⁶ Don Schweitzer, editor, *The United Church of Canada: A History* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012).

Depression, Medicare, the Temperance Movement, the question of married women and ordination,⁷ Aboriginal People, gender and sexuality. This history, along with chapters in the book addressing thematic issues on worship, ministry, mission goals, conflict around understanding of Jews and Palestinians, gave this researcher a solid understanding of the many social, cultural and religious questions that influenced the shaping of theology in the United Church of Canada.

The Doctoral Thesis of United Church minister Elisabeth R. Jones “(Re)Discovering a Midrashic Biblical Imagination for the Progressive-Liberal Christian Community”⁸ was a helpful companion in her explanation and analysis of the culture of her United Church congregation and the UCC as a whole. Jones’ definitions of “liberal” as it pertains to her congregation’s self-identity, was a definition with which I could resonate in reflecting on my own experiences in the United Church of Canada.

“Liberal” has also been the adjective used by members of the congregation (and the denomination as a whole) to describe their sense of identity across the Christian spectrum, and by it they have also inferred a liberal social ethic operative in its longstanding commitment to social justice, the equal place of women in church and society, and the full participation of LGBTQ2A+ folk in the life, work and leadership of the church,⁹

Her review of Progressive theology, including the works of Bradley T. Morrison, John Pentland, Bruce Sanguin and Gretta Vosper¹⁰ provided deeper insight into the writings of UCC colleagues, and I appreciated her reflection on those UCC ministers who “push the left edges, and

⁷ Sandra Beardsall, “And Whether Pigs Have Wings” *The United Church of Canada A History* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012) 109.

⁸ Elisabeth R. Jones “(Re)Discovering a Midrashic Biblical Imagination for the Progressive-Liberal Christian Community” (St. Paul, MN: Doctor of Ministry Thesis, 2018).

⁹ Jones, “(Re)Discovering a Midrashic Biblical Imagination,” 50.

¹⁰ Jones, “(Re)Discovering a Midrashic Biblical Imagination,” 52-54.

demonstrate to [her] what can happen when a Christian community becomes untethered from its biblical heritage.”¹¹

Theology in the United Church of Canada

As John H. Young states, the question of whether the United Church of Canada has a theology, has been posed many times both by its critics and even by its members.¹² The church’s statistical decline “is often interpreted as a consequence of a faulty approach to theology or flawed assumptions about the task of the church.”¹³ However, in the research and writing of this thesis, I have been reminded that it is often a lack of awareness within the denomination of its theology and theological traditions that have exacerbated criticism about the church’s theology, when in fact the United Church has a rich history of theological discussion.¹⁴

In using the term ‘United Church Theology,’ it is important to recognize a distinction between the UCC’s four theological statements from different periods in its life, statements that comprise the Doctrine section of the BOU, and a number of other expressions of theology. These other expressions have a less ‘formal’ status, but they have contributed to the ethos (of which theology is a part) of the UCC in the sense of a lived theology.¹⁵

“*Awash in Theology: Issues in Theology in the United Church of Canada*”, written by Michael Bourgeois speaks to the variety of ways that theology is practiced in the UCC. He

¹¹ Jones, “(Re)Discovering a Midrashic Biblical Imagination,” 54.

Jones’ statement is greatly appreciated by this writer, as many in the UCC are hesitant to voice or critique the theology of others within the UCC. This topic has been a controversial one in the church and was referred to in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

¹² John H. Young, “Introduction” *The United Church of Canada A History* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Pres, 2012),1.

¹³ Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, 293.

¹⁴ Young, “Introduction,” 1.

¹⁵ Young, “Introduction,” 3-4.

argues that because the UCC does not have one creed or confession, and that as a result of theology that emerges out of commissions,

congregational study groups; educational programs at United Church lay training centres and theological schools; responses to reports by ecumenical organizations; popular and scholarly articles and books by United Church members; and articles, editorials, and letters in United Church-related publications like the *Observer*, *Aujourd'hui Credo*, *Mandate*, *Touchstone* and *Women's Concerns*,¹⁶

there is actually an abundance of theology in the UCC. By tracing the history of some of the changes, specifically as they apply to Revelation and Scripture, Bourgeois argues for two ways that the United Church might better engage its theological diversity; studying and teaching its own theological history, and clarifying what it means to be part of “an ongoing and developing faith tradition.”¹⁷ These two ways will help dispel the ignorance of many in the United Church to its own theological diversity.

In the book *The Theology of the United Church of Canada*, UCC ordained ministers, theologians, professors, historians and church leaders set out to answer the question “Does the United Church have a theology?”¹⁸ Each chapter of the book addresses a different theological concept or doctrine. Writers explored the history of the specific doctrine, including its place in the UCC. While each of the writers wrote from their own theological perspective, I found this book extremely helpful as I navigated the changes to doctrine expressed in the United Church of Canada’s four subordinate standards; the Basis of Union (1925), Statement of Faith (1940), A New Creed (1968) and A Song of Faith (2006).

¹⁶ Michael Bourgeois, “Awash in Theology: Issues in Theology in the United Church of Canada” *The United Church of Canada A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 260.

¹⁷ At a meeting of the 2000 General Council of the United Church of Canada, this statement was used when the Committee on Theology and Faith was commissioned to produce a timely and contextual statement of faith.

¹⁸ Young, “Introduction,” 1.

Don Schweitzer's chapter "*The Christology of the United Church of Canada*" was particularly relevant to my research and the four sermons that were preached, as he studied how "the person, work and relationships of Jesus Christ have been understood in The United Church of Canada."¹⁹ Schweitzer's explanation of A New Creed being "intentionally drafted so that people across a broad range of theological perspectives could profess it with integrity"²⁰ in response to a widening and contentious gulf dividing theological liberals and conservatives, was a clear iteration of what I had come to understand in much of my previous reading. His further explanation that the post-Second World War shift from "adherence to understandings of the faith defined by ecclesiastical institutions, toward an understanding of faith in one's own terms"²¹ was a simplified yet helpful summary that this researcher could later articulate in conversation with parishioners.

Rob Fennell's work on the United Church's historical approach to the Bible²² along with the writings of Paul Scott Wilson, Edwin Searcy, Philip Clayton and others²³ on postmodernity's impact on theology, culture and the church, were all important works that lead to the finalization of my thesis proposal.

Theology in Preaching

The impetus for my thesis was born out of my frustration and questions around how to preach with integrity in the midst of theological diversity. Thus, my research needed to focus on

¹⁹ Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada," 127.

²⁰ Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada," 137.

²¹ Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada," 137.

²² Robert Fennell, "How Does the United Church Interpret the Bible?" *Touchstone* 26 no. 3 (Sept. 2008): p. 31-42.

²³ These readings are referenced in the bibliography.

the importance of theology in preaching and the necessity of recognizing the “theological diversity present, though largely hidden, in today’s congregations.”²⁴

In his work, Anthony B. Robinson states that Christendom, modernity, and a popularized therapeutic sensibility have led to the erosion of Christian theological content and authority²⁵. In looking back at the latter half of the twentieth century he reflects that:

Christian faith had been so shorn of theological substance that it became, in the worst-care scenarios, a cobbled together mis-mash of being really nice and pursuing the latest social causes and enthusiasms, with a dash of new age spirituality. As a new century dawned, those who turned to the churches of the once mainline traditions to encounter God and to be formed and transformed by the gospel and a way of life congruent with the gospel too often found little of substance. Many wondered, “Where’s the beef?” to borrow a once popular advertising slogan. What they found instead, not always but certainly too often, were congregations that were increasingly bedeviled by dysfunction, decline, and discouragement. Congregations and clergy of the once mainline suffered a loss of theological confidence. Seekers found congregations and denominations that had lost touch with their core convictions and what difference they made.²⁶

Robinson’s work spoke to my frustration and fueled my belief that good theology is an important part of preaching and Christian discipleship.

The book by United Church of Canada preachers and theologians Catherine Faith MacLean and John H. Young, *Preaching the Big Questions Doctrine Isn’t Dusty*, while extremely practical in its hands-on approach to preaching doctrine, was also revealing to me about the depth of struggles that UCC preachers have when it comes to preaching clear theology. Their book became motivational for me. I found it helpful in sermon writing as I wrestled with my own understanding and articulation of several doctrinal concepts, and I turned to it frequently

²⁴ Burton Z Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 5.

²⁵ Anthony B. Robinson, *What’s Theology got to do with it?* 14.

²⁶ Robinson, *What’s Theology got to do with it?* 15.

to be reminded of the importance of deepening listeners' understanding and my own understanding of Jesus.

In their work, Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure contend that without theological reflection we do not have faith and that “theology presupposes the faith of the individual and the confessing community.”²⁷ Their research indicates that preachers need to identify their particular theological perspective and recognize that it may be in contrast to the implicit and explicit perspectives among their congregational members.²⁸ They distinguish the importance of theological pluralism from theological relativism (defined as: “toleration of all interpretations on the ground that there is no valid basis whatsoever to evaluate conflicting claims”²⁹) and in their work *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, walk the reader through hidden determinants that impact one's theology including; theological modes, theistic worldviews, and particular doctrines. They encourage preachers to create a theological profile using their tool and accessing this tool to bring theology into their sermons. They state that “it is not enough to *think* theologically, as important as that is. The theology that you think must find its way into the language of your sermons.”³⁰

Cooper and McClure stress the importance of theology, not only for theology in and of itself, but believe that theologically improved preaching has the potential to revitalize the Church. I found myself agreeing with their contention that the:

sermon, in principle, is central to the life and thought of a worshipping community. It brings together the fundamental working powers and authorities of a living faith. In the context of a worship service, the sermon is the meeting place of God, Scripture, and the

²⁷ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 4.

²⁸ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 5.

²⁹ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 5.

³⁰ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 103.

present; it provides a home for faith, theology, and culture; it is where a biblical understanding of reality is confessed, interpreted, and related to our experience of reality; it is where we hear whispered to us an inner word of God addressing the particularities of our lives and times; and, finally, it is where gospel and judgment encounter us.³¹

Their work gave validation to my own belief that preaching matters in the life of the congregation and my commitment to better understanding the theological core from which I am called to preach.

While much of the writing that I relied upon from James Nieman pertained to contextual preaching and ethnography, I appreciated his reflections on theology in preaching.

Theology in the sermon calls for eventful and dynamic language, words that evoke more of an encounter with God than a pondering of concepts. Preaching therefore often uses unfolding narratives, multivalent images, or probing dialogue in order to convey a complex relationship between God and humanity that develops over time. Theology is then heard not as fixed assertions that silence further talk but as a language world we can inhabit because it creates the texture of those actual experiences through which we are able to meet God.”³²

Nieman believes that the sermon should “be treated as a fully theological practice”³³ while lamenting that theology is now more often treated as irrelevant, which has a detrimental impact on sermons. He gives a helpful and applicable explanation of primary and secondary theology, and introduces the idea of situational, biblical and local prompts for doing theology. Nieman invites the preacher to remember that while theology in the sermon is important, one “cannot address every theological topic in a single sermon or even over time. Preachers must decide which concerns are most pressing or revealing.”³⁴

³¹ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 2.

³² James R. Nieman, “Theology of Proclamation” *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, eds Wilson et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 493.

³³ James R. Nieman, “Theology in the Sermon” *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, eds Wilson et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 489.

³⁴ Nieman, “Theology of Proclamation,” 493.

The Gift of Preaching

While throughout my calling as an ordained minister I have loved and sought to grow in my role as preacher, I have also wrestled with what that role really entails. When I was newly ordained I often questioned “Who am I to preach the Word of God?” Throughout the years my questions have become on the one hand more simple, and yet, also more profound. “WHY do we preach? What are we trying to accomplish? Does our preaching matter?” These questions are not ones of doubt, but rather a need to more fully explore the work of preaching, which I value.

They are also questions that I have personally posed to Paul Scott Wilson and Anna Carter Florence at various workshops. And while their answers have been stimulating and inspiring, as have the writings of countless other respected homileticians, I have come to learn that keeping my questions at the forefront of my preaching reminds me each Sunday of the importance and privilege of what I do as I wrestle with the Word of God and proclaim a message to God’s people.

Throughout the research and writing of this thesis I have held onto the wise words of one of my preaching mentors, David Lose, as he states that preaching is a:

creative and even provocative enterprise where the preacher is called upon to articulate the meaning, value and relevance of the faith in light of the present challenges and opportunities facing the people of God in attendance to hear the sermon.³⁵

In specifically reading for this thesis with congregational exegesis at the fore, I found Lose’s further definition of preaching to support the need for contextual preaching. He defines preaching as “a constructive, contextual, and creative act by which the church’s faith convictions come to contemporary and concrete utterances addressed to a particular people living at a

³⁵ David J. Lose, “Systematic, Constructive Theology” in *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, eds Wilson et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 487.

particular time and place.”³⁶ As a frequent visitor to David Lose’s past articles in *Working Preacher* and more recent articles at ...*in the Meantime*³⁷ I have learned and benefitted a great deal from his encouragement to invite the congregation into the preaching moment by helping them to reflect and articulate what the Word means to them and how it applies to their lives. His practical suggestions and examples of how to engage listeners during, before and after hearing the sermon, gave insight into ways that I might exegete the congregation and then shape sermons based on the knowledge gained from that exegesis. His writing also reminds this preacher of the importance of crafting sermons that help the listener to connect God’s Word, the sermon and their lives.

While Lose advocates for the importance of contextual preaching, he is also very clear about the content of the sermon. “Whatever other topics may occupy the attention of the preacher, announcing, proclaiming, and interpreting the work of God in Christ as witnessed to in Scripture and as it relates to our life in this world stands at the center of the preaching enterprise.”³⁸ In several of his chapters found throughout *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching* and in his various books, Lose addresses the need for clear and well-articulated theology. His reflection on the tension between constructive theology and preaching³⁹ gave clarity to my questions around the role of theology in preaching. His comment that

theologians have discovered that their sermons do not simply or even primarily reflect their theology, but that their theology often must catch up with their experiences of

³⁶ David J. Lose, “Systematic, Constructive Theology,” 487.

³⁷ *Working Preacher* (a ministry of Luther Seminary) and ...*in the Meantime* (David Lose’s personal writings) contain weekly writings on ways one might preach the Lectionary reading for the coming Sunday. They can be found at <https://www.workingpreacher.org/> and <https://www.davidlose.net/>.

³⁸ David J. Lose, “Systematic, Constructive Theology,” 489.

³⁹ David J. Lose, “Systematic, Constructive Theology,” 486-489.

preaching and parish ministry so as to describe what they have learned and preached in the pulpit.⁴⁰

reiterated my own need to more intentionally read, reflect upon and address theology in sermons.

A recently published article by Stoorvogel, de Jong and van Vurren focused on factors in a sermon that elicit change in listeners.⁴¹ This qualitative study confirmed that “researchers tend to underestimate the change effect of sermons”⁴² and sought to determine what, if any, factors of the sermon most impact listeners. Through their work the writers identified three categories of influence: “a) connection to the process, b) presenting old truths in a new fashion, and c) factors related to the personality of the preacher and the hearer,”⁴³ and change was effected in the spiritual, behavioral and self domains. Of particular relevance to this thesis were the findings that sermons could impact people’s views about God and their perceived connection to God.⁴⁴ For the purpose of my work I focused on Stoorvogel et al’s research on the connection listeners experienced between their personal life/process and the sermon. This led to further reflection on my part about the importance of exegesis not only in terms of more corporate realities, such as demographics, rituals and values, but also having a deep commitment to knowing the pastoral lives of those to whom I preach. If the “hearer’s life circumstances create a new openness to receive the message,”⁴⁵ the importance of connecting the sermon with the personal processes of

⁴⁰ David J. Lose, “Systematic, Constructive Theology,” 488.

⁴¹ Henk Stoorvogel, Mark van Vuuren and Menno de Jong, “Sermons That Have Changed My Life: A Qualitative Study of the Factors in Sermons that Elicit Change” *Homiletic Vol. 44, No. 1*, (2019):13-30.

⁴² Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Have Changed My Life,” 13.

⁴³ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Have Changed My Life,” 16.

⁴⁴ Stoorvogel, “Sermons That Have Changed My Life,” 17-18.

⁴⁵ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Have Changed My Life,” 20.

hearers is even more relevant than I initially believed. This was important learning for me as I crafted the sermons preached for this project.

Paul Scott Wilson, in his writing, teaching and preaching⁴⁶ always brings listeners back to God in Christ. He reminds preachers of the importance of ensuring God is present and acting in the sermon. While this seems obvious, Wilson notes that “God is missing in many of our sermons.”⁴⁷ He laments the lack of God’s grace in preaching (as articulated in the sermon, and perhaps even in the minds and hearts of those who preach) and encourages preachers to proclaim the Gospel with boldness, creativity and passion. Wilson’s writing and personhood have inspired my work, my faith and my love of preaching as he has challenged me to always put God at the center. This shaped my preaching for this thesis and is also reflected in the journal I kept throughout the project.

In her Doctoral Thesis “Preaching to Shape Christian Witness: He Cannot Be the Messiah, Can He?” Christine M. Bellefeuille addresses the importance of biblical witness and testimony. While her research did not speak directly to mine, I was personally inspired by her writing and her reminder that:

We who claim to be or strive to be Jesus’ disciples must learn to speak about God in order to clarify our own identity as disciples. And we speak to gain clarity about the Christ to whom we cleave and to the particular brand of faith to which we ascribe. This is not the same thing as being able to quote chapter and verse or make profound theological proclamations. The necessity for putting words to our proclamation is to make a claim about who we think God is and who we are in relationship to God and, within that claim, to come to greater understanding about ourselves and our God.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ I have read several of Wilson’s books, attended workshops he has led, taken at least two classes with him and have been privileged to share many conversations about preaching and this thesis. This reflection is my synthesis of his teaching, rather than any direct quote. I pray that it is a true reflection of his thoughts.

⁴⁷ Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 20.

⁴⁸ Christine M. Bellefeuille, “Preaching to Shape Christian Witness,” 30.

Bellefeuille's thesis was an important reading for me as I continued to exegete myself throughout the writing of this thesis and in preaching four sermons aimed at helping the listener to deepen their understanding of Jesus.

Who is Jesus?

The countless authors who have shaped my own understanding of Jesus over the years cannot possibly be named, and yet there are writers whose work and preaching informed the writing of this thesis and the sermons that I preach(ed). Frequent companions as I craft sermons that include solid theology and biblical accuracy include the writings of Karoline Lewis, David Lose, Matthew Skinner, N.T. Wright, Shirley Guthrie, Daniel Migliore, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and others who have a gift of clearly articulating who Jesus is and can be for Christians. I have read and appreciate the historical-critical writings of John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, Amy Jill Levine and others. I find that their work informs and challenges my understanding of Jesus, however, does not easily translate into preaching⁴⁹.

Recently I have found the work of United Church of Canada writers to be not only stimulating to my preaching, but also reassuring as I struggle to articulate my own theology within the UCC context. As previously expressed, the 2015 publication of *Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine Isn't Dusty* by Catherine Faith MacLean and John H. Young gave clear and practical suggestions for preaching on topics that include; Sovereignty of God, Christology, Atonement, Grace and Salvation, Sin and Regeneration, among others. Their premise that our

⁴⁹ Much of the reading I did of these authors was to better understand the broader theological spectrum within a former congregation. The writings of Marcus Borg in particular, resonated with some parishioners who wanted to hear more of Borg's ideas in my sermons.

understanding of Jesus is paramount to our faith as Christians encouraged me to specifically focus on listeners' understanding of Jesus in my research work.

The newly published book *The Theology of the United Church of Canada*⁵⁰ has been a rich resource for this thesis, sermon development and a growing appreciation of the theological spectrum in the UCC. Through the writings of a variety of United Church of Canada preachers, historians and theologians, the origin, history, changes and application of several UCC doctrines were studied. This led to a clearer understanding of the four UCC subordinate standards and clarified how theology in the United Church of Canada continues to develop and be expressed. Don Schweitzer's chapter on "The Christology of the United Church of Canada"⁵¹ reminds readers that the idea that "Jesus must be understood contextually, in relation to the time and place in which the church lies, has been a consistent mark of the UCC theology"⁵² since the 1940 Statement of Faith. His exploration of Jesus in the four subordinate standards, several UCC statements, and through "Christological titles, images, or understandings that have not been officially endorsed but which have been popular or significant in the UCC,"⁵³ provided this researcher with an in-depth overview of Christology expressed in the United Church of Canada. While this understanding is relevant and foundational to how I go forward in preaching and articulating theology, it is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁵⁴ However it does explain how

⁵⁰ Don Schweitzer, Robert C. Fennell, Michael Bourgeois eds., *The Theology of the United Church of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019).

⁵¹ Don Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada" *The Theology of the United Church of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 127-154.

⁵² Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada," 138.

⁵³ Schweitzer, "The Christology of the United Church of Canada," 127.

⁵⁴ Detailed notes and a further exploration of UCC theology can be found in Appendix A.

theological diversity, specifically as it pertains to the person of Jesus Christ, is so prevalent in the church. The time-period in the UCC of when a person initially learned about Jesus and whether they continued to grow and develop that understanding, may determine how listeners relate to Jesus today. Recognizing this reality, along with the importance of context and culture for listeners, will help this preacher to preach sermons that are attentive to various listeners' understanding of Jesus while working to deepen it.

David Lose, recognizing the complexities of the various portrayals of Jesus, encourages preachers to “see in those complexities the promise of a gospel that is both succinct enough to be accessible and complex enough to be taken seriously in our complicated world.”⁵⁵ Lose argues that as preachers and as people, we all have a picture of Jesus (hermeneutical lens) that helps us to make sense of scripture, and encourages preachers to explicitly state that picture in order to use it more effectively and “use all Scripture to affirm, stretch or challenge it.”⁵⁶ He states that “whatever choice you make about which dimension of Jesus to preach, do so in good conscience, knowing that there is no avoiding such a choice. But also do so in bold faith.”⁵⁷ Lose's writing took the theological aspects of the identity of Jesus and put them into a homiletical context to better enable this preacher to recognize the connection between theology and preaching.

In his book *What's Theology got to do with it?* Anthony B. Robinson also addresses the person and work of Jesus Christ, that he feels can be expressed in two questions: “Who is Jesus, and how does he help us?”⁵⁸ Robinson critiques Gabriel Fackre's work as he explores Fackre's

⁵⁵ David J. Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads, How the World – and Our Preaching- is Changing*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 194.

⁵⁶ Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads*, 194.

⁵⁷ Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads*, 195.

⁵⁸ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 113.

four models of the work of Jesus Christ. Looking at Jesus as example and teacher, as substitute and savior, as conqueror and lord, and as presence, Robinson looks at the historical, biblical and theological justification for each of these models. He reflects that Fackre's models suggest that more than one understanding of Jesus is legitimate and different ways of understanding Jesus have a place in the "broad tradition of the church."⁵⁹ "Just as the body of Christ is made up of many parts, so the understanding of the work of Christ across time and cultures cannot be reduced to one authorized and final version."⁶⁰ Robinson further argues that the core convictions a congregation has about Jesus "are crucial to congregational vitality, for they both fundamentally ground and enrich the life of congregations,"⁶¹ and he stresses the importance theology plays in the health and vitality of congregational life.

Exegeting the Congregation – To Whom Are You Preaching?

For the preacher who ministers within a particular congregation the importance of exegeting the congregation and being aware of the context in which one preaches, can help to shape sermons that speak to the hearts and minds of listeners. While many preachers may be aware of a congregation's demographics ("age and gender spread of the congregation, its racial or ethnic makeup, the socioeconomic status of the listeners in comparison to the wider community, the general education level of the listeners,")⁶², the task of exegeting the

⁵⁹ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 129.

⁶⁰ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 129.

⁶¹ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 133.

⁶² Stephen Farris, "Exegesis of the Congregation, Denomination" *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, eds Wilson et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 266.

congregation and coming to understand its local theology, is one that requires foresight, commitment and intention.

The course “Preaching as the Word of God in Context” taught by Shauna Hannan⁶³ provided practical resources for congregational exegesis that I relied upon in my research. Hannan’s methods of exegeting the congregation specifically pertain to sermon preparation and helping the listener to more fully engage the Word of God as heard in sermons. Her tools, including the Contextual Questionnaire and the KWHL Chart⁶⁴ became part of my weekly ritual as I prepared sermons to be preached during the research phase of my thesis, and my questionnaires and surveys were created in response to several questions she posed in regard to how people hear sermons. Hannan introduced me to the feed-back and feed-forward processes as part of sermon preparation and her invitation to explore the scripture from different cultural perspectives impacted how I read and exegeted scripture for this thesis.

In her book *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale defines local theology as, “theology crafted for a very particular people in a particular time and place.”⁶⁵

When preaching is viewed as local theology, the congregation is engaged in the hermeneutical conversation from the outset. The pastor also approaches text selection and interpretation in the mode of ‘priestly questioning,’ asking the questions and raising the issues that arise out of congregational life.⁶⁶

Tisdale looks at contextual preaching as requiring the preacher to bring together the interpretation of the texts of Christian tradition with the texts of congregational life and

⁶³ Taught as a core course in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Luther Seminary June 2019.

⁶⁴ The Contextual Questionnaire and KWHL Chart are further explained in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) xii.

⁶⁶ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 95.

activity,⁶⁷ and encourages preachers to become skilled ethnographers. She provides seven symbols for congregational exegesis and walks the reader through a method of analyzing the text of the congregation by identifying its worldview, values and ethos.⁶⁸ The author gives helpful tools for moving from context to sermon preparation and reminds preachers that:

engagement with the congregation and its subculture throughout the sermon preparation process not only help to ensure that the preacher will “name God in the world”⁶⁹. It also encourages the preacher to name God in the world *the congregation actually imagines*.⁷⁰

James R. Nieman’s book *Knowing the Context* names preaching that attends to context as “grounded work” in that it “narrates something particular and concrete”⁷¹ and speaks to hearers in their own lives. He argues for the need for preachers to have a direct and intentional focus on context, and a strategy for exegeting the congregational context in order to gain “insight into faithful people and what drives or constrains their faithfulness, especially the transcendent dimension of their lives.”⁷² Nieman’s use of frames, tools and signs as methods of ethnography are demonstrated as he walks through and explains a case study that employs several of the methods he discusses.

In my exegesis of the congregation of Trinity United Church I relied upon many of the tools Nieman introduces in his book.⁷³ Participant observation, semi-structured interviews in the form of cottage meetings, artifact and place study, all gave insight into the congregation and I

⁶⁷ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 56.

⁶⁸ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 56-90.

⁶⁹ This quotation refers to a quote of David Buttick’s in Tisdale’s work.

⁷⁰ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 97.

⁷¹ James R. Nieman *Knowing the Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 10.

⁷² Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 35.

⁷³ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 35-51.

enjoyed finding creative ways to use the tools in my own context (as discussed in Ch. 4). His distinction between indexical (what the sign shows)⁷⁴ and iconic (what the sign performs for users)⁷⁵ signs was helpful in my own analysis of the congregation and also in self-exegesis.

Exegeting the Self - The Preacher Knowing the Preacher

In his article “Exegeting the Self” Stephen Farris articulates that “whatever else preachers take into the pulpit, they always take themselves. It is always appropriate, therefore, for a preacher to engage not only in an exegesis of the text or of the situation, but also of the self.”⁷⁶ In light of my personal need to preach with integrity and to speak from a theological core that is my own, as well as help listeners deepen their understanding of Jesus, the importance of self-exegesis was relevant to my thesis.

Keeping in mind Stoorvogel et al’s findings that the personality of the preacher is a category of influence in how sermons brings about change, specifically as it applies to likeability and knowledgeability that create perceived authenticity in the preacher,⁷⁷ moving into a new congregation to preach required the building of trusting relationships. Stephen Farris argues for the importance of a preacher’s words being congruent with their actions, reminding this reader that in Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion, ethos, “the perceived character of the preacher, is most effective.”⁷⁸ The time-honored writings of Augustine teach the preacher that WHO she/he

⁷⁴ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 56.

⁷⁵ Nieman, *Knowing the Context*, 56.

⁷⁶ Stephen Farris. “Exegeting the Self” 267. *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, eds Wilson et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 267.

⁷⁷ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons that Changed My Life,” 26.

⁷⁸ Stephen Farris, “Exegeting the Self,” 267.

is and how they live their lives is an important aspect in how a message is heard. “The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.”⁷⁹

To put this into practical terms, Farris addresses how in self-exegesis a preacher must look at the characteristics and tendencies that most impact the task of preaching.⁸⁰ How we read and interpret scripture, the doctrines and preaching themes to which we gravitate or avoid, who we are in comparison to our listeners (our likes, interests), and how we see ourselves versus how others see us, are all points of reflection and self-exegesis for the preacher.⁸¹ Cooper and McClure also address the importance of preachers becoming conscious of their own particular theological perspectives, even as they are aware of those that are implicitly and explicitly present in their congregations.⁸² They stress that when a preacher’s theological consciousness is heightened, theology takes on a more significant role in how scripture is interpreted and how events in one’s time are analyzed, which then has an impact on sermon development and preaching.⁸³ These writings convict me, as preacher, to be even more intentional in developing and understanding my own theological core, and then to preach from that place with confidence.

This was further reiterated in David Lose’s *Preaching at the Crossroads* where he implored preachers to remember that “our task as Christian theologians and preachers is not to

⁷⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1958), 164.

⁸⁰ Farris, “Exegeting the Self,” 268.

⁸¹ Farris, “Exegeting the Self,” 268-269.

⁸² Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 5.

⁸³ Cooper and McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit*, 6.

prove the faith claims we make but instead to witness to the truth we perceive.”⁸⁴ This resonated with me throughout the sermon series (and beyond) as I sought to preach both contextually with my congregation in mind, and from a place of my own theological truth that was grounded in solid United Church of Canada doctrine.

Further reading on self-exegesis did not come from one particular writer but rather from small glimpses of wisdom in the writings of several homileticians and lecturers. Augustine, Brown Taylor, Carter Florence, Farris, Hannan, Lewis, Lose, Robinson, Thompson,⁸⁵ Wilson and others all spoke and wrote about the importance of preachers knowing themselves, being aware of their own social-cultural location, lens and worldviews, and preaching from a place of one’s core convictions. This includes the commitment to study, self-exegesis and intentionally deepening one’s own faith. It also involves taking risks, sometimes confronting one’s own and the congregation’s personal beliefs, and opening one’s self to see how God is working in the world and in the sermon.⁸⁶ The writing of Leonora Tubbs Tisdale summed this up beautifully when she wrote “the interpretive task regularly requires of the preacher a willingness, amid prayer and faithful inquiry, to make tough decisions and to leap, trusting oneself and one’s congregation to a God who is fully capable of using even our missteps to God’s glory.”⁸⁷

Filling in the Gaps

While their work may not be referenced in this thesis, there are several writers who shaped the original proposal and provided insight into the final thesis topic. Paul W. Jones’ work

⁸⁴ David Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads*, 21.

⁸⁵ Dr. Lisa Thompson taught “BP 7587 Gender, Power and the Pulpit” at Luther Seminary June 2017.

⁸⁶ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Changed My Life,” 21.

⁸⁷ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 94.

on theological worlds for both the preacher and within congregations⁸⁸ gave language to my struggle with understanding the impact of theological diversity. Mark Allan Powell's work⁸⁹ focusing on how polyvalence impacts what listeners hear and the different ways in which laity interpret meaning addressed ways to deal with the dissonance between what is preached and what is heard. Several United Church of Canada authors, including Jeff Seaton's book *Who's Minding The Story?*⁹⁰ gave an more in-depth look at the history, theology and practices of the UCC.

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature that most impacted the writing and research of this thesis. An overview of writings by pertinent United Church of Canada authors provided relevant information for the history, culture and theology of the UCC. The importance of theology in preaching and the role of preaching were expanded upon by several respected theologian and homileticians, as was the section on the need to clearly define Christology in preaching. With a focus of my thesis being on the impact of ethnography, congregational and self-exegesis I hope to have grounded my work in the writings, theories and practical applications of those who advocate the need for this important work.

In the next chapter I will lay out the methodological framework for an Action-Reflection Model of research that describes the work of this thesis. I will introduce the tools used and the

⁸⁸ Paul W. Jones, *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) and *Worlds Within a Congregation Dealing With Theological Diversity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *What Do They Hear? Bridging the Gap Between Pulpit and Pew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

⁹⁰ Jeff Seaton *Who's Minding the Story? The United Church of Canada Meets A Secular Age* (Eugene, Oregon: PICKWICK Publications, 2018).

methods of generating Qualitative Data employed to further expand my exegesis of the congregation of Trinity United Church.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the previous chapter I described that throughout my ministry I have wrestled with how to preach in a manner that helps listeners deepen their understanding of Jesus and grow in their faith. The opportunity to intentionally explore the possibility of this has been realized in the research for my thesis “Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation.” This chapter will describe how by employing an Action-Reflection Model of research and relying upon Qualitative Data, I will retrieve data through action research, participant-observation, questionnaires and surveys. A particular initial focus will be on ethnographic work within the congregation to gain a better understanding of who they are, and how they live and express their faith. Through an initial baseline questionnaire, survey responses to four sermons preached, and a final questionnaire, I will measure possible change in people’s self-described understanding of Jesus and how that understanding shapes their faith.

While this work is particularly relevant to my own context as a preacher beginning a call to a new congregation, it is hoped that any findings in this research will be relevant and applicable to other preachers. The task (that does become a joy and privilege when done with a pastor’s heart) of studying the congregation and learning about the lived reality of listeners is one that can be done at any time in the life of a pastoral relationship.

Research Context

The research for this thesis took place within the context of Trinity United Church in Ingersoll, Ontario. Ingersoll is a small town of approximately 12,500¹ people and is located along the Highway 401 corridor. Trinity is one of nine places of worship and the only United Church of Canada in town. According to their Ministry and Mission Profile² Trinity is a congregation with 236 households under pastoral care (in 2017), with 108 identifiable financial givers and an average weekly attendance in worship of 110 people. They place a high priority on worship and pastoral care, value music and are working to grow their children's ministry programs. The church is used six days a week for community programs and has been a presence in Ingersoll since 1804. For structural reasons the sanctuary was closed in Nov. 2012. It was renovated, redesigned and re-opened in Nov. 2017. The congregation is very proud of their worship space and made very intentional choices about its design. According to its Mission Statement Trinity United Church "seeks to teach a life-giving and inclusive Christian faith by nurturing spirituality, uplifting worship, and service in our community with core values of justice, wisdom, respect, and hope."³

The former minister of Trinity United Church retired June 30, 2019 after a twenty-one year tenure. He was instrumental in helping the congregation to complete their extensive renovation of the sanctuary and was a beloved member of the community. He left a healthy

¹ Statistics Canada Web-site, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0386&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&SearchText=Ingersoll&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=0386&TABID=1&type=0>. Accessed Jan. 13, 2020.

² A document completed by the Pastoral Charge that provides self-identified demographics. Trinity United Church was required to complete this as part of their call process for a new minister.

³ Trinity United Church, *Mission and Ministry Profile*, 2019.

congregation⁴ that, while grieving the retirement of their long-time minister, was ready to welcome new leadership.

Exegeting the Congregation

Through studying and coming to know the congregation of Trinity United Church, it is anticipated that the knowledge gained will help me, as preacher, to gain a deeper understanding of the congregation's faith practices and lived theology. Learning and honoring the congregation's vernacular and traditions will also help to minimize the stumbling blocks to hearing the Gospel that are "occasioned by the humanness of the preaching event and the inadequacies of communication on the part of the preacher."⁵ By engaging in a variety of ethnographic techniques and creatively inviting participation from the congregation in self-identifying who they are and their current understanding of Jesus, data will be gathered to help this preacher craft sermons that are more contextualized, which in turn will allow for the Gospel to be more fully heard.⁶

Church Advertisement

On October 1st, 2019, I officially began as the called minister at Trinity United Church. However, the research for this thesis and my ethnographic study of the congregation began in the final year of my participation in the DMin program at Luther seminary, when I first became aware of Trinity's search for a new minister. As part of their call process Trinity completed a

⁴ The term "healthy congregation" is my reflection on a congregation that is inspired, happy, working together and looking to the future with hope.

⁵ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 34.

⁶ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology*, 35.

Ministry and Mission Profile as required by the United Church of Canada when a congregation is calling a minister. Trinity also produced a well-written advertisement that described their congregation and what they were looking for in their next called minister. This advertisement captured me the first time I read it and spoke of a community whose core values resonated with my own. Through interviews and negotiations around accepting the call, my desire to know this congregation grew, and these meetings presented me with a wonderful opportunity to get to know the people with whom I would be sharing ministry, while also doing initial ethnographic work to meet the requirements of my thesis.

In an e-mail to the Church Board⁷ prior to officially beginning, I invited them to reflect on the advertisement that they had used in their search process. They were asked to 1) read through the ad and underline any words they thought were important (quick response, significant words), 2) go through the ad a second time and circle words that are important to them, and 3) using another color writing tool to go through the ad a third time and circle words that they believed were vital for/reflective of Trinity United Church at this time (See Appendix F). At the September Board meeting the Board reflected back to me their responses, and this allowed for further conversation about the current needs for ministry at TUC and how the Board viewed the congregation, ministry and their vision for the future.

Congregational Timeline

At an October meeting of Trinity's United Church Women group (UCW) I was the guest speaker and invited the women into a time of teaching me about who they were as individuals

⁷ The Church Board is the governing body at Trinity United Church, made up of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and up to 6 representatives to the various committees. They meet monthly and their main focus is named as strategic leadership.

(women were invited to introduce themselves, tell their involvement with Trinity, how long they had been participating in the congregation and anything else they wanted me to know at that time). I also invited them to tell me about the history of TUC. An approximately 20 foot long by 3 foot wide piece of paper was attached to the wall of the gathering space with a timeline drawn on it. The timeline extended from 1800 to 2025. Beginning at the year 1900 intervals of every 25 years were marked (i.e. 1925, 1950, 1975 etc.) and the women were invited to tell me things that they knew historically or that they personally remembered about the church. Initially much of this information was gathered from their memories. However, as their interest grew some went in search of artifacts and documents within the church to give further information. Notes were inscribed on the timeline at the appropriate times in history. The women were encouraged to think about world and national historical events that impacted the congregation (such as war, church union, social issues) as well as local and congregational events (including calling a new minister, conflict, significant losses). The data from the timeline was recorded.

Congregational Self-Identifying

During Sunday morning worship on Anniversary Sunday (October 25th), in an attempt to help the congregation self-identify who they are and their perceived strengths, I began my sermon by inviting the congregation to respond to the question “If someone new were coming to this church, what would you want them to know about Trinity? How would you describe this church and congregation?” People spoke their responses out loud and responses were written on flip-chart paper (Appendix H).

Coffee, Conversation and Community Gatherings

Through Sunday morning worship announcements, the church bulletin and Facebook⁸ the congregation was invited to attend one of two Coffee, Conversation and Community gatherings that took place Tuesday October 29th at 7:00 p.m. and Tuesday November 5th at 10:30 a.m. The different times were chosen to reach a variety of people. At the first gathering participants met in the board room where, over refreshments, they were asked to introduce themselves telling who they were, their involvement at Trinity and anything else they thought it was important that I know about them and their relationship with the congregation. They were then invited into the newly-renovated sanctuary where they were asked “You have just redesigned your worship space and could choose to do anything with that space. What did you choose to put in here and why?” Responses were shared verbally, recorded in my notes and discussed.

The group was then invited to draw a group picture of Jesus, based on what they know about him. This entailed people coming up to a flip chart (or asking one young boy in attendance to draw it for them) to add features to Jesus as they would describe him (such as facial features, clothing, crown, surrounded by people). As each feature was added they were asked to explain why they felt that feature was part of Jesus (for example Shepherd’s staff because he described himself as the Good Shepherd).

At the second gathering, a similar process was undertaken with a few variations. As a result of mobility issues for some of the participants, we did not move into the sanctuary.

However, the same question was asked about the design and décor of the sanctuary. Responses

⁸ Bulletin and Facebook Announcement: Coffee, Community and Conversation. Come out to help Rev. Tracy get to know the Trinity community, and spend time together. You are invited to a gathering on Tues. Oct. 29, 7-8:00 p.m. or Tues. Nov. 5, 10:30-11:30 a.m. in the parlour. Looking forward to seeing you there.

were written on a flip-chart so all could see the responses. The group was similarly asked to introduce themselves at the outset and participate in drawing the collective picture of Jesus.

At both gatherings there was the opportunity for the group to ask me questions as a way to facilitate their ability to get to know me. For each question I posed of them, they were able to ask a question of me. My responses were given verbally.

Observation and Conversations

In his book on Qualitative research, Tim Sensing makes reference to the benefit of field notes that “consist of descriptions of what is being experienced and observed, quotations from people observed, the observer’s feelings and reaction to what is observed, and field-generated insights and interpretations.”⁹ These notes can be derived from participant-observation and conversations with congregational members and those associated with the congregation. As a new minister at Trinity United Church, every interaction I have and the observations I make create data to help me grow in knowledge of the congregation and gain a deeper understanding of their theological lens. While all of this data has not been recorded in designated filed notes within the pages of this thesis, it has emerged in the methods of exegesis I have used, the questions I have asked, the sermon examples I used in preaching and in my reflective journal.¹⁰ This data also shaped many of my interactions and pastoral encounters with the congregation.

⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research A Multi-Methods Approach to Project for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 2011), 180.

¹⁰ Please see Appendix R for the reflective journal.

Encounters With Jesus – A Four Sermon Series

As part of the thesis “Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation” four sermons were written and preached. Scripture for the sermons was chosen to correspond to the statements about Jesus made in the United Church of Canada’s A New Creed. Sermons were to consider knowledge gained from exegesis of the congregation, responses to questionnaires and surveys, and examination of the cultural exegesis and the preacher’s self-exegesis.

In an attempt to allow for maximum variation sampling, the opportunity to participate in the research was extended to the entirety of the Trinity congregation through personal announcements on Sunday mornings, bulletin announcements¹¹ and Facebook. This allowed for the possible mix of age, gender, length of membership, and theological convictions.¹²

Participants attended an information meeting following Sunday worship. Details of the thesis and the research were shared, as well as the expectations of participants. Each participant was required to sign an Informed Consent and was assured that their responses would be anonymous. To maintain anonymity the research assistant assigned each participant a Participant Number to be written on each completed Questionnaire and Survey, and all documentation was submitted to the Research Assistant. Sixteen people participated in the research.

¹¹ Bulletin and Facebook Announcement: Rev. Tracy invites you to participate in research that will be of benefit to her Doctor of Ministry (DMin) thesis, “Being Known: How Exegeting the Congregation Can Help the Listener to Deepen Their Understanding of Jesus”. Participants will be asked to attend a 15 minute information meeting following worship on Sun. Oct. 27, 2019. As part of the research participants will be asked to complete an “Informed Consent” form, complete two questionnaires (one at the beginning and one at the end of the research) and a survey after each sermon (Nov. 10, 17, 24 and Dec. 1). Participant responses will be kept anonymous. If you are interested, please attend the information meeting on Oct. 27, 2019 or contact Rev. Tracy.

¹² Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 84.

Questionnaire #1

In order to get a base-line for people's understanding of Jesus and how that understanding currently shapes their faith, life and actions, participants were asked to complete Questionnaire #1 prior to the beginning of the sermon series.¹³ The questions were of an autobiographical qualitative nature and asked participants to self-identity their thoughts and actions. The qualitative questions included, but were not limited to: "Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?" "What has helped you to know this?" "Is there a Biblical story or scripture reading that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?" "What is one claim about Jesus that leaves you feeling unsettled? Please explain." "What is one question you have about Jesus?" "Does your understanding of Jesus shape your faith? Please explain." "Does your understanding about Jesus shape how you live your life? Please explain."

The responses were read by me in order to exegete the theological lens and faith practices of those participating in the research, and thus to preach sermons that would help deepen the listener's understanding of Jesus.

Sermons

During the course of the research 4 sermons were preached on different aspects of Jesus' identity that are referenced in the United Church of Canada's *A New Creed*. Sermon # 1 was based on John 15:12-17 where Jesus declares his commandment that we love one another. This pertained to the Creed that declares Jesus, "who works in us and others by the Spirit"¹⁴. John

¹³ Please see Appendix C for Questionnaire #1.

¹⁴ United Church of Canada, *A New Creed*, 1964.

4:4-29 was the scripture for Sermon #2, and explored Jesus as Living Water, as he “reconciles and makes new”¹⁵. Sermon #3, preached on Christ the King Sunday was based on Luke 23:33-43; the story of Jesus’ crucifixion, exploring the Creed’s claim “to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope”¹⁶. The scripture for Sermon #4 that was preached in Advent was John 1:1-2, 14-18, with the sermon focus being on “the Word becoming flesh and living among us.”¹⁷

Due to time constraints of beginning my ministry at Trinity United Church, the research requiring 4 sermons preached, the liturgical calendar and other church commitments (Children’s Pageant), and the completion date for the thesis, the sermons were to be preached 4 consecutive Sundays. As the result of an ice storm and the closing of church on the date Sermon #4 was to be preached, the final sermon was contextually edited and preached two weeks later.

Surveys

Participants were asked to complete a survey¹⁸ following each sermon that they heard preached. The questions were of an autobiographical qualitative nature and included, but were not limited to questions like: “What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?” “How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.” “Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.” “What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please explain.” “Please describe some of Jesus’ attributes as you

¹⁵ United Church of Canada, *A New Creed*, 1964.

¹⁶ United Church of Canada, *A New Creed*, 1964.

¹⁷ A New Creed states “who has come in Jesus; the Word made flesh.”

¹⁸ Please see Appendix D for the survey.

learned today.” “In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life?”
 “What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.”

Surveys were to be submitted following the Sunday service or the week following.

Questionnaire #2

Following the preaching of the four sermons and the completed surveys, participants were asked to complete Questionnaire #2.¹⁹ This questionnaire included several of the same questions as the baseline Questionnaire #1, with additional questions to help measure change. Additional questions included, but were not limited to: “Was there a biblical story or scripture reading over the course of the study that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?” “In looking back over the 4 sermons what was the image of Jesus that you most identified with? Please explain.” “Does this image of Jesus shape how you live your life? Please explain.” “In thinking back to your answers to the questionnaire prior to the series “Encounters with Jesus”, do you perceive a change in your understanding of Jesus?” “What would have an impact on your understanding of Jesus?”

Journal and Reflective Documents

An important aspect of this thesis was my own deepened understanding of the Jesus I know and preach. Exegeting the self was part of the ongoing work during this research. Some of the results of self-exegesis were done with colleagues and in my own thoughts and are beyond the reporting scope of this thesis. Other self-exegesis was done through journaling my reactions to Questionnaire and Survey responses, and as I wrote and preached the four sermons.²⁰

¹⁹ Please see Appendix E for Questionnaire #2.

²⁰ The Journal can be found in Appendix R.

Two other methods of self-exegesis and reflective documents that I used were introduced to me by Dr. Shauna Hannan²¹ as tools to use in the process of sermon preparation. As part of my weekly preparation for each sermon preached for my thesis, I would complete the KWHL Chart for Preaching and Congregational Exegesis, and the Exegetical Process A1.²² These two tools helped me to synthesize and incorporate contextual considerations in writing and preaching sermons.

Summary

In reflection, there were many components to the research for the completion of the thesis “Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation.” The use of an Action-Reflection model of research that relied heavily upon participant observation and qualitative data was explained in this chapter. Ethnographic work to exegete the congregation, tools and journaling for the preacher’s self-exegesis, the preaching of four sermons, and the completion of questionnaires and surveys are outlined for the reader.

Chapter 5 will present and analyze the data gathered as a result of the research.

²¹ Rev. Dr. Shauna Hannan was the instructor for the Luther Seminary Course BP 7531 *Preaching as the Word of God in Context* taught June 3-7, 2019. Her focus on the importance of exegeting the congregation and preaching within context, was inspirational for my thesis and my ministry. The KWHL Chart and Exegetical Process A1 tool were distributed and explained in the course.

²² THE KWHL Chart invites the preacher to chart what they know about the congregation and context(K), what they want to know and what will bring more clarity (W), how they will get more clarity about what they want to know (H), and what they have learned (L). The Exegetical Process A1 is an opportunity for the preacher to write brief reflections of what they know as they prepare the sermon. Reflections specifically addressed: a) events in the world, b) events in the Church, c) events in congregational life, d) events in the lives of individual hearers, e) the minister’s state of being, f) the church year and g) other contextual considerations

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF PROJECT

As stated previously, the purpose of this project is to determine if the preacher's knowledge and experience of the congregation can shape their sermons in such a way that it deepens the listener's understanding of Jesus. Through ethnographic work to exegete the congregation, tools and journaling for my own self-exegesis, the preaching of four specific sermons, and the completion of questionnaires and surveys the research was carried out.

This chapter will report, organize and analyze the data to determine if congregational and self-exegesis can help the preacher to preach in ways that deepen the listener's understanding of Jesus.

Exegeting the Congregation

The ethnographic work of coming to know the congregation began prior to my arrival at Trinity United Church October 1, 2019 and will continue for as long as I am in ministry with the congregation. One of the gifts of pastoral ministry is the opportunity to constantly be engaged in participant-observer situations where the astute preacher can glean information and come to more fully know the congregation as a whole and individuals within the congregation. Through various points of contact with members of TUC and by becoming part of the community as their preaching minister, I have had many opportunities to begin the work of exegeting the congregation. Additional exegetical work was done through intentional exercises and using specific tools. The results of this work are presented below.

Congregational Ad

When I was seeking a new call I discovered the advertisement that Trinity congregation posted in their search for a minister.¹ Their ad spoke to my heart and to my calling as a minister. It described a vibrant and active faith community that was seeking to call a minister who would be “entrusted with the leadership and the opportunity to open our hearts to the love and mystery of God, and the privilege and responsibility of sharing significant moments in the lives of our congregation.”²

After accepting the call to serve I looked forward to discovering if the advertisement was truly reflective of the congregation. In September 2019, prior to my October 1, 2019 start date, I attended a meeting of the Church Board. In an e-mail distributed to the Board before the meeting, I asked them to review the advertisement, with a specific task³ and at the meeting the Board was asked to share their responses, which were recorded on flip-chart.⁴

¹ The advertisement is located in Appendix F.

² Congregational Advertisement originally posted on Church Hub. I obtained a further copy of it from church records.

³ 1) read through the ad and underline any words they think were important (quick response, significant words), 2) go through the ad a second time and circle words that are important to them, and 3) using another color writing tool to go through the ad a third time and circle words that they believed were vital for/reflective of Trinity United Church at this time.

⁴ All ten Board members completed and reported on the exercise. By way of introduction they taught me that the entire congregation took part in the Ministry and Mission Profile that gave them an opportunity to rank the areas of ministry in order of importance (such as worship, leadership, justice and outreach, pastoral care). This information went to the Board for review, to the congregation and was then submitted. The Search Committee⁴ wrote the advertisement that was used in Trinity’s search process.

The words that the Board reported as being important (task 1) included, but were not limited to; moving forward, hope, worship, promising future, faith, imagined, spirit beyond the norm, laughter, uplifting, flexibility. Task 2 asked individuals to circle words that were important to them, specifically. The words reported included, but were not limited to; values, promising future, God and mystery, inclusive, child & youth minister, moving forward.

Task 3 involved the Board naming the words that they believed were vital for and reflective of Trinity at that time. The words in task 3 included, but were not limited to; uplifting service, inclusive, pastoral care, music, life-giving, inspiring, respecting the history, quality, justice. After all of the words were written in a list on the flip-chart I asked them for specific examples of how they felt Trinity was currently reflective of the words they chose.⁴ An example of this is that for the response “music” they were able to articulate that music is an integral part of the service, their choir is growing with lovely voices, music makes us “bop”, it is brilliant to have Susan and Kenny⁴ who bring a new dimension to the sound, and they are often still singing at home.

For each of the words that the Board named as being vital for and reflective of TUC, the Board was able to give concrete examples of ways the congregation was intentionally living out how they described themselves in the advertisement. The Board spoke positively of their congregation and there was a sense of congeniality in the meeting. At the time I recognized that the Board may have wanted to give me, as the incoming minister, a good impression of Trinity, however I found there to be great congruency between their self-description, their actions and the demonstrated relationships among the Board members. As part of my ethnographic work this exercise not only provided me with insight into the congregation (as described and affirmed through the advertisement), it revealed to me that the leaders of the congregation are able to accurately describe who they are. They can articulate their strengths and provide rationale for naming those same strengths. I observed respectful interaction amongst the Board members and noted their enthusiasm for moving forward.

Timeline

As the newly called minister to Trinity United Church I was invited to speak at the monthly meeting of the United Church Women (UCW). In accepting the invitation I requested that I have time during the meeting to learn about the women as individuals and to have them teach me the history of TUC as they knew it. Through the use of a large timeline attached to the wall, participants were able to tell me things they knew about the church from any time period in its 220 year existence.⁸

⁸ The responses for the timeline can be found in Appendix G.

Regardless of how long they were members of the congregation, the majority of women were able to participate as relevant historical data was named. Trinity United Church began with a saddleback minister and was initially a Methodist Church until church union in 1925. There are many historical highlights: the church was a stop on the Underground Railroad, in the late 1950s they had a congregation made up of 100 children; they sponsored three refugee families over the years, and the closing of Salford United Church (2005) resulted in several dedicated members coming to TUC. Participants could name the ministers who had offered leadership and the women spoke with pride of the three females who had been at TUC in the role of Children and Youth Minister.⁹ The women gave detail into the recent re-design of the building (specifically the sanctuary) and look to a future that recognizes the importance of outreach and inter-church relations.

While the factual information that I gleaned from this activity was informative and gave me a working historical account of Trinity United Church, what I found most revealing was that their energetic working together on their “assignment” expressed ownership of their church in a positive way. And for those new to the church their obvious alertness and participation in the exercise revealed their interest in knowing the history.

Congregational Self-Identity

On Anniversary Sunday, October 25, 2019, prior to the first sermon of the series being preached. I posed the question to the congregation “If someone new were coming to this church, what would you want them to know about Trinity? How would you describe this church and

⁹ During the exercise there was some underlying tension when naming the ministers but nothing specific was said. Following the meeting one woman told me that there had been a former minister of the congregation whose ministry created controversy and several people left the church as a result.

congregation?” The congregation was invited to articulate responses out loud and these responses were recorded on flip-chart paper.

There were 29 separate responses. Those present in worship that day told me the opportunity to speak about their church was welcome. The overwhelming feeling from the answers presented was that the members of Trinity had a very positive feeling about their church and that feeling is primarily centered in the experience of community.¹⁰

Of the 29 answers at least eight of them pertained to the congregation’s welcoming nature. Words such as friendly, inclusive, supportive, warm, caring, were some of the ways that they expressed their appreciation for the community at TUC. In addition, eight of the responses referred to their involvement in outreach, fellowship, being helpful and being hard-working.

I was intrigued by the many ways they described what I might refer to as their “way of being”. The words they used to articulate their “way of being” were inclusive, evolving, progressive, inquiring, faith family. They expressed appreciation for the staff and the work that people do. These responses included, but were not limited to: welcoming staff, excellent guitarist, best minister, United Church Women, wonderful cooks, music.

Other words that clearly articulate attributes they experience in their church, were; humor, hope, fun, beautiful.

Even with the newly renovated sanctuary that they are very proud of, all but one of the 29 responses referred to people, relationships and outlook.¹¹ When I have used this exercise in the past with other congregations, even when presenting a positive image, words such as tired,

¹⁰ Please refer to Appendix H for the complete list of responses.

¹¹ The one exception was the response “old tunnel”, referring to part of the former structure of the church that was an underground tunnel that led from the sanctuary to another area of the church. It is no longer in existence with the renovation.

searching, wanting to grow, were often articulated. There were no words expressed in this list at Trinity United Church that I would consider to be negative.

This exercise at TUC and further exegetical work on the congregation indicates that there is an overall positive regard for the church and a strong emphasis on community.¹²

Coffee, Conversation and Community Gatherings

Invitations were extended to the congregation during Sunday morning announcements, in the bulletin and on Facebook, to attend a time of Coffee, Conversation and Community in an effort to help Rev. Tracy get to know the congregation. Two events were held (one evening event and one daytime event).

The first event,¹³ held at 7:00 p.m. was attended by nine people, including one child (approx. 11 years old). Participants introduced themselves, their connection with TUC (how long they've attended, what brought them there) and were able to tell me anything they thought it important that I know. Through observation this group represented both people who had been members of TUC for a long time (67 years, 55 years), some who had come as the result of a nearby church closure in 2005, some more recent members, and one person who had recently started coming with his family after being the recipient of overwhelming church outreach after a family crisis.

The group was moved into the sanctuary and the question was posed to them, "You have just re-designed your worship space and could choose to do anything with the space. So what is

¹² People enjoy being with one another and see the strengths in the community of which they are a part I found this list so positive that it is my intention to include it, as a reminder, in my Minister's Message for the 2019 Annual Report. I would like the congregation to remember and be proud of who they claim themselves to be.

¹³ This will be referred to as Group 1.

in here and why?” Since they were in the space there were very specific references to items in the sanctuary, along with some history or explanation for their presence.¹⁴

The second gathering¹⁵ was held on a weekday morning and there were 25-35 people in attendance. People were also invited to introduce themselves and tell me about their connection to TUC.¹⁶ This group consisted primarily of retired women and men. Some had been worshipping at TUC for more than 60 years and there was one woman who had recently moved into the community. There were some who are very active in their participation by sitting on church committees and getting involved in outreach, and others who primarily attend Sunday worship. Due to the group size and some personal mobility issues, we did not move into the sanctuary.

The question posed to Group 2 was similar in nature to Group 1; “You have just re-designed your worship space and you could choose to do anything with it. When you think of that space, what is in there and why was it important? What is not in there?” Group 2, despite not being in the sanctuary, were very aware of its physical space.¹⁸ From this group I learned about the one decision that clearly had an impact on many members. During the renovation the decision was made to no longer have an organ in the sanctuary. Some in the group lamented this fact, while others articulated they were pleased with the decision. In Group 2 there was someone from the “Sanctuary Renovation and Re-design Committee” who was able to give further history and background around some of the decisions. Group 2 clearly articulated the importance of

¹⁴ The full list of responses can be found in Appendix I.

¹⁵ This will be referred to as Group 2.

¹⁶ With such a large group these introductions were done less thoroughly than Group 1.

¹⁸ The full list of responses can be found in Appendix I.

leaders consulting with the congregation throughout the design process, so that people would feel a “shared ownership” of the space.

In reviewing the responses from both groups, I was able to make some general observations that further help me to exegete the congregation. The Trinity community is very proud of their new worship space and worked very hard to design it in a manner that allows it to be a space for worship and for community events. The technology, including projectors, screens, sound system, and lighting are high quality. This allows for good audio and video during worship, and has appeal for the larger Ingersoll community to use the space for concerts and rentals. Comfortable chairs, instead of pews, were important as they are more welcoming and allow the space to be versatile and multi-functional. This is also true of the expansive “stage” and the moveable articles that are part of the worship space.¹⁹

In my study of the space I had noticed that there was not a baptismal font in the sanctuary and reflected my observation to each group. Group 1 told me that the font is located in the coatroom that leads to the sanctuary (that I might refer to as a Narthex in an older style building) and only comes out when needed. They reported that there are not a lot of baptisms at TUC. Group 2 reported that the font is not in the sanctuary because when they redesigned it they wanted the space to be less intimidating to people (those who might rent or come in for things other than Sunday worship) and chose to only include “subtle symbols” in the worship space.

¹⁹ With the modern furnishings there is still an importance placed on history. Both Group 1 and Group 2, along with several individuals at various times, told me about the importance of the original tresses (beams) being maintained in the new sanctuary and a focal point of the architecture. Several pieces (pulpit, table, hymn book holders) were made by a congregation member using wood from the pews of the old sanctuary. Stained glass windows from the original sanctuary were repurposed into the new and the large decorative crosses¹⁹ that previously hung on the organ pipes had been installed on the wall behind the new pulpit. Each group mentioned the liturgical banners and were intentional in stating that they had been made by a member of the congregation.

The results of this exercise taught me some important things about the congregation of Trinity United Church. Through their responses I was able to discern:

- a) the value they place on people as they relayed who had made things for the sanctuary, and expressed the importance of everyone in the congregation having the opportunity to offer input into the newly designed space
- b) the desire to welcome people into Trinity United Church and for it to be seen as a community space (not just for Sunday worship)
- c) the importance of maintaining the history of their church (tresses, stained glass, War Memorial), while at the same time meeting present day needs (accessibility, audio-visual)
- d) the various opinions on music, with the loss of the organ and the addition of a guitar player (with the piano) not being a shared value by all
- e) the nominal emphasis on sacraments and “traditional” liturgy, with the baptismal font not having a place in the sanctuary and there being no mention of the communion²¹ table by either Group 1 or Group 2

The other component of the Coffee, Conversation and Community Gatherings was that at each gathering the group was invited to draw a collective picture of Jesus based on what they know about him. The invitation was stated as, “Together we are going to draw a picture of Jesus, with each of us drawing a separate piece. This is not an art project, but a way of communicating what you know, think, believe, and remember about Jesus.” At each gathering there was a large piece of flip-chart paper, several color crayons and markers. I began by drawing a circle near the

²¹ The communion table is located on the “stage” and is often pushed against the wall. It can be seen between the pulpit and the choir, and often houses two candles that are lit for Sunday morning.

top of the page to represent Jesus' head. People added attributes and explained why they chose that particular attribute.²²

Group 1 added 18 attributes to Jesus. Group 2 had 24 attributes that they drew. Both groups included typical body features such as eyes, mouth, hands, feet, hair. Group 2 included two different color eyes and various shades of skin, explaining this represented all people and differences. Group 1, by way of explaining some of the attributes they added, would refer to biblical stories about Jesus (such as a donkey because he came differently than other leaders, the temple because he was in the synagogue when he was 12 years old, a scroll that represents him teaching). Group 2 tended to add attributes that expressed how they perceived Jesus (such as frown line because of his concern for the world, laugh lines because they love the picture of the laughing Jesus, heart because he was all about love, trees because he would have been an environmentalist, food because he fed people and would want the whole world to have food, people around him who were healthy, sick, poor and rich, tears over the state of the world). Each group referred to the crucifixion in some way (Group 1 drew a cross because he died for our sins, Group 2 had him wearing a crown of thorns and a cross). Both groups included Jesus walking on water and him being surrounded by people. One interesting item was that Group 2 drew an airplane representing "yesterday and the present".

The pictures of Jesus indicate that those who took part in the gatherings have an understanding of Jesus that relates to their knowledge of biblical stories (specifically Group 1) and their perception of who Jesus is for them (Group 2). They attribute characteristics to him that relate to his ministry (teaching, meeting with people, walking on water, fishing) and to how he related to people (listening, seeing, loving, reaching out, caring and working). Their images of

²² The list of attributes and a photo of the picture can be found in Appendix J.

Jesus refer to his crucifixion (three times in Group1 and two times in Group 2), his resurrection (Group 2 drew a sun to represent he rose) but did not refer to his birth or ascension. Each group included something yellow (Group 1 a halo, Group 2 lines protruding from his head) that represented peace and good things (Group 1), and that he “had an aura about him” (Group 2).

Observation and Conversations

In initially getting to know the congregation of Trinity United Church there were several things that I noted that intrigued me or caused me to seek further clarification. Through conversations, in studying architecture and visual arts and taking specific note of their rituals and practices I was able to reflect on what I had learned. While this list is not exhaustive, I share here some of those reflections in this section.

- a) In the re-design of the building there is seating capacity for 160 people in the sanctuary, however not all those seats are assembled on a weekly basis. On an average Sunday we have approximately 110 people in worship and many Sundays since my arrival we have had more than 130 people. Christmas Eve we moved into overflow space in the parlor and had to turn some people away, as we had more than 300 people. Building a sanctuary for 160 people suggests that they were not projecting a growth in church attendance.

The present room assigned to the Sunday School is suitable for approximately 10 children. Our regular Sunday School attendance can fluctuate from 3-12 children. When the numbers are high, the room is over-crowded and not conducive to mixed ages. If we were to grow in numbers, is there alternate space we can free up for Sunday School?

In one conversation it was articulated to me that “we re-designed the building for our present needs.” This, along with a communication style that reaches those within the church effectively and yet is not as clear or effective for those outside of the community, leads me to wonder if there is an underlying, and likely unconscious desire to be a family-size church.²³

That said, there is a great deal of space that is assigned to and available for their outreach projects and for the community to use for outreach. It was articulated to me that outreach is an important part of their identity.

- b) The lack of a baptismal font in the sanctuary was obvious to me early in my introduction to Trinity. This encouraged me to ask about it at the Coffee, Conversation and Community Gatherings and caused me to wonder what this says about their theology around the sacraments?²⁴
- c) In conversations with the Board and other committees, there has been some discussion about visioning for the future; however this has not been met with a great deal of enthusiasm. The renovation of the building was a huge undertaking and took a great deal of both time and energy. With its completion, they then lost their long-term minister. In my conversations and observations I have assessed that the community is excited with where they are at the present time and want to enjoy that “present

²³ Family-sized church is a term used by Roy M. Oswald, and refers to congregations of 50 or fewer active members, with patriarchs and matriarchs who control the church’s leadership.

Roy M. Oswald, “How To Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program and Corporate-Sized Churches” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c7d7ede4b03a45e09cd270/t/5aa00b43652dea8c73c46299/1520438089615/HowToMinisterEffectivelyInFamilyPastoralProgramandCorporate-SizedChurches.pdf> (accessed Feb. 10, 2020).

²⁴ In the UCC we have two sacraments, baptism and communion.

- situation” right now. They have experienced a great deal of change (including my arrival as their new minister) and I see them as needing some time to adjust to the changes and find a “new normal” before taking on any more big steps.
- d) From conversations that I have had with various individuals, the worship committee and within other meetings, I assumed that there was a low Christology and a liberal theology around Jesus. The contemporary hymns sung during Sunday worship have a high Christology with theology not often heard in the mainline United Church. I am curious about the apparent disconnect. Do people not have words to express their understanding of Jesus? Are the hymns chosen for their modern music and appeal, without thought to the lyrics? Is the apparent disconnect reflective of the theological diversity within the congregation?

Encounters With Jesus – a Four Sermon Series

Further research for this thesis included preaching four sermons that were preached with scripture chosen to correspond with the statements about Jesus made in the United Church of Canada’s A New Creed. The congregation was invited to participate in the research by completing a preliminary questionnaire, listening to four sermons and completing a survey after each, and completing a final questionnaire. A total of sixteen participants took part.

As a requirement of taking part in the research, all the participants in the study were over the age of eighteen years. There were no participants who were 18-30 years of age. Two of the participants were 31-50 years of age, five were 51-65, six were 66-79, and three participants were over 80 years of age. There were no other demographics collected for this research. In hindsight, helpful questions for this thesis project might have asked the number of years each participant was active in a church congregation (either TUC or another congregation).

Questionnaire #1

In order to develop a baseline for the research and gain a deeper knowledge of participants' pre-sermon understanding of Jesus, Questionnaire #1 asked questions pertinent to participants' current understanding of Jesus and how that understanding was gained. It asked about how their understanding impacted their faith and life, and any questions or claims about Jesus that left them unsettled or confident.²⁵

In response to the question "who is Jesus," eleven of the sixteen participants included the words "Son of God" in their response, eight referred to Jesus as a teacher or someone to "show us the way," four used the word "love" in some capacity in their response and two people named Jesus as Savior or leader. Words that were also used to describe Jesus included, but were not limited to; Messiah, Redeemer, prophet, friend, mentor, human, divine, Trinity. In one of the responses there was a thorough historical description of Jesus, and five of the responses did not include any aspect of Jesus's divinity or connection to God (although one of those responses stated that "I believe Jesus thought he was the Son of God").

When asked how they came to learn about Jesus, seven responses included the Bible and seven said through church worship and sermons, five respondents specifically mentioned they learned stories of Jesus in Sunday School and five named that they learned about Jesus through other people. Reading, personal experience and faith events (studies, conferences) were also listed as ways to know Jesus. One respondent specifically stated that she/he learned through history, archaeology and sociology.

The responses to the question asking if there is a biblical story that helps you to define Jesus, were vast in scope. Two respondents articulated the story of the Good Samaritan, two

²⁵ A complete compilation of the responses to Questionnaire #1 is in Appendix K.

referred to Jesus' birth, and two named Jesus being with children as important stories that help them define him. Other biblical stories that were included, but not limited to, were Zacchaeus, Jesus clearing the temple, the woman at the well, stories of healing lepers and the woman who touched his cloak, Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and Jesus being tempted in the desert. One person stated that they do not and have not ever studied the Bible, and another indicated that there are many stories that leave her/him in awe.

When asked if there were biblical stories about Jesus that left them unsettled, the responses were also vast in scope. Three respondents mentioned some aspect of Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion. The stories of the Prodigal Son, the man possessed by demons, the money-changers in the temple and the command to shake the dirt off your feet if you are not welcome, were all named as stories that unsettled people.

A claim about Jesus that they felt confident making included describing Jesus as loving (five respondents) and accepting (four respondents). Among other comments listed in Appendix K, people articulated that Jesus was a charismatic leader, always there, the greatest teacher and he died for his beliefs. Claims about Jesus that left them feeling unsettled included that he performed miracles (raising Lazarus from the dead, turning water into wine), that he was weak or radical and that he was crucified. Five respondents left this question blank or answered unsure/nothing bothers me.

When asked what one question they have about Jesus, two respondents had questions about the resurrection and two wanted to know about Jesus' life growing up. There were questions about the importance of the virgin birth, why he seemed detached from his own family, why he told his disciples not to tell others about his miracles or being the Messiah, and how he reconciled his human self from his divine self. The question I personally found most compelling

was “I wonder if Jesus would recognize himself if he saw what we have made of him?” Four participants did not respond.

In response to the question “Does your understanding of Jesus shape your faith?” nine people clearly responded “yes” and gave examples to explain (remaining hopeful, feel I can make a contribution, cast my burdens on him). One respondent articulated that seeing how other people live their lives has a big influence on them, and another described Jesus is the basis for a community that comes together with a common goal for the benefit of others. When asked if their understanding of Jesus shaped how they lived their lives, fifteen of the sixteen respondents gave specific examples of how their understanding shaped their lives. Valuing, loving unconditionally, living faith, prayer, treating others with kindness, helping people, living with integrity were some of the responses given to this question.

In studying the responses to Questionnaire #1, I extrapolated that people most identified with Jesus as a teacher who shows people how to live their lives in ways that are loving, inclusive and for the good of others. Titles such as Savior, Messiah and Son of God were used by some, however most respondents used descriptive words for Jesus based on his actions. People learned about Jesus through church, Bible stories and from other people.

While there was no one story that helped them to define Jesus, most respondents related to scripture depicting Jesus in relationship with others. Stories that unsettled them tended to be stories that dealt with challenging human experiences (death, anger, betrayal) and Jesus’ responses to their experiences. People were confident claiming Jesus to be loving and accepting of people, but were unsettled about claims pertaining to Jesus’ miracles or other human traits that may have portrayed him in a negative light. Respondents were interested in knowing more about

the historical Jesus and his family relationships, and had questions pertaining to his birth, resurrection and divinity.

Responses indicated that people's understanding of Jesus shaped their faith and how they lived their lives, and they were able to give clear examples of both. Some answers to questions included responses related to the Old Testament, which suggests that there is lack of clarity for some people about stories that pertain to Jesus specifically instead of the bible as a whole.

Four Sermons

In preparing to write and preach the four sermons for this thesis I relied upon several tools and sources of information to shape the focus and contents of each sermon. Exegetical points came from what I had learned about the congregation through ethnographic work and being a participant-observer in my time as the called minister at Trinity United Church. After each sermon the sixteen participants were asked to complete a survey that would collect data relevant to the thesis topic.

Sermon #1

The text for sermon #1, preached on Remembrance Sunday, was John 15:12-15 with Jesus' command to love one another after he washed the disciples' feet. The focus of the sermon was on Jesus revealing God and God's love shown through Jesus' love for others. Exegetical points I wanted to hold up included references to TUC's current outreach and how I had witnessed their love in action in the last week.²⁶

²⁶ Please note chart in Appendix L.

In this first sermon I felt the need for the sermon to be somewhat didactic. I often find an introduction to the scripture reading helps to give historical and biblical data and orient the listener to where the pericope fits into the larger biblical narrative. I intentionally include several references to stories of Jesus, not only by way of illustrating the point of the sermon, but also to remind listeners of some of the more familiar biblical stories of Jesus that they might remember or relate to as they listen.

While I did not have the opportunity to fully reflect on all I had accumulated through the congregational exegesis, I had come to know that there was a strong emphasis in the congregation on community, love, inclusivity and caring for one another, as well as it being Remembrance Sunday. Beginning the series with exploring Jesus as mediator between God and humanity seemed a non-threatening way to begin. I had the opportunity to quickly read through many of the first questionnaires prior to preaching. With so many of the participants naming aspects of Jesus' identity as "teacher" and "loving", the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet and giving the command to love one another, would be congruent with many listeners' understanding of Jesus.

To deepen that understanding I included the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, to give language to their commitment to outreach and how that can be an expression of their faith as a follower of Christ. Specifically naming ways in which I had witnessed them living out "love in action" and allowing Jesus to "work in us and others by the Spirit"²⁷, will hopefully help build a connection between the congregation's commitment to outreach and their faith.

As noted in my journal, the intentional practice of Lectio Divina, and completing the Exegetical Analysis and KWHL chart was very helpful and allowed me to really focus on how I

²⁷ In reference to the UCC A New Creed

saw the text as well as how the text might relate to the congregation I serve. I recognized that in this sermon I still did not clearly articulate the theology about Jesus revealing God, or had I taken it one step further, Jesus as the second member of the Trinity.

Survey responses to this sermon²⁸ were completed by sixteen participants. Twelve of the participants could clearly articulate that the scripture story preached was about “loving one another” and they heard the importance of love for the other. Four mentioned the scripture story was about Jesus’ last words to his disciples and several articulated how that foot-washing was an expression of Jesus’ love, respect and his ability to see them for who they are. One person heard that God and Jesus are two different people.

Respondents articulated that the sermon made them feel loved, a sense of belonging, humbled and amazed. Some felt the need to examine how to express love and support, while another noted that they felt reassured that there is still love in the world. They learned many different things from the sermon, including but not limited to: Jesus’ role as embodiment of love, his command to love one another, the value of telling others we love them, Jesus was love with clothes on, and that the lessons from the ages still apply today.

People identified with the disciples regarding their confusion, the strengths and weaknesses they had, and seeing themselves as the world sees them. One person identified with Jesus as a helper/problem solver and another with Deb, who is referenced in the sermon. Connections to a grandfather and other people who had died were in reference to Remembrance Sunday. When naming characters participants felt disconnected from, Judas was named.

In response to the question about the image/understanding of Jesus that the sermon portrayed, respondents’ answers were varied and included many different aspects of the sermon.

²⁸ The completed survey responses are found in Appendix L.

Jesus as love in action, as flesh, as love in clothes, as teacher – giving commands, as one who loved more than they knew, were all included in the responses. While some answers had similar aspects, their diversity was more notable. When asked “In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning to your life?” fifteen respondents answered the question. Each person was able to articulate that the image they had of Jesus would impact how they lived their life, with responses including, but not limited to: being more comfortable talking about Jesus, patience – love in action, whatever happens we might continue to love one another in our faith community, when I am supported I feel God’s love manifested.

The most important understanding they heard about Jesus in the sermon included: respect differences, he loves all, Jesus never gave up on his love for others, everyone longs for something more, not all of his teaching methods were direct – some had to be discovered, Jesus expects all who follow him and love him to carry on his work. The ways in which they see Jesus connecting to the entirety of the Christian story include, but are not limited to: Jesus was not commanding them to love one another for that time and place but to lay the foundation of Christianity for the future, without Jesus there is no personal connection to the story, love is the paramount theme of the Christian story, Jesus and God are the Christian story, he was looking to the future and how folks might react to his crucifixion and departure.

Ten respondents indicated that nothing impacted their hearing of the sermon. One person was aware of their desire to really hear, understand and remember what was being proclaimed, and another had their attention drawn by a cute baby. One respondent noted that they had come to church “feeling sad and unloved” but left feeling surrounded by love.

In reflecting on the survey responses, I noted that people hear a variety of different things in a sermon and extrapolate a variety of meanings. Mark Powell's work²⁹ on polyvalence in sermons was evident in responses to this first sermon. Of particular interest in the survey responses are Powell's two conceptions of meaning; meaning as *message*, with understanding being in cognitive terms, and meaning as *effect*, with understanding entailing the impact on those who listen.³⁰ In reading the responses to the sermon, I sensed overall people responded with effective terms more so than cognitive terms, indicating that the impact of the sermon was greater than the specific knowledge they gained.

Several responses in Survey #1 did not pertain to the sermon in any obvious way (one person related to the character of the Blind Man whose sight had been restored), reinforcing the idea that people "create meaning for themselves by selectively sorting and organizing data"³¹ and that sorting and organizing of data "is influenced by particular factors of their own social location."³² This was further noted in the responses by Participant #3 who continued to struggle with having heard that Jesus and God were two separate people³³. This was unsettling to her/him and captured their focus.

Through coming to know the congregation and using this knowledge in sermon preparation (their focus on outreach, importance of community) it was hoped that referring to issues pertinent to their lives and using vernacular common to the congregation of Trinity United

²⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *What Do They Hear? Bridging the Gap Between Pulpit & Pew*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

³⁰ Powell, *What Do They Hear?* 66.

³¹ Powell, *What Do They Hear?* 19.

³² Powell, *What Do They Hear?* 19.

³³ This was not articulated in the sermon, but extrapolated by the listener.

Church, the impact of polyvalence would be minimized. There was no means to measure this in the survey.

Overall, respondents were clearly able to articulate what they heard in the sermon, how it impacted them and the image of Jesus with which they most connected. While their responses varied, the majority of respondents included references to what was proclaimed in the sermon. The responses indicated that participants could identify Jesus as the bridge between God and humanity, Jesus as the One who reveals God's love and calls us to love others, and that love is active. No respondent used the phrase the "Church as the Body of Christ", however many responses indicated an awareness of the church being one of the places where Jesus' love is lived out among his followers.

This sermon was able to articulate attributes of Jesus that reflected the UCC's A New Creed, "who works in us and others by the Spirit." However in a focused reading of my sermon after it was preached, I see the sermon did not clearly define or name any one doctrine of Jesus.

Sermon #2

The second sermon was based on John 4:4-29 in which Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well and offers her life-giving water. The focus was on the life-giving water of acceptance, welcome and belonging that Jesus offers. Specifically, in this sermon I wanted to address the exegetical question "does inclusivity/acceptance extend when there is a difference of opinion being expressed, such as "clapping" during worship?" I was also writing the sermon with the awareness of the lack of a baptismal font, which for me is about the sacrament of baptism and new life, but is missing from the worship space.³⁶

³⁶ Please note chart in Appendix M.

For this sermon I was aware of how long the scripture reading would be for listeners. In my role as participant-observer I had also heard it expressed that some people did not like having the words of the scripture projected on the screen while it was being read. For this sermon I had the scripture proclaimed by three people (Jesus, the Woman, and a narrator) and the words of the reading were not projected. In critically examining this sermon the following week I felt it would have been helpful to have had a conversation (with those taking part in the reading) about how tone of voice and how they read, might have had an influence on how the story, and thus the sermon, was heard. I know that in my own hearing of the reading, I reacted to the way that Jesus was portrayed as his voice included condemnation of the Woman.³⁷

In this sermon the focus from the UCC's A New Creed was to be Jesus "who reconciles and makes new". Jesus not only sees and welcomes us, but through love, makes us new. I wanted to explore what life-giving water looks like today and was very aware of how I experience the lack of a baptismal font in the sanctuary as "we are missing something." While the sermon could not specifically address a theology of baptism (it would have been so great if we had had a baptism that day!), it could include some learning about life-giving water that makes us new.

In a community with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and welcome, I also wanted to speak to those who may not feel that they belong at Trinity or struggle to belong in some other area of their lives. Recognizing that even within inclusive communities there are those who feel to be on the margins, this was an important pastoral component for me to keep in mind for this sermon. The timing of this sermon was also relevant as during the week there had been

³⁷ For further reflection on this, please see my Journal in Appendix R.

conversation about the appropriateness of clapping after anthems.³⁸ There were mixed and very heart-felt opinions on this, and in my role as participant-observer I was curious to see how the topic would be resolved. How does acceptance and inclusivity work in the midst of conflicting ideas and behaviors?

For this sermon I also wanted to name ways that TUC had named themselves to be inclusive, as well as address some biblical historical context to meet the needs of those who had specifically mentioned history and biblical context as questions they have about Jesus. My intent was not just to address these, but also to help tie their commitment to inclusivity and acceptance to their understanding of Jesus.

Prior to beginning the writing of this sermon I began with *Lectio Divina* and exegetical work around the pericope. I completed the Contextual Analysis and the KWHL, although did not find them as helpful this week. I gained a great deal of insight and inspiration from thoroughly reading the responses to Questionnaire #1.

In Survey #2⁴⁰ respondents could clearly articulate that the biblical story was of the Samaritan Woman at the Well, and six respondents indicated that they heard the story was about belonging. Three respondents heard the historical/contextual aspects of the story, and five reported that they heard the importance of accepting others. One person wrote “it doesn’t matter who you are or whether you are rich or poor if you believe in God”, and another stated “If Jesus can do this and does - he can help me with anything!”

³⁸ This was discussed in response to the Remembrance service the previous week when the anthem was particularly poignant and some felt the clapping took away from the message.

⁴⁰ For this sermon Participant #16 did not submit a Survey and indicated to the Research Assistant that they were absent from worship, resulting in fifteen respondents completing Survey #1. All responses to Survey #2 can be found in Appendix M.

Five people responded that the sermon made them feel grateful for their faith community, and others reported feeling hopeful, comforted, secure in their relationship with God. One participant, having been down a similar road, could feel the pain of the Samaritan Woman and the hope that Jesus was offering. The word community (or “fellowship of like-minded people”) was used by seven respondents as they related to being part of something, and one person wrote that the sermon made them feel great as it is what they believe.

When asked what they had learned, three people commented on the cultural/historical content of the sermon, four people referred to the 3 B’s⁴¹ and five people responded to the concept of life-giving water and thirst. Other comments included but were not limited to: I should be more outgoing and share Jesus with others, to trust him, that recognizing others who may feel disconnected or alienated is difficult. Nine respondents reported that they identified with the Woman at the Well, however each for a different reason. One person reported that they were happy not to identify with her as they have a strong sense of who they are as a woman and feel valued. Five people either left this question blank or responded “no” without explanation, with one naming having felt disconnected from the Woman.

Images and understandings of Jesus included, but were not limited to: a man who has time for everyone, intelligent person with keen insight, always with us for support and love, teacher, accepting, love and compassion for people, can satisfy us, reconciles and makes us new. These images bring meaning by giving an example of how to live, with eight respondents referring to a possibility of/need for a change in their behavior as a result of their image of Jesus. Four respondents wrote about Jesus’ action toward them (forgiveness, understanding, accepting,

⁴¹ As referred to in the sermon; Belonging, Behaving, Believing.

keeping promises) and one reflected on the power of words like Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the midst of community.

Again, as in Survey #1, the responses to the question “What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today?” were all different. Similarity comes in with eight people referring to the love that Jesus offers. Four responses included reference to living water or new life, and four responses referred to the need for acceptance (by Jesus and ourselves). One person wrote “your past is your past – you cannot change it but your future holds the chance to make other choices,” and another referred to Jesus’ sacrifice, fatigue and discomfort in order to bring his message of God’s love for all.

The responses to the question about Jesus connecting with the entire Christian story bore little similarity to one another. Responses included, but were not limited to: an example of the many times Jesus crossed social barriers to demonstrate love for all, He brings hope to all that they may belong, behave and believe, the water of life emanates from God and his son/prophet Jesus, gave us more understanding of who Jesus is, living water – eternal life and a better life here on earth. Ten respondents did not have anything that might have impacted their hearing of the sermon, one commented that there are always distractions. Another mentioned they were able to hear well. Someone found the dialogue approach to the reading distracting, and one commented on the appropriateness of the last hymn.

The overall responses to this sermon felt more cohesive and perhaps reflected people’s growing comfort with the research process. There was a common thread of understanding Jesus as the One who offers acceptance and belonging. People responded to the content regarding the historical context of the story and appreciated the introduction of the 3 B’s. Again, I assume that this is a result of people responding to meaning as effect and meaning as message.

People tend to resonate with words with which they identify (love, belonging, inclusion, and acceptance), however I also feel that because this vernacular and these concepts were so prevalent in my exegesis of the congregation, that I was using those words frequently in the sermon. This impacts the listener, in that they are familiar concepts with which they identify, but also that they are heard repetitively in the sermon.

In this sermon people offered fewer titles for Jesus, and instead referred to his attributes. They also stressed how Jesus' actions and attributes are important to imitate for those who follow him. A majority of people identified with the character of the Woman at the Well, which leads me to believe that personal identity with the biblical story may increase listener's connection to the story and deepen their understanding of Jesus.

As noted in my journal, near the beginning of preaching the sermon I realized that while I was preaching about life-giving water, two of my parishioners (participants in the research) had experienced a severe flood that destroyed much of their home. As I preached the sermon I found myself wondering how they were feeling about life-giving water in their personal context. This reflection made me more aware of the weekly exegetical process (Contextual Analysis, KWHL Chart) and the importance of the preacher-pastor who has a personal knowledge of individuals within the congregation. I knew this couple's story, and yet forgot it as I was preparing the sermon. This experience of missing such an important pastoral concern might encourage me to develop a new exegetical tool that includes information about pastoral issues that might be impacted by sermons. If preaching this scripture story again I would be inclined to meet with them to better understand how to speak of life-giving water when destructive water changed your life or have them speak of their experience as part of the sermon.

The sermon addressed Jesus as the one who offers the life-giving water of acceptance and belonging, and our need to belong. While it did refer to the UCC's A New Creed "to reconcile and make new", the sermon was weak in expanding upon the theology found in the creed. The sermon did not refer to Jesus as the one who restores our relationship with God, community and ourselves.

Sermon #3

Sermon #3 was preached on Reign of Christ Sunday. The text was Luke 23:33-43 describing Jesus' crucifixion between two criminals. The emphasis from the UCC's A New Creed was "to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope" with the planned focus of discussing the significance of Reign of Christ Sunday and why it is important in our ongoing faith. The exegetical points from past congregational interaction that I intended to address included people's questions pertaining to Jesus' crucifixion, his radical side and the horrible nature of his death. As well, I wanted to ask what the text means in light of the town getting ready for Christmas and the church being busy with pre-Advent preparations?⁴²

In doing exegesis and sermon preparation I sensed that for many the idea of a sermon on Jesus' crucifixion would feel strange that close to Christmas. As Trinity has not followed the traditional church seasons or liturgical calendar for several years, I was uncertain how many would know about Reign of Christ (Christ the King) Sunday. It was important for me to put the reading into the context of the church year, and address that in order to more fully understand Jesus' birth we need to recognize Jesus' death. There was an introduction to the scripture to explain Reign of Christ and put the reading into context.

⁴² Please note chart in Appendix N.

The sermon sought to address Jesus' crucifixion. In the text those who are gathered around the cross and the two criminals do not know who Jesus is. We don't always know who Jesus is either, which leads to more questions for many. Questionnaire #1 articulated several questions that participants have around why Jesus was crucified and how God could allow that to happen. In the pictures of Jesus that were drawn for the gatherings each group drew something that pertained to the crucifixion, with Group 1 stating Jesus died for our sins. The hymns that are sung during worship have referred to Jesus' blood. However, based on conversations I have had and insight I have gleaned over the two months before preaching this sermon, people are not comfortable speaking about the crucifixion with any authority.

To prepare for the writing and preaching of this sermon I used Lectio Divina, text exegesis and completed the exegetical tools that I have been using. I noticed this week that the Contextual Analysis and KWHL Chart were feeling repetitive; however they did help me to recognize the incongruity of the town preparing for Christmas and a sermon on the cross.

In reviewing responses to Survey #3⁴³ respondents were able to identify that the story was about Jesus' crucifixion and/or Reign of Christ, with mention being made by at least seven respondents to Jesus being mocked or scorned. Eight respondents heard in the sermon the prevalence of questions about the crucifixion or acknowledged the various views of Jesus' crucifixion. Respondents also wrote that Jesus was sent to save us, he was bringing in a new kingdom of inclusiveness, he promises eternal life and to love your enemies.

When asked how the sermon made them feel, five respondents included words like sad, mad, helpless and tearful. Eight respondents reported feeling positive, using words such as comforted, reassured, supported in my own belief, gave me a fresh perspective. Two of the

⁴³ Responses to Survey #3 can be found in Appendix N.

respondents moved from negative to positive feelings over the course of the sermon. The sermon made some reflect on where they were in the crowd and how they might have responded if they were present.

In response to what listeners learned, five respondents referred to not needing to have all of the answers and the importance of questions. The remainder of the answers were diverse, including but not limited to: signs of God's love are all around if I constantly look for them, love in action, wonder and awe of the depth of Jesus' sacrifice, the method of Lectio Divina to understand scripture, sometimes you have to see someone with your heart and not your eyes.

When asked if there was a character they identified with in the story, four of the respondents placed themselves in the crowd. Two others noted that they struggled with those who derided Jesus, and one identified with Jesus. Two respondents identified with a thief on the cross, however each of them identified with a different thief. Five respondents did not respond.

Respondents described a variety of images and understandings of Jesus that they felt were portrayed in the sermon. Seven respondents referred to love, five to forgiveness and of those respondents four included both love and forgiveness. One person indicated that Jesus was much like the rest of us and died as we all will do. One wrote that Jesus is the obedient Son and "loved his Father therefore made a choice to suffer the meanness of others in order to do the bidding of God." A respondent stated that Jesus struggled with why he had to die, however his love of God did not waiver, and another stated his/her understanding was "acceptance of the inevitable, tolerance for those around him and belief in his future".

The ways in which their image of Jesus might evoke meaning in their lives included, but were not limited to: "it is an ongoing exploration and enforcement of how we can live out the idea of love and compassion for all people," "Jesus believed in his God and Father and trusted

his God. This means I need to believe in God and trust him as well even when I don't fully understand what is happening or being asked of me." Respondents still expressed questions about why Jesus had to die and expressed an understanding that they didn't have to have all of the answers, and one expressed that their understanding of Jesus "gives me hope that heaven is open for all who believe."

When naming the most important understanding of Jesus that they gained from Sermon #3 there were no two answers alike. Some of the answers included, but were not limited to: "his love and sacrifice that he made so that all of us would have a chance to live in paradise," that he took the time to comfort others as he was being taunted and tortured, that "he did not choose to save himself so he could save us instead," his forgiveness, his unwavering love, he never lost faith, he meets us in our questions. Three respondents left this question blank.

Five people did not complete the question that asked how they see Jesus connecting to the entirety of the Christian story. The remainder of the answers to this question were very different than in previous surveys, containing new language and greater clarity. One person wrote that "Jesus brings in a new kingdom, one of inclusiveness." Another articulated that "the idea of life after death in the kingdom of God is paramount to Christianity," and still another wrote "from humble beginnings to an end of life amidst all the anger, turmoil and sordidness of humanity, He remained a man 'of the people' offering faith in God to all." Three respondents referred to Jesus' love and forgiveness, two wrote of the image of Jesus stating that we will be with him in paradise and one wrote "to show us the way, his sacrifices for us and God's love for us in spite of our sins."

In response to whether there were any distractions that kept them from hearing the sermon twelve respondents answered "no" or left it blank. One person was tired and another ill.

One respondent commented that while there were no distractions she/he “kept wanting to hear how to integrate the teachings into our own lives – at Trinity ‘our purpose is transformation’ and I would like the stories to help me live better in today’s world.” This final reflection was important to me to read as I often ask myself at the end of writing a sermon “So what? How does that sermon impact someone’s life?” and often struggle to have an answer. Knowing that listeners really do want concrete ways to integrate teachings will encourage me to be more intentional in including this aspect in sermon preparation.

From the responses to Survey #3 I noted that people were more specific in their responses and seemed more confident in expressing ideas. Respondents did not articulate any concern about addressing the crucifixion at this time of the year and recognized that having questions about Jesus’ crucifixion is not detrimental to their faith. I found the depth of responses quite compelling and people appeared to have really thought about what they had learned. They were able to articulate a connection to various characters in the biblical story and to describe how their understanding of their image of Jesus might evoke meaning in their lives.

I cannot clearly explain why, but I felt a “shift” in the responses to this Survey. In my attempt to address crucifixion (and not resurrection) from the UCC’s A New Creed “to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our judge and our hope”, the sermon addressed the crucifixion, but moved to more fully explore the kingdom of God to which Jesus points. This sermon did not address the questions asked by respondents in Questionnaire #1, nor did it fully explain the crucifixion. However, it was the listeners themselves, and not the sermon, that gave voice to the meaning of crucifixion and moved from the challenge of the crucifixion to signs of hope. Listeners responded to Jesus’ interaction with the criminals and were able to name the impact of

that interaction. These responses all came from their own interpretation and processing rather than what was articulated in the sermon.

In Survey #1 the disconnect between what had been preached and what listeners heard seemed to reveal a lack of understanding of Jesus. However, in the responses to Survey #3 listeners appeared to move beyond what the sermon said and rely on their own knowledge and experience in order to clarify their understanding of Jesus. This may be a result of more comfort with completing the surveys, more experience with intentional listening to sermons or a growing vocabulary about how to articulate their faith as a result of focusing on Jesus' identity over the last three weeks.

I am not yet prepared to theorize that the work of exegeting the congregation and including that exegesis in the sermon through relevant story examples, common vernacular and beginning with their understanding of Jesus, is significant to the change in responses.

At this point in the research, prior to reading responses to Survey #2 and before writing Sermon #3, I was uncertain as to the impact sermons were having on listeners and what they were hearing. On November 24, in addition to participants completing Survey #3, I asked the congregation to listen to the sermon and then for each of them to write down and submit a title that they thought would be appropriate for the sermon they just heard.⁴⁴ There were seventy-seven sermon titles submitted.⁴⁵ Seventy-five of the sermon titles revealed that the listener had been impacted by a particular aspect of the sermon, while two referred more to their reaction to the sermon (boring, the sermon was very enlightening as usual). These sermon titles, while not

⁴⁴ This was a tool taught by Shauna Hannan in the DMin Core Course BP7531 Preaching as the Word of God in Context, June 2019.

⁴⁵ A full list of the sermon titles can be found in Appendix O.

conclusive as to what was being heard, indicated that people were listening to the sermon and gaining something from it that they could articulate, even in the small way of titling the sermon.

My own critical reading of the sermon was enlightening in that I did not fully address Jesus' crucifixion or the theology of the cross. My journal reflections on the importance of trust between the congregation and the preacher⁴⁶ gave me insight into my own hesitancy to make clear, bold theological claims. I also recognized in the writing of this sermon that I need to more clearly articulate my own theology for myself before I can bring it into a sermon.

Sermon #4

For the final sermon in the series the scripture John 1:1-2, 14-18, the UCC's A New Creed and focus were on "Jesus, the Word made flesh." The sermon was preached on a Sunday when we celebrated the Sacrament of Communion⁴⁷ which requires a shorter sermon. The liturgical aspects of Advent and communion were important considerations in this sermon (I wondered if I could connect the Incarnation to the Sacrament of Communion), as was the balance between honoring Advent and not moving to Christmas too quickly. This felt like a lot of aspects to consider in a sermon, let alone a short sermon. The sermon was written and ready to be preached on December 1 (Advent 1). However, due to the weather on that date worship was cancelled. This allowed for me to re-work some aspects of the sermon and include new exegetical emphases for the new date of December 15.

⁴⁶ See Journal in Appendix R.

⁴⁷ Trinity United Church celebrates communion approximately 5 times each year. This was my second Sunday presiding at the table with them.

This sermon was preached at a time when people were getting prepared for Christmas. I believe the Sunday prior (Advent 2) was a wonderful service that exhibited much of what the congregation had taught me about themselves. The pageant included people of all ages and abilities, and the congregation was so pleased by the method in which the story was told.⁴⁸ For the children's story I engaged the congregation in a playful rendition of the Christmas story, where I intentionally told it inaccurately (Mary rode to Bethlehem on the back of alligator) and they shouted out when I made a mistake and then gave the appropriate answer. This too, allowed for all ages to participate and to grow in confidence as they helped to tell the Christmas story. Advent 2 also included White Gift Sunday and I was pleasantly taken aback by the generosity and participation of the congregation in the offering of food, winter necessities (hats, mitts, socks) and toiletries that were collected for those in need. The entire service was a celebration.

Sermon #4 followed that celebratory service that gave clear examples and insight into how TUC lives out its commitment to outreach, inclusion and fun. This felt like added pressure on the sermon in terms of maintaining the joyful aspect of the season that was prevalent the Sunday prior. I was aware of all of this as I wrote and preached the sermon for Survey #4.

There were 12 responses to Survey #4 but several responses were not as detailed, with many answers left blank. This week the majority of respondents returned their surveys immediately following the worship service. I hypothesize that participants were tired of

⁴⁸ Historically the children have read parts in the pageant, which made many feel uncomfortable and the pageant included pressure to perform. This year there were adults and children who read from a script, provided actions, and the service relied on visuals as well. There was a very positive feeling about the pageant.

completing surveys, confused about the survey date based on moving Survey #4 to December 15⁴⁹, and they had other commitments with the approach of Christmas.⁵⁰

In responding to the questions⁵¹ regarding what story was proclaimed and what they heard in the sermon, ten of the twelve respondents referred to Jesus as the Word made flesh. Three respondents wrote that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promises while several people made the connection between God and Jesus with Jesus being the One to help make God known.

Respondents described the feelings that the sermon evoked as being; "today's sermon gave me a sense of excitement and anticipation as I await Christmas with the promise of Jesus' birth," "The story always leaves me in awe but I had never considered that God was trying to get our attention in a new way." Some reported the sermon was reassuring, left them feeling hopeful, felt God's love and wondering how they can explain faith to people. Of the eight people who responded to the question about what they learned, four people noted something pertaining to the importance of seeing, touching, and feeling God's love for it to be real. One noted that our knowledge of Jesus should affect our behavior, another that the sermon reconfirmed what they already had been told. One respondent reported that they had never heard the story explained in that way, and thus it gave clarification and understanding.

Other written responses to the sermon included one person who acknowledged their struggle with the God/Jesus relationship, another identified with all of mankind in that they feel lost in the ways of the world until they practice spiritual disciplines. One person was amazed at

⁴⁹ Survey #4 was to be completed Dec. 1, however church was closed due to weather. Dec. 8th the Pageant was scheduled, so the sermon for Survey #4 was preached two weeks after the original date.

⁵⁰ I was aware that several families were celebrating family Christmases that Sunday afternoon, some were attending a concert and others going to worship at the Nursing Home.

⁵¹ The complete responses to Survey #4 are in Appendix P.

Joseph's willingness to take Mary as his wife, and another identified with Mary who was chosen to raise God's Son. It is interesting to note here that Mary and Joseph were not part of the scripture reading or the sermon, however, were part of a video clip used in the communion liturgy.

The images or understandings of Jesus that the sermon portrayed include, but are not limited to: Jesus as God in human form, Jesus as humble, charitable, forgiving, "Jesus came so we could know God is with us," "that by becoming flesh Jesus had all this weakness that humans have," "his meaning and the importance of what Divine love is." Two responses referred to the communion video rather than the sermon. One person wrote that the images of Jesus might bring meaning to their life as they offer hope, peace, joy and love. Another answered that "sometimes faith is all we have and we have to trust in the path that God has put before us." In six of the ten responses to the question regarding how the images of Jesus evoke meaning, participants anticipated a change in behavior as a result of their understanding of Jesus and God.

The most important understanding about Jesus that respondents heard in the sermon about the Word made flesh included, but were not limited to: Jesus is fulfilling God's promise to us, he is the Word in human form, "Jesus made God's love real", "In our community of faith – bread and wine -we can find joy and belonging", God reaches out in surprise and joy.

Respondents saw Jesus connecting to the entirety of the Christian story in that his "birth brought the prophecy of old to life, pulling the threads of early Christianity together & humanizing the Christian experience." One respondent named Jesus as the beginning of the Christian story and wrote that the story is still alive and meaningful. Jesus was seen as the personification of love and an example of Christian living, and because he came as a babe in a lowly place that particular respondent feels acceptance. One person noted that in order to "get

the message” from God we need the physical being of Jesus. Another wrote “he was the true sign of the love and grace God means for us.”

Eight of the twelve respondents answer “no” or left blank the question relating to distractions to hearing the sermon.⁵²

Responses to Survey #4 reminded me that many listeners do not separate the sermon from the entirety of the worship experience. In course work for the DMin program and working with the Parish Response Groups, I often noted in their feedback that the Children’s Story, liturgy, prayers and other aspects of the service impacted how they heard the sermon. This reinforces in me the validity of the importance I place on continuity throughout a worship service and the value of every element of a worship service.

In this sermon the responses indicate that the respondents were able to hear and understand the message of Jesus as the Word made flesh. Many could tie this into the entirety of the Christian story in a way that I found indicative of their level of understanding. Responses were not as detailed or as plentiful as previous sermon surveys above. Those who did respond indicated that they had a deepened understanding of the Word made flesh and some were able to connect that to the Sacrament of communion in some way. In retrospect I think that this particular sermon could have introduced the term “incarnation” in a way that would have given listeners theological language to which they could relate in their understanding of Jesus.

⁵² One person arrived cold after a busy morning, one was wandering to their own health, one did not complete the questionnaire for a week so felt they might not have done justice to the sermon. One respondent included a personal story about a time they were sick and was visited by a real angel who spoke about God and his teachings. Interestingly this was then signed by the participant, although I could not make out the signature. It made me feel that the writer felt this information was relevant in some way to their responses, wanted to communicate this information to me for pastoral reasons, and was not sure how else to do it.

Questionnaire #2

Questionnaire #2 was completed by respondents following the four sermons preached. Some completed them immediately after listening to Sermon #4 and others throughout that week. All sixteen initial participants completed Questionnaire #2. This questionnaire included two identical questions to Questionnaire #1, and four questions that were similar to ones asked in Questionnaire #1 posed with reference to having had listened to the sermons.⁵³

In response to the question “Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?” twelve respondents indicated that Jesus was the Son of God and three used the terms “Word made flesh” or “God made flesh” in reference to Jesus. Seven of the respondents included “love” in their answer, one included “acceptance” and four people stressed that Jesus provides an example or inspiration for our behavior. One respondent wrote: “Jesus is a living presence in lives today offering hope, sustenance for the spirit, and strength for those of us in any time.” The term “Savior” or “salvation” was included by two respondents and one person identified that Jesus died on a cross.

People came to have their understanding of Jesus through sermons (ten responses), biblical stories (six responses), bible studies (three responses) and their experiences with others. One person indicated they “know it in my heart” and another commented on the importance of early learning in Sunday School. When asked if there was a biblical story over the course of the sermon series that helped them to define Jesus, five of the respondents named Jesus with the Samaritan Woman at the Well, three responded “Jesus as the Word made flesh”, and one chose the story of Jesus’ crucifixion. One person felt that all of the stories helped them to define Jesus. One articulated that their definitions of Jesus were formed decades ago. Two people mentioned

⁵³ Questionnaire #2 responses can be found in Appendix Q.

stories not covered in the sermon series that had an impact on them; Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman and the Lord's Prayer.

The story of Jesus' crucifixion was unsettling to six of the respondents. Eight of the respondents answered that none of the stories were unsettling to them or did not answer. One person indicated that there were no stories that unsettled them and included "Maybe I should have been." A respondent commented that they struggle with how to explain Jesus and faith to non-believers, and another reported that there are other biblical passages that disturb them.

In reporting on the image of Jesus with which they most identified over the course of the four sermons, while four people specifically mentioned the image presented in the story of the Woman at the Well, most responses named various traits in Jesus. Eight people referred to "love", five people to "inclusion/acceptance", two referred to his kindness. Other words that were used to describe their image of Jesus included, but were not limited to: teacher, sustainer, forgiveness, anger, did not follow social conventions. Respondents' images of Jesus help them to define their faith in that nine respondents articulated that their behavior is changed in some way. One feels their faith is made more secure because of their image of Jesus, one that their faith embodies inclusion and one person reported that they most relate to, rely on and trust Jesus.

In response to the question "Is a person's understanding of Jesus important to their faith life?" of the fifteen people who responded, eleven people responded "yes" and gave an explanation as to why. The other four respondents implied "yes" through their explanation of how their understanding of Jesus is important to their faith. Two people wanted to clarify that while they answer "yes", they also acknowledge other faith traditions that do not put Jesus at the center and still have their own way to God. Immediately following was the question asking if their image of Jesus shapes how they live their lives, with three respondents referring to the

previous answer, one leaving it blank and the remaining twelve respondents indicating ways in which their faith shapes their lives. Answers include, but are not limited to: I'm trying to emulate his love and acceptance, placing my faith in God & treating others as he did, causes me to reflect on my personal ideas and values, share time and talents, "he challenged us to be better people."

The question asking if there was an image of Jesus over the four sermons that people least identified with resulted in seven respondents leaving the answer blank or replying "no". Two people could not remember the details well enough to comment and one referred to the scripture story the week prior to beginning the series (Zacchaeus). Three respondents would not identify with Jesus' having to die on the cross, one could not identify with the thief on the cross, and one could not identify with "his place of privilege in society as a man."

When asked if respondents perceived a change in their understanding of Jesus from their answers given prior to hearing the four sermons, two respondents left the answer blank. Three people answered "yes", three people answered "no" and two people answered that their understanding had not changed but had become deeper or more comprehensive. One person reflected that they had to think more deeply than usual, four referred to a better or different understanding of Jesus' love, two named more emphasis on accepting others, and one wrote "Jesus seems to be more querulous in his engagement with ordinary folk – in order to reveal himself and explain his message."

The question "What would have an impact on your understanding of Jesus?" received seven blank responses. Three people would benefit from having biblical stories relate to today's life situations and how they can set an example, three responses indicated that further study of the bible would be helpful, one person would like to speak to Jesus and another is impacted by

people who they encounter living love and acceptance. One respondent wrote “I’m not sure anything would change my understanding of Jesus. He is good & right & just and all loving and forgiving. I can’t see anything changing that.”

Analysis and Interpretation of the Research

In the thesis “Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation” my goal was two-fold. I wanted to see if congregational exegesis and spending intentional, focused time getting to know the congregation would impact sermon development. I also wanted to know if this knowledge of the congregation could then be used in sermons to help deepen listener’s understanding of Jesus.

The ethnographic work and exegesis of the congregation resulted in an appreciation for the people of Trinity United Church and my increased knowledge of their practices, values, self-identity and theological understanding. As a new minister called to TUC, the timing of this thesis research was not only beneficial to my degree, but also to my ministry as the work I did gave me insight that might otherwise have taken years to gain. The Trinity congregation wanted to support my research, so they eagerly responded to invitations for me to get to know them. This, in turn, assured them of my interest in who they are as a congregation and as individuals, and allowed for relationships to begin to be formed that I trust will continue to grow and help me speak into their lives through sermons.

I was able to incorporate some of my learning into the sermons that were preached, specifically in regard to vernacular around the congregation’s identity of Jesus (loving, accepting, teacher) that was also reflective of their self-identity as they described TUC. Using these words in sermons in an attempt to identify with listeners resulted in their employing and feeding those same words back through their questionnaire and survey responses.

The use of the Contextual Analysis and the KWHL Chart each week required me to spend additional time studying what was happening in the world and the lives of my congregation. This made me more aware of things I needed to be sensitive to and consider in the sermon, as well as helped me try to locate the scripture story in topics relevant to the lives of listeners. While sermon illustrations included some of this exegetical knowledge and were acknowledged as helpful, I also heard the request for sermons to provide more applicable ways for listeners to respond and actively live their faith in ways that might impact their lives.

My self-exegesis took two different paths. Each week I was very intentional in spending time reflecting on the scripture text. I did my own form of *Lectio Divina*, in that I would read through the text searching for words that jumped out at me, that unsettled me and that I found compelling. I would mark up the text and re-mark it as I explored what the Word was saying to me. I would leave the text and go back to it another day to see what it said when I was perhaps in a different frame of mind. I then went back and looked at what the Word might be saying to the congregation I serve based on what I knew about them. I thoroughly loved this process and found it to be inspiring and faithful to my role as preacher and ethnographer. This work would then lead into text exegesis, consulting with various commentaries and preaching partners and all the while considering the congregation's context as it might apply to the sermon.

My other self-exegetical tool was the journal that I kept. I am surprised by some of the reflections that I had on the sermons as I was writing them and after I preached them. The journal revealed my own struggle with theological claims and language, which resulted in greater awareness of these struggles. However, those recorded struggles did not always translate well into changes in sermons. Noting these revelations, I do feel that over time, and with continued

reading and reflection on theology, my sermons will come to be impacted by my own growing awareness and deepened understanding of Jesus.

A particular reflection in my journal⁵⁴ explored the importance of trust between the preacher and the congregation. I recognized that without a certain level of trust that the preacher knows them and cares about them, the congregation is hesitant to allow the preacher to push them outside of their comfort zone theologically. Without a level of trust that the congregation will not throw them off a cliff for their teaching⁵⁵, the preacher will not explore difficult or challenging theological concepts. I cannot speak for the TUC congregation, but I recognize that I fell prey to this concern about trust in the sermons I preached for the series and did not boldly preach doctrine as I had intended.

The surveys gave good insight into what participants had heard in the sermons and how that made them feel or impacted their faith. While there were some responses that did not relate specifically to the sermons or biblical texts, the majority of participants were able to clearly articulate an understanding of Jesus from the sermon. They could identify points of connection and disconnection to images of Jesus and biblical characters, and name how those images might evoke meaning in their faith lives. Participants continued to use familiar and consistent language in describing Jesus.

Questionnaire #1 and Questionnaire #2 were used to set a baseline and end-line to measure participants' understanding of Jesus and how that understanding impacted their faith and lives. They were also helpful in giving me insight into the language participants were comfortable using pertaining to Jesus, the questions they had about him, and things they found

⁵⁴ See Appendix R for a full journal entry.

⁵⁵ In reference to Luke 4:28-29.

unsettling. Some of participants' language and word choice that remained from the first questionnaire to the last pertained to words that participants used to describe Jesus (loving, caring, accepting, teacher). Interestingly, and I would claim not coincidentally, they are similar words to how the congregation described themselves or sought to be (inclusive, caring, welcoming).

Over the course of the surveys and questionnaires I noted that participants became more comfortable making claims about Jesus, and were able to relate how Jesus tied into the overall story of Christianity (this was particularly true after Sermon #4 on Jesus the Word made flesh). When specifically asked if their understanding of Jesus had changed, of the fourteen people who answered the question, two indicated that it had not. The remaining twelve reported that they had either learned something more specifically, that "yes" their understanding had changed, or that while their understanding had not changed, they had a deeper or more comprehensive understanding of Jesus.

Summary

Chapter 5, Analysis of the Project, reveals that congregational and self-exegesis did have an impact on the sermons that were preached as they deepened my relationship with the congregation, and thus my ability to preach to them using words and concepts that they were able to relate to. Reflecting some of their stories back to them in the sermon and using some of their images of Jesus allowed for a stronger connection to the sermons. The congregational and self-exegesis did not have as significant or positive impact on my ability to preach clear theology as I had hoped. However, that exegesis did impact what listeners heard in the sermon. This hearing and then reflecting on what they heard led to a deeper understanding of Jesus in a majority of the participants. In this way I would claim that the outcome of my thesis was positive

and that exegeting the congregation can help the preacher to deepen the listener's understanding of Jesus.

However, I cannot claim that it was the exegesis itself that had a direct impact on the listener's understanding of Jesus. Familiarity with scripture texts, growing comfort with the preacher, hearing old ideas presented in new ways,⁵⁶ and being asked to be attentive to their learning may all have very well impacted listeners' understanding of Jesus.

On a personal note, the journal reflection on the importance of trust between preacher and congregation makes me even more confident that as I come to know the congregation more fully and the congregation knows me, I will become more willing to make bold theological claims that result in further conversation and the listener's deepening understanding of Jesus.

In the following chapter I will evaluate the project by reflecting on its strengths, shortcomings, things to do differently, surprises and wonderings, and next steps.

⁵⁶ Stoorvogel, "Sermons That Saved My Life," 23.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

The previous chapter reported and analyzed the data collected in the research for the thesis “Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation.” The data collected was in response to an Action-Reflection model used to determine if congregational and self-exegesis can help the preacher to preach in ways that deepen the listener’s understanding of Jesus. Data was organized to include information gathered in the exegesis of the congregation, two questionnaires, four surveys and my own reflections as I prepared and preached the four sermons.

In Chapter 6 I will evaluate the project by looking at its strengths, shortcomings and what might be done differently in a similar project. I will also share some of my personal reflections on what I learned, what I continue to wonder about and possible next steps.

Strengths

As a new minister at Trinity United Church the process of getting to know the congregation through the various exercises used to encourage them to teach me about who they are, impacted my thesis and will have a lasting impact on my ministry at TUC. I was able to learn through interactive methods to engage people (drawing Jesus, completing the time-line) and help the congregation identify their perceived strengths (congregational ad, naming their strengths before the sermon). Congregation members wanted to teach me about their history, the new sanctuary and were pleased that I was interested in knowing more about them. Although not

stated, I also sensed that some felt that their participation was a way of “supporting the new minister with her thesis,” and wanted to communicate that support.

In reading through the surveys that participants completed after each sermon, although anonymous, I learned more about the people at Trinity United Church. In their responses participants shared personal experiences, struggles and reflections on how the sermons impacted them (“I was bullied as a child so recoil from the soldiers taunting Jesus”).¹ One participant shared a personal story at the very end, and signed their Survey #4 (they had not signed any other), leading me to believe that they wanted me to know the story. Personal information (number of children, divorce) was included in the responses. Whether intentional or not, in their sharing participants gave me deeper insight into their lives. Perhaps it was the anonymous nature of the responses that allowed them to write so personally.

More specifically to the thesis, exegeting the congregation and studying their context led toward “more relevant and engaged preaching”² as I was able to incorporate some of their experiences, beliefs about themselves, and vernacular they used when speaking about Jesus. I was able to take the information I gathered and begin to develop a sense of the *signs* in the congregation. Nieman defines signs as “the markers of what matters seriously, what bears greatest meaning, and what conveys ultimate claims, transcendent realities, or even genuine holiness.”³ Understanding and appreciating what matters to the people of Trinity United Church not only shaped the words and images in my sermon, but also lead to a growing fondness for the people that I trust was communicated in my preaching through my pulpit presence and

¹ As quoted from a participant response in Survey #3.

² Nieman, *Preaching in Context*, 6.

³ Nieman, *Preaching in Context*, 53.

performance.⁴ This was noted in the responses (by one participant, in particular) and through conversation with parishioners. If it is true that “authenticity of the communicator is a factor that creates the right atmosphere for people to tune in and receive the message,”⁵ then my genuine appreciation and care for the people of TUC, being experienced during preaching, will aid in what listeners are able to hear.

The relevance of knowing the congregation and, in turn, hopefully building a trusting relationship, comes into play when trying to preach challenging or unknown biblical stories and theological concepts. My journal reflections on the need for trust between preacher and congregation speaks to the importance of that relationship and is reiterated in Stoorvogel et al’s article when the writers name “if there is a lack of consonance, hearers will not feel inclined to connect with preachers and be persuaded by them.”⁶ One of the strengths of this research was that the congregational exegetical process provided information that helped shape the four sermons that were preached and initiated relationships which impacted how sermons were heard and experienced.

Another strength of the research was that through the questionnaires I was able to learn some of the questions that people have about Jesus. With this information I intentionally tried to incorporate didactic elements into the sermons. Specifically, people wondered what life was like for Jesus. Including historical and cultural content in the sermons resulted in a deeper understanding of the biblical text and Jesus. Participants commented on the impact new learning

⁴ I continue to struggle with using the word “performance” when it comes to preaching, especially if laity are reading this thesis. The DMin Core class on performance helped me to better understand the use of the word, however I confess that the word still brings images of me in a mime costume!

⁵ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Changed My Life,” 26.

⁶ Stoorvogel et al, “Sermons That Changed My Life,” 14.

had on their ability to hear the story and be affected by the sermon. Having the data from the questionnaire helped me to preach in ways that spoke of concrete struggles/questions that participants had about Jesus, which Nieman reminds us “will have a greater impact than generalizations ever will.”⁷

In analyzing the data over the course of the research I noted that participants started to become more comfortable articulating what they had heard and believed. Their responses took on a more personal nature, used new words for describing Jesus compared to Questionnaire #1, and articulated a commitment to exploring their understanding of Jesus. When specifically asked if they perceived a change in their understanding of Jesus, nine of the fourteen participants who answered the question indicated that their understanding of Jesus had either changed, become deeper or they had clearer insight into some aspect of Jesus.

For me, personally, one of the strengths of the project was my self-exegesis and writing the journal. Taking the time to reflect on what I bring into the sermon each week (Contextual Analysis and KWHL Chart), how I feel about what I am preaching, the questions I have and the theology from which I am writing, all impacted my sermon development and my preaching. This is a good practice for me to continue if my goal is to help deepen listeners’ understanding of Jesus and my own.

Shortcomings

When I think of the short-comings and frustrations of the research many of them are as a result of lack of time or things I might have done differently if I had more time. The change in

⁷ Nieman, *Preaching in Context*, 10.

my pastoral relationship in October of the year of my research, while helpful to the topic itself, was problematic in implementing the research.

Ideally, I would have taken 6 months to have completed the research (rather than 2.5). The process of congregational exegesis over a longer time period would have allowed for more depth in coming to know the congregation. I would have benefited from an exercise that taught me their theological language (if they have one) and their understanding of different doctrine pertaining to Jesus (atonement, incarnation, justification). They, in turn would also have gotten to know me better and that might have further impacted their ability to hear the sermons.

An extended period of time would have allowed me to read and analyze Questionnaire #1, discern some of their questions about Jesus or stories that trouble them, and then decide upon the biblical texts for the four sermons. I believe that texts specific to their questions might have had a deeper impact on their understanding of Jesus.

I also think that it would have been helpful to have written the survey questions after choosing the scripture readings. Some of the questions did not pertain to the particular text, such as the question “Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from?” In sermon #4 (John 1:1-2, 14-18) there was not an actual character. Knowing the texts in advance would have allowed for questions more relevant to the chosen scripture.

Timing also had an impact on my ability to receive, read and then apply the information from the surveys prior to preaching the next sermon. Had there been time in between preaching the four sermons I could have used data gathered to build on the understandings expressed or questions still left unanswered. More time in between sermons would have also allowed me to journal and reflect upon the image of Jesus that would be portrayed in the sermon and my own theological stance on that image. Theology and UCC doctrine for each sermon could have been

better synthesized with participant's needs, my own understanding and the text had there been more time between sermons.

Survey #4 and Questionnaire #2 were handed out on the same day. This was after three surveys and Questionnaire #1 being completed in a very short time period. I think by the end of the research participants were tired of completing so much written work in a brief time span. I can imagine that the survey questions would have felt repetitive completing them each week.

Another shortcoming of the research was that as a result of the congregational exegesis I was able to write sermons to engage the congregation using familiar points of reference and begin with their self-described image of Jesus. However, because I did not have added information from completed surveys prior to writing the next sermon, I was not able to intentionally help them to move or grow from that place. This is not solely the fault of timing. I fully recognize that my own resistance to proclaiming clear theology and challenge people's beliefs limited the theological content in the sermons. I would have liked to have had more than one sermon preached on each aspect of Jesus' identity portrayed in the United Church of Canada's A New Creed, so that I could introduce the image and develop it in subsequent sermons.

In analyzing the survey responses, I was reminded how difficult it is for listeners to isolate the impact of the sermon from the worship service in its entirety. Liturgy, music, prayers and the children's story all work together to shape listeners' experience of the Word of God. While sermons were the specific variable being studied, it was evident from listener's responses that participants considered the entire service when responding to the surveys.

A further shortcoming of this research is the overall amount of data that was accumulated with the majority of the questions being open-ended, generating a great deal of information that

was difficult to manage and measure. In retrospect using closed-ended questions that were more easily measurable would have simplified data and the amount of writing done by participants. Alternately, surveys could have been limited to fewer and more directly relevant questions.

Things to Do Differently

If another researcher were to duplicate this research or a preacher wanted to use it to try to deepen their listeners' understanding of Jesus, there are key things that could be done differently to affect greater change.

With an increased amount of time, I would do the research over a minimum period of six months, beginning prior to Advent and concluding after Easter. Not only would this amount of time minimize many of the shortcomings mentioned above, it would also allow the preacher to tie the research more closely to aspects of Jesus' identity that are highlighted in the liturgical year; Advent (the Promised Messiah), Christmas (the Word Made Flesh), Good Friday (the Crucified One), and Easter (the Resurrected One). Sermons would not need to fall on the actual date of the holy days but within the season.

Alternately, still using a six-month time frame, I would choose four biblical characters who interact with Jesus in a way that reveals his identity. Participants in this research responded positively to scripture texts that included people with whom they might identify or felt disconnected from in some way. In her thesis "Real People, Real Faith, Real God: Encountering the Divine in Preaching Biblical Characters,"⁸ Cynthia Halvorson, when advocating for the effectiveness of preaching based on biblical witnesses, discovered that "bringing biblical

⁸Halvorson, "Real People," 2018.

characters to life enhance listeners' ability to encounter the Divine."⁹ Preaching on texts that include specific biblical characters (for example, the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, Nicodemus, the Hemorrhaging Woman, the boy who shared his lunch) who encounter Jesus, with whom listeners can identify, may help listeners deepen their understanding of Jesus.

Surprises and Wonderings

My first surprise as I read through the questionnaires and surveys was how profound some of the responses were. There was clarity and insight for some and relevant and thought-provoking questions for others. I found myself wanting to use some of their ideas in a sermon, and at one point thought that had I had their responses BEFORE preaching the sermon, my sermon would have been greatly improved or taken a much more meaningful approach for them. This learning encourages me, in this new ministry, to look at the possibility of doing Bible study with a group prior to preaching on a text. This will allow for more feed-forward material that can then impact sermon development and listeners' engagement with the Word. Karoline Lewis spoke to this when she wrote "there is something theologically important in dialogue. Revelation, understanding, possibility, and openness happen in conversation. Conversation itself is indicative of theological curiosity and not doctrinal conclusiveness."¹⁰ The opportunity to engage in conversation about the text prior to preaching will allow me to continue to exegete the congregation and learn more about their theological core, and it will give all those who participate the opportunity to explore and name what they believe and how those beliefs shape their lives.

⁹ Halvorson, "Real People," 73.

¹⁰ Karoline Lewis, *John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 46.

As I read through the questionnaires and surveys, I was greatly impacted by the personal nature of some of the responses. I found myself wanting to get to know the respondent better and learn even more about them.¹¹ I read snippets of their stories and wanted the whole book! I will look forward to continuing to grow my relationship with the congregation and with the individuals who make up that congregation.

The pastor in me heard how many participants could identify with loving others but struggled with loving themselves. I could not help but wonder if that is what they had been taught in sermons and reminded me of the importance of helping people to know the meaning and the experience of God's grace. There were several comments made that deserve a pastoral response and I hope that participants will come to me so that the anonymity will break down the barrier that presently keeps me from being able to respond.

In reviewing the survey responses there were comments made by participants that referred to what they had heard in the sermon. In some cases I am very confident that I did not say or even imply what they heard. In other surveys it appeared that each participant heard a completely different sermon. This brought greater clarity to Mark Allan Powell's work on polyvalence in *What Do They Hear?* as it was evident that participant's own story, social location and experience was impacting how they heard the sermon.

Throughout the course of this work I have had several questions come to mind that I think are worth considering. I recognize that I wrestle with "good theology" and preaching that is reflective of a theological core. I also recognize that I have difficulty putting theological concepts into sermons with any sort of clarity. As I was thinking about this and reviewing my journal notes I found myself wondering if perhaps it's not about helping our listeners (or

¹¹ The anonymous nature of the questionnaires and surveys preclude this from happening.

ourselves) be able to use “fancy words” and name doctrine. Maybe it is always about deepening our¹² individual understanding of Jesus and coming to better understand how Jesus is inviting us into relationship. Perhaps it is the relationship itself that is primary and not how we explain, interpret or label that relationship. This is not to dismiss the importance of clear theology, but instead highlights the need and benefit of helping people grow in their relationship with Jesus,

Another question that is relevant to this research pertains to naming the actual change agent as people deepened their understanding of Jesus. While the research indicates that coming to know the congregation did have an impact on sermons and what was heard by the listeners, I also wonder if it was the invitation to listen to the sermons with intention and then reflect on them which deepened listeners’ understanding of Jesus. I noted in my analysis that responses changed over the course of the sermons. Participants knew what to be listening for as they were familiar with the questions. If preachers regularly invited responses to sermons in some way (What title would you give the sermon you just heard? What will you share with a friend that you learned about Jesus today?) or encouraged listeners to pay attention to a specific topic (Where do you hear grace in this sermon? What might you have done if you were the one asked to carry Christ’s cross?), or asked listeners to communicate with you sometime throughout the week what they had heard (Please e-mail me about the places where you saw people actively living compassion in your community or tell me how you might have reacted to Jesus’ interaction with the woman caught in adultery.),¹³ would they be more inclined to actively listen to sermons, knowing that some form of response was expected of them?

¹² “Our” referring to both listener and preacher.

¹³ David Lose, in his former “Working Preacher” and present “...in the Meantime” posts, encourages engaging listeners in creative ways.

Next Steps

The relevance of what I learned through congregational exegesis convinces me that this is an important practice not only for ministers who are beginning a new call, but for all those in ministry. The tools that were used, the exercises that people were invited to take part in and the intention around coming to know a congregation and its members, can be employed throughout a ministry. I will continue to find creative and interactive ways to exegete the congregation and to learn of their identity as both the congregation and I change and grow. Finding ways to incorporate that learning into sermons so that sermons are relevant and contextual to listeners will be an ongoing practice in preaching.

The feedback and feed-forward processes used with sermons, when mined for further learning, can help preachers to gain a better understanding of how their sermons are being heard and what impact those sermons are having on their listeners. Being intentional and proactive in hearing congregation members, providing them with opportunities to delve into scripture prior to hearing a sermon, and giving them the opportunity to reflect upon what they heard and its impact on their daily lives, has the potential to deepen listeners' understanding of Jesus and transform their relationship with him, no matter where they might be on the theological spectrum.

I would be negligent if I did not acknowledge an important next step for me as a preacher and as someone seeking to grow in faith. That step is for me to spend intentional time reading and writing about theology. I enjoyed the research I did for this thesis and for the sermons I preached. I am, by nature, someone who likes to learn and put that learning into practice. The opportunity to study theology, engage with colleagues and resources, and invite my congregation into conversation will have a lasting impact on the sermons I preach and the faith I profess.

Summary

In Chapter 6 I evaluated the project by looking at its strengths, shortcomings and what might be done differently in a similar project. I shared some of the surprises I found as I completed the work and some questions that I am left with at the end of the project. I also proposed some next steps for preaching ministers and for my own ministry. In Chapter 7 I will reflect on the value this project has for preachers and the wider church. I will also share my personal reflections on how the work of completing this thesis has impacted me.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTION

I began the writing of this thesis with the story of those first century Greeks who had heard stories of Jesus and all that he had done. The stories were no longer enough to satisfy them, and instead they went in search of a personal encounter with Jesus. When they met Philip their words and their request were clear, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21).

Today many still wish to see Jesus as they seek to affirm and grow in their faith. And while they may be familiar with biblical stories, that does not always translate into an ability to name and claim who they understand Jesus to be and how that shapes their lives.

The purpose of this thesis was to gain an understanding of the congregation of Trinity United Church’s Christology through their own expression of it. By studying the congregation’s context, coming to know them more fully and listening to their expressions of faith, I anticipated I would find clarity around the Jesus they know and the Jesus with whom they can deepen their faith. With this knowledge I would preach four sermons that address different images of Jesus with the intention of articulating clear theology that would allow listeners to deepen their understanding of Jesus.

A secondary purpose of this research was for this preacher, through studying United Church of Canada faith statements, reading the work of respected theologians and self-exegesis, to deepen my own understanding of Jesus so that I may preach with clarity and integrity. In the introductory chapter of this thesis I stated that it’s difficult to preach on Christ and the Christian

life when we are uncertain about who Jesus is and what his life, death, resurrection and ascension mean for those who follow him.

It is my hope that this project will have value to the congregation of Trinity United Church, to my preaching and practice of ministry, and to the wider church.

The Value of this Project

The benefit of congregational exegesis and spending intentional time getting to know the congregation of Trinity United Church helped me not only to get to know congregational members, it also gave me insight into their collective lived and local theology. I was able to gather data that provided clarity around their self-identity, values, practices and ways they live their faith. While this data is helpful for me as I begin my ministry at TUC, the collection of it taught the congregation that I was interested in getting to know them and wanted to hear their stories. It was a time for us to begin to build our relationship and for the congregation to meet with me in ways outside of worship or pastoral visits. They were given insight into the thesis project and while not directly stated, their participation indicated a willingness to be part of the research.

The data collected through exegesis has helped to shape worship liturgy, preaching and the ways in which I interact with the congregation. It will continue to influence how we move forward together, specifically the choices about education and faith development programs, outreach opportunities, congregational growth and preaching. Being intentional in time spent continuing to learn about the congregation as time passes and changes occur, will keep me in touch with who they are and who God is calling them to be as individuals and a congregation. I trust that this will be a value to the congregation as they experience a minister who really does want to be in relationship with them and respond to their needs, values and beliefs.

The four sermons that were preached with the focus on images of Jesus were of benefit to those who participated in the research. The opportunity to complete the questionnaires and surveys allowed them to articulate their beliefs, wrestle with biblical stories, explore their questions and spend time focusing on their understanding of Jesus. Responses indicated that this was a positive experience for participants and growth was noted in the results. As articulated in Chapter 2, when people encounter Jesus they come to know themselves more fully. It is hoped that those who participated in the research have discovered that to be true and that their participation might inspire them to listen to sermons with a greater focus on what they are hearing and how that impacts their faith.

An additional perceived value to the congregation at Trinity is that all those who listened to the sermons (participants in the research and those in the congregation) had the opportunity to learn more about Jesus. Sermons addressed history and culture, theology and faith as they proclaimed Jesus. Sometimes listening to sermons is the only form of faith development in which people engage. If Anthony Robinson is correct in assessing that:

the core convictions of the church about the person and work of Jesus Christ are crucial to congregational vitality, for they both fundamentally ground and enrich the life of congregations. Congregations ought not avoid the basic and central questions, “Who is Jesus?” and “How does Jesus help us?”¹

then the work of this thesis and subsequent preaching on Jesus that reflects clear theology, will enrich the lives of listeners and enliven the congregation.

The value that this research has to the United Church of Canada is that in my interactions with colleagues I have noted a growing frustration with the perceived lack of a theological core. In speaking with other preachers there is increased stress about what to preach as we try to meet

¹ Robinson, *What's Theology got to do with it?* 133.

the needs of theologically diverse congregations within the UCC. I hope that should any of my colleagues read this work, they might be inspired to seek out the gifted and wise writings of other United Church colleagues. There are many UCC historians, theologians and homiletics who have a great deal to offer to those who preach. We have well-written and faithful theological statements that can be our companions and our guides. We also have one another, preachers with whom we can gather with to explore and deepen our own understanding of Jesus. That kind of intentional connection may better equip us to preach in the midst of the diversity, embrace new expressions of faith, and be relevant in our contexts, all in hope of revitalizing this Church that we love!

In reflecting upon the value that this project might have to the wider church, I see the project encouraging preachers to take the time to exegete their congregations and reflect on their context each week. In the busyness of ministry, the time spent engaging the congregation and learning about what is important to them, has the potential to shape sermons in ways that reach listeners in an impactful way. It builds relationships between congregations and preachers, which in turn builds trust. This trust will allow listeners to hear more readily when they are being challenged or pushed beyond their comfort zone and will give preachers the confidence to preach what they feel convicted to preach.

The other value for preachers in the wider church is that this project speaks to the benefit to listeners when they are invited to actively listen to the sermon and respond in some way. This research asked for written responses; however, there are many ways to encourage listeners to reflect on what they have heard and make applications for their lives. It is often my concern (and that concern was supported from participant feedback) that sermons do not encourage listeners to apply what they have heard to their own lives. As often as I have tried to ensure this is an aspect

of the sermons I preach, I feel it falls short. However, perhaps the responsibility of finding application is not that of the preacher, but rather the responsibility of the listener is to find ways to connect the sermon to their daily lives. Preachers can offer specific suggestions for how that might be done (as suggested in Chapter 6) and encourage listeners to reflect and respond to what they have heard.

Where Might It Lead?

Further research to expand on this thesis would involve determining if indeed listeners do deepen their understanding of Jesus when they are invited to respond in some way to what they have heard in the sermon. Providing several formats for reflecting on sermons would allow researchers to study if there is an impact on listeners' understanding of Jesus and which type of format has the greatest impact (such as responding to written questions, titling the sermon, re-telling the sermon to a friend, finding an example from the sermon in their life that week).

I also would be interested in finding further research that focused on the impact of participants having the opportunity to be engaged in scripture study before Sunday worship or an educational opportunity discussing Christology, where participants are invited to discuss their understanding of Jesus prior to hearing the sermon. Research has been done on the impact of text-study prior to hearing a sermon,² and I think similar research could be done to better determine if pre-sermon study impacts listeners' lived and proclaimed Christology.

² DMin Theses by Brian D. Mundt, "Creating a Culture of Israel: A Congregation Wrestles with the Word" (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2009) and Vern Christopherson, "Preaching to People Who Read and Reflect on the Worship Texts in Advance" (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Luther Seminary, 2009) both address the impact that reading scripture prior to hearing has sermon, has on listeners. While their work does not specifically address listeners' deepened understanding of Jesus, they both support the idea that scripture study prior to sermons has a positive impact on how listeners understand and became engaged in the sermon.

This research focused on exegetical and ethnographic work done at the beginning of a new ministry relationship. I propose that exegesis can happen throughout a preacher's ministry in a particular congregation. Interesting research would focus on creating or studying methods of congregational exegesis that can be used over the course of a pastoral ministry. What tools might be used to strengthen a preacher's knowledge of the congregation after three, five, ten years of shared ministry?

In my research I found that keeping a journal on my own reactions to the sermons and my questions around Jesus influenced my thinking and challenged me to give voice to my beliefs. What impact would it have on listeners if they, too, kept a journal of their reactions to sermons they have heard? What if they completed the Contextual Analysis each week before attending worship so that they listen to sermons with that awareness? Would it have a greater impact on how they hear the sermon and how they respond to that sermon? There is still a great deal preachers can learn as research expands to include some of these questions.

Where Am I Now?

As I come to the final chapter of this thesis "Congregational Exegesis: Toward Shared Proclamation" I am surprised by the feeling of loss surrounding the completion of this project. This work has been a constant companion on my computer, mind and heart (not to mention my family's kitchen table!), and the DMin program has had a transformational impact on my preaching and ministry.

I confess that this thesis topic is not the first topic I explored during my DMin studies. There were many areas that piqued my curiosity and spoke to my desire to become a more faithful preacher. I also confess that many of those topics grew out of my frustration and uncertainty about the theological diversity I experience in the United Church of Canada. If I am

honest, the thesis topic I undertook was a result of my own discomfort with being able to name what I believe and claim why I believe as I do. My theological vernacular has always been below what I thought it needed to be.

As a preaching and pastoral minister, especially in my previous congregation, I felt that I always had to be armed and ready to defend anything I claimed about Jesus or God, and I believed that I was seen to be intellectually inferior and naïve in my understanding and preaching.³ I became more and more hesitant to make any theological claims, let alone bold ones.⁴ Further, my frustration about the lack of clarity around theology in the United Church of Canada was heightened with the recent controversy around the UCC maintaining the status of a proclaimed atheist minister. This created uncertainty about how to address the questions that this decision evoked in the congregation I serve, as well as colleagues, the wider ecumenical community and in my own heart. I wanted clarity around what I should and could preach and believed that clarity should come from the United Church of Canada.

In the reading and research of this thesis I re-discovered that the United Church of Canada does have theological statements upon which to ground one's growing faith and preaching. There are gifted theologians, homileticians and writers who are members of the UCC who widely share their wisdom and insight. There are fellow travelers on this road who are able and willing to help navigate the challenges of theological diversity and this is a road I need and want to travel. In the research and writing of this thesis I was reminded of why I love being part

³ Admittedly the dissenting voices were not the majority, but they were loud and often left me feeling immobilized.

⁴ As a result of preaching during the Core 2 class and feedback about being quiet when I preach, I came to realize and articulate that I felt that I had lost my voice as a preacher.

of the UCC and how important it is that the Church encourage its members to deepen their understanding of Jesus, no matter where they fall on the theological spectrum.

Through the initial work I did in exegeting the congregation I have become even more convinced of the importance of using creative means to come to know the congregation. I will enjoy developing new tools to use to continue to come to know TUC and will have fun exploring ways to invite the congregation to reflect upon and respond to sermons. I see this as a way to help listeners engage in their own faith development and deepen their understanding of Jesus.

Perhaps my most profound learning in the work of this thesis is around my own growing theology. I have found the reading and learning that I have done to be stimulating. The practice of writing in my journal and Lectio Divina was something that I looked forward to each week. I found that exploring the scripture in this way gave me a new appreciation for the biblical stories and finding ways to help them come alive for listeners. I love crafting sermons, and this preparation work adds to that love. However, it was only because of this thesis that I committed to doing that work for the four sermons. I need to give myself permission to take the time to fully engage in my own exegetical work each week. It will enhance the sermons I preach by helping me to connect context to text and deepening my own understanding of Jesus.

In conclusion I return to a quote⁵ from the book *Preaching the Big Questions: Doctrine Isn't Dusty* where the authors remind readers that

doctrine is a gift. It is a breath of fresh air when everything seems routine. It is finding a new path of adventure when every other way looks predictable. Doctrine is meant to open our minds, to present possibilities, to engage us in transformation.⁶

⁵ This quote was used in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁶ MacLean and Young, *Preaching the Big Questions*, 17.

As I study theology and find language for my own beliefs, as I turn to doctrine to shape those beliefs, and as I boldly preach sermons that clearly articulate an understanding of Jesus, I look forward to the possibilities and transformation that God will bring.

APPENDIX A

The United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada was founded in 1925 in an attempt to unite Protestants in Canada through “setting aside the doctrinal differences of the past by professing a ‘common faith’ that emphasized their theological harmony.”⁷ Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and the Evangelical United Brethren (in 1968) came together to “proclaim a social gospel – not an endorsement of a partisan political or economic agenda, but an orientation to life that connected faith and community.”⁸ On the 10th Anniversary of Church Union, the United Church declared:

On this its Tenth Anniversary, The United Church of Canada reaffirms before the world its faith in the ideals and principles which brought it into being. In the light of ten years' experience it has found these ideals to be eminently practicable in their out-working, and in the quest of them its members have found an enriched and deepened fellowship, human and divine. In a renewed conviction of the worth of inclusive Christian fellowship, The United Church of Canada enters its second decade, prepared, as the opportunity may offer and as God may direct, to seek with other Christian communions further development of its ideals, whether by increased co-operation, organic union, or otherwise, and so fulfill its purpose of being not merely a united, but a uniting church.⁹

The church was a national church which gave it a great deal of influence in the country and the voice of the United Church of Canada was one that was respected and sought after in the political sphere.

Historians have documented the United Church's important role in helping to build a social service infrastructure before the Second World War, and, more recently, its participation in debates about national identity and constitutional change. It has often

⁷ Phyllis D. Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), xviii.

⁸ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, xix.

⁹ United Church of Canada <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/historical-timeline>. Accessed Dec. 6, 2019.

tried, and sometimes succeeded, to serve as the conscience of the nation; and it has often reflected, and sometimes led, important sea changes in the mores of English Canada.¹⁰

Throughout its history, the United Church of Canada has celebrated time of strength and vitality, and has suffered decline and loss of identity. In 1936 the UCC ordained its first woman, the Rev. Lydia Gruchy, and during the second World War, while the UCC engaged in chaplaincy efforts, it also signed a witness against war, stating the church's pacifist views and speaking against conscription.

During the 1950's the church was seen to be "vibrant, growing and confident."¹¹ The church "proclaim[ed] a social gospel – not an endorsement of a partisan political or economic agenda, but an orientation to life that connected faith and community."¹² Being a member of the UCC had a civic dimension to it and churches were shaping post-war communities across the country. However by the mid-sixties many noted a "crisis of institutional identity"¹³ in the UCC and the idea of a national church began to diminish as Protestantism declined in Canada.

By the end of the 1960s it was evident that Canada was 'rescripting' the role of religion in public life. The importance of faith was still acknowledged, but there was little attention paid to the particular contributions of one church or another. The new Canada wanted no church – Catholic or Protestant – as its conscience; there was little state interest in the United Church's offer of friendly service.¹⁴

That said, during this time the United Church of Canada continued to look at how the church might shape the culture of which it was a part. The Commission on Gainful Employment of Married Women, presented to the 1962 meeting of General Council, was the first study in

¹⁰ Kevin N. Flatt, *After Evangelicalism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 3.

¹¹ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, xix.

¹² Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, xix.

¹³ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, xix.

¹⁴ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*, 296.

Canada “to consider the implications of married women in paid positions from a Christian perspective and among its recommendations was a call for government and social service agencies to help working families and support for the principle of equal pay for equal work.”¹⁵ Medicare and Temperance were topics during this time. The church addressed the restructuring of women’s work in the church and the question of married women and ordination.¹⁶ On a global scale the church spoke out against Apartheid in South Africa, protested against American military action in Vietnam, recognized the Peoples Republic of China and addressed issues of disarmament. Church leaders at the time wanted to show the people of the sixties “Christians who sought cultural relevance and were eager to participate in progressive change.”¹⁷ While leaders with the national church were taking bold stances, they were not always representative of the voices of those in the pews. Instead the church “eschewed strong positions in favour of social harmony and respect for individual freedoms – an inclusive agenda, rather than a radical one.”¹⁸ During the 1960’s the New Curriculum was introduced as an educational tool in the church for people of all ages and it “continued to be a flashpoint between theological conservatives and liberals.”¹⁹

The 1970s brought a focus on marginalized voices. “National church leadership, both elected and staff, were influenced by contemporary liberation theologies and as a result

¹⁵ Airhart, *A Church With the Soul of a Nation*. 183.

¹⁶ Sandra Beardsall, ““And Whether Pigs Have Wings”” *The United Church in the 1960s*,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 109.

¹⁷ Sandra Beardsall, ““And Whether Pigs Have Wings,”” 101.

¹⁸ Sandra Beardsall, ““And Whether Pigs Have Wings,”” 103.

¹⁹ Joan Wyatt, “The 1970s: Voices from the Margins,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 124.

increasingly listened and responded to these voices.”²⁰ Feminism, French-English relations, and First Nations Land Claims were some of the conversations of great importance during this time. Church policy, teaching and practice were influenced by the message of liberation, however for some, the focus on social justice was named as the cause of continuing decline in the UCC. The seventies also marked a time of increased loss of political influence that “corresponded to a decline in membership, the reality of an increasingly secular society, and an increase in multicultural and multi-faith dynamics in Canada.”²¹ The New Curriculum continued to be a controversial topic with

tension between members seeking a personal experience of salvation through Christ, a literalist understanding of the Bible, and a Sunday school experience characteristic of the fifties were at odds with others, many of whom were in national leadership positions, and who lived their faith seeking justice in and for the world. Such liberals were committed to action but were not always explicit about their theological convictions.²²

During the 1970s the UCC spent a great deal of energy focusing on ecumenism, specifically between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and between the Disciples of Christ, Anglican Church and the United Church of Canada. However in the UCC itself the gap between national leadership and the church widened.

The leadership of the church held fast to the assumption that information and education would eventually convince even those who resisted the idea that faithful mission required siding with the outsider and the oppressed. Others, particularly at the congregational level, maintained that spiritual nurture, based on a fundamental orientation to the biblical message, was needed to restore the church to health.²³

²⁰ Wyatt, “The 1970s: Voices from the Margins,” 121.

²¹ Wyatt, “The 1970s: Voices from the Margins,” 124.

²² Wyatt, “The 1970s: Voices from the Margins,” 125.

²³ Wyatt, “The 1970s: Voices from the Margins,” 135.

For the United Church of Canada the 1980s brought a shift to the church's goals and identity. In seeking to respond more intentionally to marginalized voices, the church became increasingly fragmented and internally conflicted as "it became clear that the United Church family was not as united as many had hoped."²⁴ Liberation theology was calling for change not only in Central America, but for all Christians, and questions around ethics and responsibility became more prominent.²⁵ In the UCC human sexuality concerns took front and center as the church

witnessed a growing demand from members for clarification of the church's stand on sexual expression. While this demand came from grassroots members, the national church's responses created conflict and eventually alienation between many congregations and the national church.²⁶

In 1988 the General Council declared that

all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to be or become members of The United Church of Canada" and that "all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry."²⁷

The eighties also addressed concerns around the Trinitarian formula in an attempt to have more inclusive language, however this did not pass. Inclusive language did continue to be a topic in the church into the nineties. Apartheid, nuclear weapons, racism, sexism and apologies to our First Nations siblings were all important aspects of work in the UCC in the 1980s, with the All Native Circle Conference being formed and installed in 1988.²⁸

²⁴ Tracy Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be the United Church of Canada? Emergent Voices, Self-Critique, and Dissent" in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 141.

²⁵ Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be the United Church of Canada? 141.

²⁶ Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be the United Church of Canada? 142.

²⁷ United Church of Canada timeline.

²⁸ Trothen, "1980s: What Does It Mean to Be the United Church of Canada? 146-147.

The 1990s responded to the predictions of the demise of organized religion. The UCC was impacted by urbanization and rural depopulation. Canadians “expressed an increased interest in spiritual matters, yet a declining allegiance to organized religion,”²⁹ and “by 2001, the ‘none’ had surpassed ‘United Church’ as the second-most popular answer for religious affiliation on the census.”³⁰ Social status, declining finances and human resources, and issues of social change all impacted the UCC during this period.

Within the church there was a great deal of frustration with how church courts operated and the how decisions were being made. The 1988 decision on the ordination/commissioning of homosexual persons created splits in congregations with 3.5% of the UCC membership, 70 ministry personnel and 60 preaching points departing from the UCC.³¹ The aftermath resulted in church meetings filled with cruelty and inflammatory language, attempts at healing, and a significant change in the ethos of the UCC as long-standing tensions and differences began to surface.³²

This was also the decade when the UCC began to look at the need for institutional reorganization as a result of decreasing resources and members. In these changes

some began to see an increased ‘professionalization’ in the church, as a reliance on paid staff increasingly replaced the volunteer staff pattern of the previous division structure. Part of this was financial, however some observers saw in this professionalization a movement toward a different form of ecclesiology.³³

²⁹ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 164.

³⁰ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” 164.

³¹ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” 165.

³² Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” 166.

³³ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” 170.

The 1992 General Council received the report on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture as well as several documents meant to “give new articulation to the United Church’s self-understanding in relation to other faith traditions.”³⁴ A focus on the church’s sustainability became a central focus, and “discussions around worship, congregational revitalization, and being the church in a multicultural society came increasingly to the fore.”³⁵ Social justice continued to be a focus, as was the Jubilee Initiative that sought to address the financial burdens owed by some of the poorest nations in the world, and responding to the residential school crisis.

The new millennium for the United Church of Canada required a response to the growing multiculturalism and secularization in Canada. Multi-faith and multi-cultural relationships, as well as improved and intentional relationships with our First Nations, have been important developments in the church. A policy on anti-racism was adopted, recognizing the need for the church to deal with racism within and outside the church.³⁶ Response to the HIV/Aids pandemic and Israel-Palestine, were important commitments for the UCC. Church decline continued and more congregations responded to a decrease in numbers by closing or amalgamating with other congregations. Part-time clergy and lay worship leaders are in many pulpits, and there is a decrease in the number of candidates looking to enter the ministry.

The present decade has focused on environmental stewardship and improved relationships with Indigenous and multi-faith partners. Welcoming refugees, the signing of a Full Communion Agreement with the United Church of Christ in the United States, and the Comprehensive Review Task Group to propose changes in church structure, were all at the

³⁴ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,”172.

³⁵ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,”172.

³⁶ United Church of Canada time-line

forefront.³⁷ In January 2019 the revised structure of the United Church of Canada came into effect, and the initial growing pains have been unsettling for many at the national level and the grassroots. The structure, ethos and lived faith of the United Church of Canada continues to adapt and change in response to the culture in which it finds itself.

While the history of the United Church of Canada is not long, it has had an impressive impact on the faith development of those in the church. The importance of the social gospel, inclusivity, justice and remaining culturally relevant, has shaped how faith is expressed and lived out in the United Church of Canada. While the UCC has been on the forefront of many societal changes, the connection between social justice and theology has not always been clearly articulated or relied upon.

The United Church of Canada Formal Statements.

In the United Church of Canada all statements of doctrine are considered to be subordinate to Scripture.³⁸ The formal theology of the UCC is expressed through three Statements of Faith (Basis of Union Twenty Articles of Doctrine 1925, The Statement of Faith 1940, A Song of Faith 2006) and a Creed (A New Creed 1968). While individual members contribute to the work and writing of Statements of Faith, it is only through the meeting of the court of the church that a formal theological position of the church can be declared with authority.³⁹

³⁷ United Church of Canada time-line

³⁸ Young, "Introduction," 9.

³⁹ Young, "Introduction," 4.

The Twenty Articles of Doctrine were part of the original Basis of Union that came into being at church union between the Congregationalist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The three denominations had a “generally common understanding of some key theological concepts” and the committee used two existing Faith Statements (from the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1905 and the Presbyterian Church of England 1890) as the building blocks from which they worked.⁴⁰ At the time of church union some believed that these Twenty Articles of Faith did not fully address the needs of a modern and national church, and this belief encouraged the development of a new and contemporary expression of United Church theology as expressed in the 1940 Statement of Faith.⁴¹

The 1940 statement was in response to world events (WWI, the Depression) and the move from the optimism of Liberal Theology to Neo-Orthodoxy. There was also a desire for a more “usable” faith statement that embodied the substance of Christian belief in concise and intelligible form.⁴² The 1940 Statement of Faith was intended to be “one of affirmation rather than of apologetic defense of the Christian faith”⁴³ and “picked up the trends in Biblical and theological scholarship of its day.”⁴⁴

As work began on a new worship service book, it became apparent that the UCC would benefit from a Creed that reflected United Church of Canada theology. While the Apostles Creed and Nicene Creed were used in some churches, there was a desire for a creedal statement

⁴⁰ Young, “Introduction,” 10.

⁴¹ Young, “Introduction,” 11.

⁴² Young, “Introduction,” 12.

⁴³ UCC Proceedings, GC7, (1936), (Toronto: UCC, 1936), 49.

⁴⁴ Young, “Introduction,” 13.

that could be used as part of the baptismal liturgy.⁴⁵ Thus, A New Creed was primarily a tool for worship and devotion, not a fully developed faith statement.”⁴⁶

A New Creed was intentionally drafted so that people across a broad range of theological perspectives could profess it with integrity. At this time, the spectrum of belief between theological liberals and conservatives in the UCC was widening and becoming contentious. This can be seen partly as a reflection within the denomination of a broader movement in post-Second World War North Atlantic societies away from adherence to understandings of the faith defined by ecclesiastical institutions, toward an understanding of the faith in one’s own terms. This movement led to a pluralization of attitudes towards religious belief and an increasing number of options for it, and may have contributed to a broadening of the spectrum of understandings of Jesus Christ within the UCC.⁴⁷

The creed contained a strong emphasis on Jesus, with “the emphasis on proclaiming Jesus rather than ‘God’s Kingdom’ certainly fit better with the emphasis of the age.”⁴⁸ A revision in 1980 incorporated inclusive language into the creed, and a further revision in 1995 expanded it to include reference to living with respect in Creation.⁴⁹ A New Creed contains United Church theology in language that is easy to understand, and its beauty has made it a popular and frequently used expression of faith for many years. Its appeal to people of all ages has also led to liturgical movement being added to the Creed in many congregations.

A Song of Faith (2006) was developed in response to a request for a “contemporary statement of faith as a replacement for the 1940 SOF and as an expression of what the UCC believed, given the rapid changes of the late twentieth century and an increasingly secularized

⁴⁵ Young, “Introduction,” 14.

⁴⁶ Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” 171.

⁴⁷ Schweitzer, “The Christology,” 137.

⁴⁸ Young, “Introduction,” 15.

⁴⁹ Young, “introduction,” 15.

Canada.”⁵⁰ Relying upon several documents and statements that had been completed in the UCC since the mid-1960s, the committee tasked with writing *A Song of Faith* placed great importance on context, as well as “committed itself to addressing what is sometimes called ‘religious pluralism,’ or the relationship of Christianity to other faiths, something not explicitly included in earlier statements of faith.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Young, “Introduction,” 15.

⁵¹ Young, “Introduction,” 15-16.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Being Known: Exegeting the Congregation to Help the Listener to Deepen Their Understanding of Jesus⁵²
Rev. Tracy Crick-Butler

You are invited to be in a research study of how preaching can impact an individual's understanding. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a person who participates in the congregation of Trinity United Church Ingersoll, and you are over 18 years of age. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my Doctorate of Ministry in Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary. My advisor is Rev. Dr. Richard Rehfeldt.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if exegeting the congregation can impact preaching that helps the listener to deepen their understanding of Jesus. Through listening to a sermon series "Encounters with Jesus" participants will have the opportunity to listen to 4 sermons that speak specifically to Jesus' identity. Recognizing the theological diversity within the United Church of Canada, 4 different aspects of Jesus' identity that are addressed in the United Church's statements of faith will be explored.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things.

Attend an information session on Oct. 27, 2019.

Complete an Informed Consent form and submit it to the Research Assistant.

Complete Questionnaire 1 prior to the beginning of the sermon series and submit it to the Research Assistant.

Attend all 4 sermons preached in Sunday morning worship on Nov. 10, Nov. 17, Nov. 24, Dec. 1 2019.

After each sermon complete a survey (Survey 1-4) and submit to the Research Assistant.

After the series is finished, complete Questionnaire 2 and submit to the Research Assistant.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study does not contain any known risks to the participants.

There are no direct benefits (money, credit, etc.) of participation in this study. Indirect benefits to yourself/or to other participants may be the contribution to knowledge.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home office. A list of participant names and assigned numbers (for confidentiality) will be kept in the home office of the Research Assistant. Only my advisor, Rev. Dr. Richard Rehfeldt, the Research Assistant, and I will have access to the data. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied (minimum of 10 participants).

Raw data will be destroyed by May 30, 2024, however participants will have the opportunity to receive a copy of their personal completed responses if desired.

Raw data will be retained but all identifying information (the list of assigned numbers to names) will be destroyed by May 30, 2020.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

⁵² This was the original name of the thesis project.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/or Trinity United Church, Ingersoll. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Rev. Tracy Crick-Butler. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at trickbutler001@luthersem.edu or 519-661-9866. You may also contact my Thesis Advisor Rev. Dr. Richard Rehfeldt at rrehfeldt001@luthersem.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document. The source of these quotations will be anonymous.

Signature _____ Date _____

Created 02/25/2019

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire #1

Participant # _____
(To be completed by
Research Assistant)

Have you completed and submitted the Consent Form? Yes No

Are you over 18 years of age? Yes No

Age Range: 18-30 31-50 51-65 66-79 over 80

Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?

What has helped you to know this?

Is there a Biblical story or scripture reading that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

Is there a Biblical story about Jesus that unsettles you? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

What is one claim about Jesus that you feel confident making? Please explain.

What is one claim about Jesus that leaves you feeling unsettled? Please explain.

What is one question you have about Jesus?

Does your understanding of Jesus shape your faith? Please explain.

Does your understanding about Jesus shape how you live your life? Please explain.

***Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Please submit it to the Research Assistant by Nov. 10.***

APPENDIX D

Surveys

Assigned Participant # _____

Survey Date: Nov. 10, Nov. 17, Nov. 24, Dec. 1 (please circle)

What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?

In the sermon, what did you hear? Please explain.

How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.

What did you learn? Please explain.

Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.

What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please describe some of his attributes as you learned today.

In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life? Please explain.

What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.

In what ways did you see Jesus connecting to the entirety of the Christian story? Please explain.

Was there anything about today that might have impacted your hearing of the sermon (distractions, temperature, illness)?

***Thank you for completing this survey.
Please submit it to the Research Assistant today following worship.***

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire #2**Questionnaire #2** Assigned Participant # _____*The following questionnaire has similar questions to the first questionnaire you completed.**Please answer the questions as you would respond to them TODAY, regardless of your previous answers.*

Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?

What has helped you to know this?

Was there a Biblical story or scripture reading over the course of the study that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

Over the course of the study was there a Biblical story about Jesus that unsettled you? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

In looking back over the 4 sermons what was the image of Jesus that you most identified with? Please explain.

Does this image of Jesus help you to define your faith? Please explain.

Does this image of Jesus that shape how you live your life? Please explain.

In looking back over the 4 sermons what was the image of Jesus that you least identified with? Please explain.

In thinking back to your answers to the questionnaire prior to the series “Encounters with Jesus”, do you perceive a change in your understanding of Jesus? Please explain.

What would have an impact on your understanding of Jesus? Please explain.

Is a person’s understanding of Jesus important to their faith life? Please explain.

***Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Please submit it to the Research Assistant prior to Dec. 15 and ensure
your participant number is recorded above.***

*Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and your answers are greatly appreciated.
They will remain anonymous and all answers will be treated with respect.*

APPENDIX F

Congregational Ad

Dear Trinity Board,

Thank you for completing the following task. I will look forward to seeing you soon.

Peace, Tracy

Please go through this ad and underline any words you think are important – don't think about them, just circle significant words.

Please go through again and circle words that are important to YOU specifically.

With another colour writing tool please go through one more time and circle 5-7 words that you think are vital for/reflective of Trinity at this time. Thank you!!!!

Ingersoll, ON. Imagine yourself being the minister of a vibrant church with spirit beyond the norm. If so, Trinity United Church, Ingersoll, is for you. Trinity is searching for an Ordained, Diaconal or DLM, to further her/his calling, to help a church community, established in 1804, to continue moving forward in its promising future. The position is available July 1, 2019. You will be leading a church, “a community that exists to teach a life-giving and inclusive Christian Faith” by nurturing spirituality, uplifting worship and service in our community with our core values of justice, wisdom, respect and hope. As a full-time minister of the Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, you will be entrusted with the leadership and the opportunity to open our hearts to the love and mystery of God, and the privilege and responsibility of sharing significant moments in the lives of our congregation while respecting the history and tradition of Trinity United Church. Your use of variety, creativity and flexibility appropriate to the changing times is desired. Maintaining the strong focus that music plays in worship by collaborating with our Worship Committee and Music Director is important to us, as is the continued growth of our child and youth ministry. Our recently renovated church building has a welcoming and inspiring cathedral-style sanctuary with an up-to-date audio-visual system. Our town of 12,500 offers proximity to larger centres on the 401 corridor. Ingersoll offers excellent elementary schools and a quality high school. A French Immersion school is nearby. Please submit your application and/or request Trinity's Profile at trinity-search2019@gmail.com.

Responses

Words that are important:

faith	good music,
imagined	joy
hope	“spirit”
flexibility	spirit beyond the norm
creativity	uplifting
move forward	church community
promising future	inspiring
worship	welcoming
vibrant	music
justice, wisdom, respect	collaborative
Laughter and light	variety

Words that are important to YOU specifically.

Spirit beyond the norm	promising future
inclusive	God and mystery
vibrant	child, youth minister
moving forward	welcoming
values	

5-7 words that you think are vital for/reflective of Trinity at this time.

Uplifting service	Laughter – joyful, upbeat songs, not heavy/oppressive, relating to the congregation
Inclusive	Everyone is welcome, ability, gender inclusivity, non-judgmental
Pastoral care	Supporting those needing it, seniors and young people, shut-in and ill, phone calls, cards, drop-off, make tea for them – worship services go out to them, meals are supplied, pastoral care team made meals and drop them off & visit
Music	Integral part of service, brilliant having Susan and Kenny – new dimension to the sound, sound-booth – the people and quality of sound/lighting, screen is a big play, acoustics, choir is growing with lovely voices, music makes us “bop”, still singing at home
Life-giving	Energy, you miss it if you don’t come to worship and groups, anxious to get back the next Sunday, growing myself in faith, God’s

	love and the family I have here, people notice when you're missing, extended family atmosphere
Welcoming	Invite to coffee, inclusivity – doors open to whoever wants to come, people greet and invited to sit – no pressure – we all welcome who comes, everyone talks/introduces, passing the peace, people who might not come regularly are not judged – just included
Inspiring	Uplifting, leave with something to think about, something from the service, singing music later, inspires you to be a better person, communal, more than a congregation – it's a community,, outreach (shuffleboard, pickleball, Soul Sisters, Girl guides) – how we help out (Kiwanis, Operation Sharing, A.A., United Way)
Nurturing	-see pastoral care
Quality	Take pride in services we offer, Sunday and weekday, do it all the way, giving it all, trying to do our best
Justice	Inclusivity, fairness, social justice, sponsored a family from Syria, refugee families in past and still involved, Lazarus cupboard (foodbank)
Changing times	New female minister, progressive, don't wallow in the past, embrace the future – not afraid
Moving forward	See changing times
Respecting the history and tradition	The beams in the sanctuary incorporated, quilts of the churches that have joined, other people have brought history and we support that too, keep contact with where we've come from, not change for change itself, new sanctuary incorporate the old – back to our history
Additional thoughts	Child and youth ministry very important, Drop-in program for parents and tots is like planning a seed – some families have started coming

APPENDIX G

Timeline**19th century**

Year	Event
1804	Nathan Banks saddleback minister <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preached in various places
1854	Wesleyan underground railroad
1865	Church was on Oxford St.

20th century

Year	Event
1906	Ladies groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive
1908	Trinity Methodist
1925	Church Union
Early 1950s	Choir gowns, youth choir, strong choir
1957	Addition
1958	Church shed demo – had been used for horses for those attending church (transportation)
Late 1950s	Outreach of Trinity - Alma St. Sunday School A congregation of children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their only church connection • 100 children Active Guides, Scouts, Messengers
Early 1970s	Family sponsorship – Laos family
1975	Strong UCW groups 1975-1998 - 4 different ministers
Early 1980s	Discovery Service Chapel Music Sunday morning
1980-90s	Laurie, Louis and Mary were children and youth ministers or second ministers through the 80's and 90's
1990s	Financially tough Meant change – music

21st century

Year	Event
2004	200 Anniversary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did a play • Catered by Catholic Church - big deal
2005	Salford United Church closed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 people joined • Others came later
2012	Sanctuary closed for renovations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After Thanksgiving <p>Huge sanctuary - held 400 people + 100 in chapel Organ taken apart</p>
2013	Iraq family sponsored <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily by Trinity
2016	Syrian family sponsored <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With others UCC congregations
2017	New Sanctuary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grand piano <p>Required cooperation Faith in future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Came together as a people • Worshipped downstairs all together with a piano - lost very few people <p>Fellowship and faith Autonomous Adaptable Dedicated Pulpit out of organ pipes</p>
2025	Outreach is important Inter-church relations

APPENDIX H

Congregational Self-Identifying

Sunday October 25th Anniversary Sunday

Prior to the sermon being preached, the questions posed to the congregation were:

*“If someone new were coming to this church, what would you want them to know about Trinity?
How would you describe this church and congregation?”*

Responses were articulated out loud within the worship space, and recorded on flip-chart paper.

Responses:

friendly	welcoming	fellowship
caring	warm	faith family
outreach x 2	supportive	inclusive x 2
committed	beautiful	evolving
humour	best minister	United Church Women (UCW)
welcoming staff	hope	fun
there in life's challenges	music	helpful
inquiring	progressive	old tunnel (part of former structure)
excellent guitarist	wonderful cooks	hard-working

APPENDIX I

Coffee, Conversation and Community Gatherings**Oct. 29 Gathering – Evening**

Question: *“You have just re-designed your worship space and could choose to do anything with the space – what is in here and why?”*

- crosses – came from the old sanctuary, they were up with the pipes of the organ
- pulpit – made with wood from the pipe organ by a member of the congregation
- table, crosses, communion table, candles – all came from the old sanctuary
- 3 stained glass windows in sanctuary, 3 at the front of church, still some more – they are symbolic of the church and the colours are nice – some were memorial windows and all were from the old sanctuary
- War Memorial Plaque – from the old sanctuary
- stage – all done for sound and so various organizations can use as rentals
- wall hangings – there are a lot of them
- exposed beams that were in attic – this is the old chapel and when the beams were discovered they decided they were important to keep
- piano – Susan played piano and organ both, now there is no organ – it’s a dying art and a lot of people can’t play
- baptismal font – not in the sanctuary – only comes out when needed
- chairs – was an easy decision to get rid of pews – chairs for flexible use – more trouble picking the colour of chairs than deciding to get rid of pews – not all of them have arm rests, for accessibility
- Kenny – guitar player – here for 3 years
- 4 years worshipping in the basement
- sound system – want space to be used for community functions – wanted something to attract that
- a lot of meetings to figure out the design and what needed

Nov. 5 Gathering – Daytime

Question: “You have just re-designed your worship space and you could choose to do anything with it. When you think of that space, what is in there and why was it important? What is not in there?”

- sanctuary: decision to take down vs. repair – 2012, with approval of the congregation – moved to fellowship hall for worship
- a committee decided and designed the new sanctuary – lots of consultation with congregation -ownership to everyone
- stained glass: part of history, story of Jesus, memorial – people still part of congregation, 3 windows in sanctuary and other 3 in south entrance, there are more windows not displayed
- organ – it is missed by some, it was unusable
- small organ pipes are now in the choir room
- crosses – came from the old sanctuary
- pulpit – made from wood of organ pipes, by someone in the congregation
- hymn book holders and magazine racks also made by member from refurbished wood from sanctuary
- small table made
- pews re-used or sold, people purchased them
- Banners for all the seasons – made by congregation member
- comfortable seats
- maintained the tresses from 1865
- accessibility in re-design
- versatile
- multi-functional
- calm, love, joy
- more modern
- less intimidating/generic
- subtle symbols
- audio-visual – we can really hear
- screen, was large, but now good
- lighting
- they became closer when they needed to worship in the fellowship hall while re-building

What is NOT in the sanctuary:

- pews
- font
- hymns not from hymn book (on screen)

APPENDIX J

Drawing a Picture of Jesus

Invitation: *“Together we are going to draw a picture of Jesus, with each of us drawing a separate piece. This is not an art project, but a way of communicating what you know, think, believe, remember about Jesus.”*

October 29, 2019 7:00 p.m.

- Big brown eyes – to see
- glasses – wisdom
- ears – to listen
- smile
- crown of thorns – he died
- halo – peace, good things
- hands – to work, caring
- holes in hand – for crucifixion
- holding a scroll – teaching
- wearing a cloak – with frill at the bottom “to have some décor”
- sandals – for walking
- on water – walked on water
- donkey – coming differently than other leaders
- children -surrounded him – smiling
- disciples
- cross – died for our sins
- temple – synagogue when 12
- bird – peace, animals



November 5, 2019 10:30 a.m.

- Eyes – one brown, one blue to represent all people of various colours
- ears – does a lot of listening
- laugh lines – love the picture of the laughing Jesus
- big smile
- beard and long hair
- tears – over the state of the world
- multi-coloured skin – to represent differences
- frown lines -concerned about the world
- heart – he was all about love
- hands – for reaching out
- crown of thorns
- sandals on feet – a lot of walking
- water – walked on water
- boat and fish – fishing
- people around him – healthy, sick, poor and rich
- disciples – lots of crowds
- food – he fed people -would want the whole world to have food
- trees – he would have been an environmentalist
- birds and bugs
- children
- cross – he was about the cross
- sun – represents that he rose
- airplane – for yesterday and the present
- yellow lines – had an “aura” about him



APPENDIX K

Questionnaire #1

Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?¹

1	Jesus is a divine human who is ordained by God to be his representative on earth. He is prophet, reformer, teacher, mentor and loving friend.
2	Jesus – son of God: made flesh. Lived as human, sacrificed as a Redeemer for our sins – to make it possible for us to go to Heaven – receiver of prayers; provider of peace
3	Jesus is someone who came to earth to help everyone see their way
5	Jesus was sent to live among us and show us the way to become gentler, kinder and more loving to those close to us and all others, especially those in need. He did this by living his life as an example and by using his teachings to explain and delineate what we should strive for.
6	Jesus is the son of god, sent down to earth to teach us through his actions & words how to live as God expects, to show us the love of God & that through death we will live again.
7	Jesus was a Jewish man who was born in and lived in a Roman client state of Judea. In mid life he became a rabbi or teacher. He was involved in social justice issues and got caught up in the politics of the day. At this point in history religion and politics and national identity were intertwined. I believe he thought he was the Son of God and died for this. I also believe that our concept of what Jesus is changes depending on our cultural values.
8	Son of God, central figure of Christianity. His teachings were wise, pure, inclusive. Teaches us to love one another.
9	Jesus is the Son of God. He spent time on earth in human form, to teach mankind a new way of living in relationship with God and each other.
10	-the Son of God – teacher (be patient, be thankful for what you have or receive) – leader – listener
11	He is a teacher, a leader, and an exemplar for the ages. His stories, parables and actions apply in my life.
12	Jesus is Son of God – at same time he is God, 2 nd person in the Trinity. Works through the Holy Spirit – my HOPE of Glory to come.
13	Son of God
16	He is the loving and obedient son of God, who was sent to guide and support us, as human beings, to live a loving, faithful to God life on earth.
17	The Son of God. Our Savior.
18	Jesus is a man who changed the face of Christianity 2000 years ago. Jesus loved unconditionally. He is kind, compassion, loving. He gives us hope that the world can be a better place.
20	The Messiah, Son of God who died for our sins.

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¹ All answers to questionnaires and surveys are recorded as submitted.

What has helped you to know this?

1	Hearing the stories of Jesus as a child then throughout life experiencing Christ in others during their happy and challenging times has helped me to know who Jesus is. With Jesus I have a heart full of love, patience and compassion for those whom I encounter and I am at peace.
2	Bible reading, childhood church services, Faith events (conferences, seminars, etc.)
3	Listening to people talk
5	I take this understanding from the stories and parables in the bible, and from observing people that filled with the gift of his grace, wisdom and understanding. They are what we should all strive to be.
6	Years of attending church services and faith.
7	History, archaeology, my background in sociology as well as biblical accounts. John 1:45 "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel." John 3:2 "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."
8	Bible stories, parables, sermons.
9	I was raised in the United Church. I raised my children in the United Church as well. I have served my churches on boards and committees. I have been an unlicensed lay worship leader for 30 years. So I have done lots of reading and research for worship prep. I continue to read the views and thoughts of others to challenge what I believe.
10	Readings and years of being taught (parents, grandparents), -life experiences (faith) – births and deaths
11	Reading of the gospels. Nurturing within the church, family and home from childhood.
12	Sunday School – minister's sermons, books, bible, youth conference – like-minded people, the way he loves.
13	Sunday School
16	My education as a child, the role model of my parents, my deep belief and my life experiences.
17	Sunday school, then church and some wonderful ministers.
18	Church, minister's message, book studies. I see Jesus in many people. All of us have Jesus within but not all people can recognize that in themselves.
20	Sunday School stories, Bible study included

Is there a Biblical story or scripture reading that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does that story say to you?

1	Mark 10: 13-16 Jesus and little children. This story tells me that Jesus valued children and saw god in each one. It also tells me that accepting Jesus as if a little child gives me a clear and uninhibited view of what is possible in my own life when in relationship with him.
2	Psalm 23 – God walks with us daily, guides us, cares for us
3	No
5	One story would be the recent story of Zacchaeus. It exemplifies that Jesus did not judge or shun those who were outcasts, he sat down with them and accepted them. This is something that many churches preach, but don't practice.
6	The story of his birth, his humble beginnings, very down-to-earth & simple upbringing resonates with me. It shows that God's love is for everyone, not just the rich or powerful.
7	Matt. 21:12-17 Jesus clearing the temple of money changers. This story shows a very human side of Jesus, a willingness to upset the status quo for reasons of personal belief and for social justice.
8	Parable of Good Samaritan – help those who need help regardless of race, sex, religion etc.
9	Jesus wants everyone to know that they matter and they are loved. The woman at the well, the woman who touched the hem of his robe to be healed, lepers etc. No matter how outcast they feel or marginalized by society.
10	Ten commandments, John 13 (14) story – the washing of each other's feet – love thy neighbor as they self
11	Jesus telling the story of the Good Samaritan. It embodies all that Christianity is and should be – caring and outreach within the community.
12	-Jesus with the children – Peter's answer as to who he was, -Messiah, Son of the living God.
13	"Have faith in God" Mark 11: 22 Tells me to trust in him/have faith.
16	I do not and have not ever studied the bible. I love the nativity story and all that surrounds it simply because it is the birth of Jesus.
17	There are so many. I am in awe with each one I hear.
18	Matthew Chapter 25 verse 31-46 especially verse 35 & 36 shows us how we should live and treat each other.
20	Christ tempted in the desert! his strength of spirit and dedication to his Father. How we can overcome temptation in the face of trial.

Is there a Biblical story or scripture reading that unsettles you? If so, which one and what does that story say to you?

1	The Gethsemane story unsettles me. He asked his disciples to wait with him when he went to pray. Jesus shows his humanity in his fear and plea to God. His disciples fell asleep and were not attentive to him during his fear and agitation. In the end he resigned to his fate. This story is one example to me of how difficult it can be to be a committed follower of Jesus.
2	Some of the Moses stories – God seems less forgiving. Says I need to listen and obey even when it's hard.
3	No
5	Probably the parable of the prodigal son, who wastes his money and talents, and yet is welcomed back with open arms. It illustrates for me the extreme difficulty in living the precepts of God's word in a practical way.
6	That Jesus knew his disciples would betray him bothers me greatly. It seems to indicate that our paths & choices are pre-determined.
7	Mark 5:1-20 The story about the man possessed by demons, "My name is Legion for there are many." Jesus cast out the demons into a herd of pigs. Part of me hopes this is a story of Jesus helping a schizophrenic, the other that there may actually be demons.
8	Parable of Lost Son – always feel sorry for the son who worked and was faithful and receives no thanks or recognition.
9	The moneychangers in the temple. I am always wondering if he lost control and his human self just lost it or if the anger and violent acts were the only way the money changers would pay attention to what he was saying. But I also realize that I am uncomfortable with aggression.
10	Blank...
11	The transfiguration – why are only 2 of the disciples witnesses? What is the meaning of the account?
12	-hate brothers and sisters – leave parents – I have to follow him and leave my aging parents. – Judgement day – scares me – not for me but for those I love
13	Can't think of one right now.
16	No
17	About the crown of thorns, and that he died a horrible death.
18	I am unsettled with the story about Herod murdering all the babies Jesus' age. I am hoping it is just a story and the cruelty never happened.
20	Matt 10, 14 If anyone will not welcome you...shake off the dirt...as you leave...Perhaps the loss of tolerance for diversity of opinion or belief....smacks against the idea of forgiveness...

What is one claim about Jesus that you feeling confident making? Please explain.

1	That Jesus accepts and loves even me. I have had the experience more than once, of getting to know someone whose life seemed to be “off the rails” only to hear their story and understand their worth as Jesus would.
2	He loves us – repeated many times throughout the Bible
3	Unsure at this time
5	Jesus did not discriminate, did not pick and choose with whom to associate. He did what many of us are incapable of, or choose not to attempt to do, that is, to accept everyone with love.
6	Jesus had complete faith and believed in god’s love & power & through that faith he wa able to teach kindness, respect and caring.
7	That Jesus was a charismatic leader who was genuinely involved in helping the outcasts of his society. He died for his beliefs.
8	-greatest teacher of all times -so many parables and stories to give life lessons
9	Jesus loves each of us as we were created. He invites us to make choices in our lives that help others and that look after/support our own best selves. Jesus looked beyond what people saw on the outside of tax collectors and lepers to their inner being.
10	In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct your life (pathways)
11	Just as he asked the disciples to “let the little children come to him”, he is the shepherd of all and welcomes anyone regardless of ability or status.
12	Romans 8:38, 39 – Nothing can separate us from the love of God. – Through growth in the church – I love those verses – have come to believe this without doubt
13	That he is always there for us.
16	He loves me. Whenever I have been in great need of something, I have believed I will receive and I have received. Not material need, solace or guidance type of need.
17	That he was a worker – a person like us all.
18	Jesus changed the face of Christianity centuries ago. Jesus showed us how we should live as Christians and how to treat others no matter what their religion is. Love all is the answer.
20	Sermon on the Mount. He relates it so many divergent concerns.

What is one claim about Jesus that you feeling unsettled? Please explain.

1	The claim that he performed miracles gives me doubt and uncertainty. I believe this comes from not ever witnessing a miracle such as the instant healing that is recorded in the bible. I have witnessed the miracle of acceptance of a medical problem but not the supernatural healing of the condition.
2	God as judge (tower of Babel, Noah's Ark, Red Sea, Battle of Jericho) – death as punishment “en masse”
3	Unsure at this time
5	I can't at this moment think of anything. It seems to me that he portrays a range of all-too-human responses to events in his life, responses of anger and disappointment that we all struggle with.
6	That Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead is unsettling. If that power exists, why weren't more people saved?
7	That he was some how Jesus was weak. Forgiveness or turning the other cheek is seen by some as weakness. It is actually a strength. We can't always change someone else's behaviour, but we can limit its effect on our own thoughts and behavior.
8	Blank...
9	I am less comfortable with the radical side of Jesus. The Jesus who throws the money changers out of the temple. The Jesus who was a political dissident, someone the Romans felt was a threat.
10	Blank...
11	Matt 2: That he advised the Master to reject the servant who had saved his “talent” and cast that servant “into darkness”.
12	He left his parents at the age of twelve. They worried about Him. At times I think he was disrespectful of his mother.
13	Blank...
16	Nothing unsettles me about Jesus.
17	That he was about to be crucified.
18	That Jesus died on the cross. IS that a sacrifice a father could do?
20	Water into wine/curing the leper etc. Miracles...? not sure

What is one question you have about Jesus?

1	Is his bodily resurrection true?
2	What was his life on earth like growing up?
3	Why him?
5	It would be nice to have some idea of what his early life was like, and how he felt then about his place in the world and how his life here would end.
6	I have more questions about god then Jesus but as they are the trinity I will say I do question why there is so much hardship, want & sadness in the world.
7	I wonder if Jesus would recognize himself if he saw what we have made out of him.
8	Why is virgin birth important?
9	How did he reconcile his human self with his divine self? Did he feel pulled in different directions all the time?
10	Blank...
11	His detachment seemingly from his own family – from all the accounts that we have.
12	He tells us to go and tell others but told his disciples not to tell about his miracles performed etc. Not to reveal he was the Messiah. Why did he do this? Was it not yet time for him to be revealed?
13	Blank....
16	None that I can think of.
17	Blank...
18	Is he a man made creation? IS he an actual son of God?
20	How do you account for the “rising from the dead”?

Does your understanding of Jesus shape your faith? Please explain.

1	My understanding of Jesus ensures that I remain hopeful about the creation of a just society where all are valued and have their needs met. I have faith that I am loved and seen. I have faith that I can make a contribution.
2	Absolutely. I see him as a loving father disciplining when necessary but still loving all the time. I cast my burdens on him and try to let go of anxiety and worry.
3	I don't have enough understanding of him.
5	Yes, my upbringing since childhood in the Baptist church and bible teachings has formed my sense of faith and my views of right and wrong, tolerance and bigotry, kindness and inhumanity.
6	Yes, as I try to live by the lessons he taught (oops – next question). Yes, his life & death gave me belief in an afterlife, a sense of eternal love, regardless of my transgressions & a belief in a divine Father who guides and watches over me.
7	Yes it does. I am drawn to my faith community because like Jesus they tend to be unselfish.
8	Yes, I like to think that I try to follow his lessons.
9	Combined with following question....
10	Yes – kind and considerate
11	It is the basis for a community that comes together with a common goal of working within the larger community to the benefit of others. It sustains one personally and individually throughout life – amid successes and challenges.
12	Yes – He gives me HOPE, JOY, PEACE and helps me to love. – I know with certainty that he is ALIVE and works through his Spirit. – I understand I must continue to grow!!
13	No – so much I don't know!
16	Partially and partially from life experiences and partially from a deep inner feeling of just “knowing”. It's not something I can easily explain.
17	Yes. He is part of a package that gives Christians faith.
18	I don't necessarily believe the stories in the bible. Believing in Jesus is within us is something I do believe. Seeing how other lives their lives has a big influence how I live mine.
20	To some extent to have "faith" and to believe that someone is capable of espousing principles that guide humanity "today": someone we can emulate is astounding and encouraging.

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Does your understanding about Jesus shape how you live your life? Please explain.

1	Jesus has taught me to see value in everyone I meet. He has taught me to love unconditionally. I love and respect the natural world that provides so much beauty and diversity. I live in gratitude and awe for my life and my Jesus.
2	Yes. I am working on being a better witness – to live my faith daily as an example of love and acceptance of all. I’m trying to be less judgmental.
3	I don’t have enough understanding of him.
5	Again, he gives us a splendid example of what we can strive to be, and how easy it is to fall short of that ideal.
6	Yes, I do my best to give back all I can to make the world a better place. I live in kindness, I treat all as equals & while I’m not perfect & have an ego that intercedes, I live the best life possible.
7	The idea of forgiving enemies or people who may have wronged you makes my life much easier. Holding grudges or hating people is too much work and not worth the effort.
8	I try not to be judgmental, love my “neighbours”.
9	I try to see the good in others. I help people. I try not to be hard on myself when I make mistakes. The example for this comes from Jesus.
10	Yes -daily, prayer
11	Similar to the above, it prompts and encourages one to live among and with others – remembering that we are part of a larger world.
12	Yes, I try to live my life with integrity – not believe in paying “under the table” and avoiding government taxes. I once was so shy – could not welcome people – come to look at them as God’s child – have become more aware of thankfulness
13	Yes, I try to share & love all as he did.
16	Same answer as above. I feel I have a strong moral code within me and if I follow that (which is the same as being a good Christian) then I cannot go amiss. I am human and I do falter at times but that doesn’t stop me from continuing to improve.
17	Yes. I believe that everyone that believes in <u>him</u> is a better person.
18	I am a beloved Child of God. I am really not sure how to answer this question some of the answer is in the previous question.
20	As above

APPENDIX L

Sermon #1

Sermon Details	Focus	Exegetical Points
<p>Sermon #1 Nov. 10, 2019 Remembrance Sunday John 15:12-15</p> <p>Jesus' command to love one another and the washing of the disciples' feet</p> <p>"who works in us and others by the Spirit..."</p>	<p>-Jesus is the bridge between God and us</p> <p>-Jesus reveals God and God's love through his love for others</p> <p>-we are called to share/live out that love in our love for others</p> <p>-Church as the Body of Christ</p> <p>-Love is active</p>	<p>-I'm not sure which stories they know, so rely on familiar biblical stories to help portray Jesus</p> <p>-they have a strong commitment to community, outreach, caring for one another and inclusivity</p> <p>-recent death of community member that is impacting many I the church</p> <p>-Remembrance Sunday is also part of the entire worship service</p> <p>-specific references to their current outreach and how I have witnessed their love in action over the last week</p>

Exegetical Process (first steps) Nov. 10, 2019

Brief Reflections On What You Know Going Into This Sermon

- a. Events in the world
 - Remembrance Day
 - Economic uncertainty
 - Teacher-Strike possibility
 - killing of two young boys (9&12) by father

- b. Events in the Church
 - UCW involvement
 - little or no other involvement right now

- c. Events in the congregational life
 - new minister – trying to figure out what this means
 - prepping for fund-raiser
 - dealing with change – the good and bad of it
 - death of a member of the community (new spouse of church member -67 yrs. old)
 - uncertain how to care for former minister who is related to this death
 - coat distribution for those needing coats

- d. Events in the lives of individual hearers
 - new diagnosis of cancer
 - illness
 - grief anniversaries
 - death of a friend's spouse/friend – family for some

- e. Your state of being
 - tired, and disconnected from family
 - anxious about this thesis sermon
 - trying to figure out my place in the community
 - my head is “in” the funeral and not the sermon
 - recognizing my own need to clarify my Christology, but not sure what that looks like

- f. The church year
 - Remembrance Sunday

- g. Other contextual considerations
 - it has started to snow

KWHL Chart for Preaching and Congregational Exegesis – Nov. 10

KNOW	WHAT	HOW	LEARN
<p>I don't know enough about my congregation at this point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -we are in change/transition -they reach out in countless ways – part of their identity -I'm not sure WHY they reach out and I'm not sure if they can name WHY 	<p>Why do they reach out? In response to what? Their understanding of faith or for some other reason?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -what is the role of the church for them? -they're very committed – committed to WHAT? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -at today's gathering (coffee, conversation, community) I will inquire about what inspires/underlies their reaching out and mission -have them draw their picture of Jesus -ask them today "What is the most important thing you do as a community?" -If Mission and Outreach team at gathering ask them WHY? - can they articulate the WHY of their mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -they are very invested in their church community and the community of Ingersoll -Jesus calls them to care for others – it's a response to their faith -church is a community for them where they care for one another

Sermon #1

John 15:12-17 Remembrance Day Nov. 10, 2019

Intro to the Scripture

This morning our scripture reading comes to us from the Gospel of John and it is part of the Farewell Discourse where Jesus spends time talking to his disciples about his upcoming death. Jesus is about to hand himself over to be arrested. He will be put on trial and crucified. Jesus will have to leave his disciples, and He wants to prepare them for what is to come, and reassure them that everything that has happened, everything they have been a part of, everything Jesus has said – does not end with his death. The words of scripture that we hear today are words said in the midst of betrayal and denial, in the midst of departure and desperation, in the midst of fear and unease.² And yet, they are words of love.

John 15:12-17 Remembrance Day Nov. 10, 2019

My friend Debbie has a wonderful gift for bringing people together – of helping people make connections. I might be in search of some information, and Debbie will cc me in on an e-mail to her friend who has that information. I have a question about how to run a certain program, and Debbie pulls up the name and contact information for someone who does something similar. I wonder out loud about a good spiritual director, and Debbie sends me the biography of someone she trusts.

And she doesn't just do this for me – she does it for everyone she knows – helps to connect them to one another. Brings people together and enables new relationships to be built. It's a gift that she has, because she has a love for people, for their stories and for helping them to connect to what they need.

² Karoline M. Lewis. I can't find the source, but had it marked as Karoline's.

Do you know someone like that? Who seems to be able to pull people together and bridge the gap that might otherwise separate them. I am sure you do because there are people like Debbie found in many churches...

That is the thing about church - it gathers people into the same place- the same building – people whose paths might not otherwise cross. We come from different backgrounds and neighbourhoods, economic places. We have a variety of struggles, passions, concerns, joys and yet we gather in churches across the country and across the world to worship. No matter what that physical place might look like – the church that is the body of Christ - gathers people together and enables new relationships to be formed, bridges to be built and deep connections to be made.

Let's imagine it for a moment – Jesus is with his disciples - those followers who he has gathered from all walks of life, and this night he brings them together in an upper room to share a meal. But it is not just any meal, because at this meal Jesus has done something they will never forget. He has gone around to each of them – to James and John, to Peter and Judas, to Philip and Andrew, and all the rest – and taking off his cloak, he ties a towel around his waist and bends down to wash their feet. What it means, they are still not entirely sure – but what they do know is that it has changed everything. The look in his eyes as he kneels before them, calling each disciple by name. The strength with which he holds each foot before washing away the day's dirt. And then the certainty with which he speaks as he talks about what is going to happen next:

The betrayal of his friends; where he is going; the house with many rooms where they all would be welcome; the advocate that God will send in his place. That night in the upper room,

Jesus gathers his followers together and welcomes them even deeper into his circle as he shares what is to come.

And then he gives them the commandment to love one another as he has loved them. Not just to love one another – but to love one another as HE has loved them. And we can almost imagine the scenes flashing through each of their minds as they recall the ways in which they have experienced Jesus' love.

When he called them from their old lives into new, inviting them to come and see what God was doing. When he saw them, truly SAW them for who they were, and called them still. When he fed the 5000 in body and in spirit. When Jesus stood with a woman who had been caught in adultery teaching the crowd about forgiveness and compassion- when Jesus healed the sick. When he taught them about God and God's kingdom.

When all of these images of Jesus loving them came to mind for the disciples, suddenly WHAT Jesus was calling them to do, WHO he was calling them to be – came into greater clarity. Jesus was calling them to love one another as HE had loved them. He was calling them to recognize that love is a verb – love is active, love is intentional – love is Jesus' words and actions coming to life in ways that bring new life – love is what Jesus invites us into – and how we are called to be in relationship with one another. And we love one another by SEEing God's people for who they really are -by practicing compassion and forgiveness – by serving one another and reaching out to one another.

Because we all need love – to be loved and to feel love and to express love –it's what makes us human³ – it's what makes us community – it's what makes us church. And as preacher and writer Karoline Lewis so eloquently described, love is the reason God made us, why God

³ Karoline M. Lewis, *John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 199.

approached us in Jesus and why God chooses to be in relationship with us – because of God’s love for us.⁴

And this is not some distant love that we cannot know or experience or feel. This is a love that is so deep that it had to be expressed – and that expression is Jesus – that expression is found in the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who brings together our deep longing for something more, and God’s deep love for us. He is the one who bridges the gap between God and God’s people. He is the conduit who draws God and us into closer relationship with one another as he reveals God’s presence. Jesus is the one who makes love real – who puts clothes on it as he actively and intentionally reveals God’s love – as he LIVES God’s love - As he makes visible God’s love.

And Jesus makes God’s love for us SO real, so tangible, so touchable – that the only response – the ONLY response that we can have to that love is to share it beyond ourselves with one another.

I don’t know about you – but I confess that sometimes I need to experience that love with clothes on. I NEED to have Jesus bridge the gap between God and I, so I really know what God’s love looks like. I need to see and feel and experience that love.

So how does that happen for us today - 2000 years after Jesus walked the earth? How are we, today, to know God’s love?

First, we are invited to go back into the biblical stories about Jesus and allow them to live for us again as we put ourselves into those stories. WE are invited to discover new life, as we see Jesus bring new life to those he encountered – like the Samaritan woman at the well who received life-giving water – like Nicodemus in search of what it means to be born again – like

⁴ Lewis, *John*, 199.

the blind man restored to his community after a lifetime of isolation. We can find ourselves in those stories and see that Jesus is still the one who connects us to God – who bridges the gap between God and God’s people as he pours out love in visible ways.

AND.... we are invited to recognize the presence of Christ that is still with us as we see his followers reach out in love to one another. As people throughout the centuries and people 2000 years later make God’s love real through the love that they express in their words and their actions.

When coats and boots and mitts are collected and distributed to those who might not otherwise have them. When our doors are warmly opened to those with addictions, to those in search of support, to those seeking to balance their bodies and minds, and those who benefit from other parents to talk to during the week.

When hugs and prayers are shared with a friend who is grieving. When soldiers go to war because their belief in peace and justice for all people calls them to go. When a young person stands in solidarity risking themselves for a friend who is bullied and condemned for their sexual identity, or their family make-up. When eyes and ears and hearts are open, and time is taken to sit and listen, REALLY listen – to the person who is isolated and longing for healing and new life. We encounter the love of God in very real ways, every time we love one another as we have been loved.

That night in the upper room – when Jesus had gathered his followers together, Jesus did not ask his disciples to lay down their lives for him – he asked them to lay down their lives for each other - to love one another as he loved them – as God loves them.

And he asks the same of us. He calls his followers today – you and me - to love one another as we are loved. May it be so. Amen

Survey # 1

John 15:12-17

Nov. 10, 2019

What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?

1	Jesus is appointing his chosen friends to go out and spread the word of God's incredible love. He tells them everything he has learned from God he has made known to them, most importantly to love each other.
2	Love one another
3	All about loving one another
5	This was the story of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, and how he washed their feet, shared supper, and told them of what was to come.
6	The scripture was from John and he told his disciples to love each other as he had loved them.
7	Jesus commanding that we love one another.
8	Love one another
9	Love each other as I have loved you.
10	Peace
11	Jesus speaking to disciples in "the upper room" and commissioning them to "love one another" and foreshadowing his departure.
12	John 15:12-17
13	Teaching us to love as he does – by example
16	Jesus was trying to let the apostles know what it was going to be like when he was gone and he was asking them to love others as Jesus loved them.
17	Jesus is preparing everyone for the time after he is crucified.
18	Love one another as I have loved you.
20	Your preamble set up the reading. Jesus prepares the disciples for his death but not the end to what he has established, a foundation based on love. Which he has stated will continue.

In the sermon, what did you hear?

1	Many examples of how God's love through Jesus is shown in our lives, such as taking time to really listen to someone who has a need, standing up for human rights in prayers and actions. I also heard in my heart how Jesus humbled himself by expressing love in an intimate and personal way when he was at the feet of his friends. An example of God's love made real.
2	It's important to show our love to others, to feel loved by God.
3	That god and Jesus are two different people. And to love one another no matter the differences.
5	I heard of the love that he bore for his disciples, how they were his friends and equals.
6	Tracy expanded on the scripture to describe Jesus washing his disciples feet, showing them respect, humility & love.
7	That Jesus gave the disciples a summation of what it meant to be a true follower of Christ.
8	-church gathers people to help one another & to form new relationships. Last supper – Jesus washes feet, calls each by name, welcomes them deeper, sees them for who they are – love is active, makes us church & community
9	Jesus was trying to prepare his disciples for what was coming next and also wanted to show them how much he loved them so they would have an example of how to love others.
10	Work at enjoying each other and encourage those around us – remembrance day and its importance.
11	That love is what binds people in community as Jesus did with his disciples and that it is basis of faith in our actions in words
12	These words of Jesus can be likened to a farewell discourse to his disciples i.e instructions to love one another as he loved them. Forgiveness and compassion are uppermost if we are to love like Jesus. Everyone longs for something more – share love in the community. Love is an action, not a verb.
13	He wants us to love each other.
16	We are also to love others as Jesus loved them. By putting “clothes” on that love, we can see how Jesus loves us.
17	Jesus loves us. No matter. we are to love everyone.
18	I heard of Jesus love for his disciples and his commandment to them to share and spread his love. Share love beyond ourselves with one another!
20	The story of the last supper at which Jesus expressed his love for the disciples he chose. His concern for the future and what it holds for his 12, including Judas on a personal level and their response for what will take place.

How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.

1	-a sense of belonging in my church family as I witness acts of caring and kindness – an urgency to continue to support the work of the church in a tangible way as it is a way to express God’s love.
2	Loved by God.
3	Confused, I thought god and Jesus was the same person!
5	It made me examine, yet again, how to express love and support to those that are close, and to those that we have never met, but who need our support.
6	I felt humbled knowing that I don’t always follow Jesus’ directive but relieved to know I am loved regardless.
7	The sermon was about a point in Jesus’ ministry when one part of the journey ended and a new one began. A sadness that something familiar ends and an exhilaration about a new part beginning.
8	Reassured – God/Jesus loves us
9	Loved – love others with your whole being like Jesus did
10	Great – music was meaningful – believe
11	Reassured that love still resides in this world despite wars, challenges and conflicts we recognize daily.
12	I feel to some extent the love of Jesus. Made me question “am I doing enough” to spread it. I am not good at verbally testifying. I believe it must be shown through actions.
13	Secure in His love. He’s always there for me.
16	Reflective of the way Jesus and in turn God, loves me and how it has manifested in my life.
17	The sermon made me very comfortable, knowing of Jesus’ undying love.
18	Made me happy to belong to my church. So much love here. I needed a message of love today. Gave me hope. I could feel the love of Jesus radiating out of the sermon.
20	Amazed yet not surprised because of the strength of Jesus’ commitment to his message and his messengers.

What did you learn? Please explain.

1	I learned that every act of love is real and important. I learned that something as minute to me as a kind word can have a positive impact on someone who is struggling. That is, love needs expression and intention to make an impact.
2	Reinforced Jesus' role as embodiment of Love – I need to be more open to all people
3	Blank
5	I learned, as always, how valuable it is when we tell others how we feel instead of keeping our feelings internal. Jesus is about expressed love.
6	That loving each other, humbling ourselves, cherishing others will bring us closer to understanding God's love.
7	That the faith journey is meaningless if we do not love one another.
8	Jesus was love in clothes – a new visual image
9	The foot washing (by another person) was not already an established ritual – washing was a Jewish ritual to purify for temple but it was performed for yourself
10	Love one another – help those that are in need
11	That lessons from the ages apply today even though we sometimes find it difficult to see.
12	Love is the reason we exist – Why we were born. I believe we may be judged by how “deeply” we have loved.
13	Never give up. He is always there.
16	Nothing I didn't already know.
17	I learned more about the scriptures, and tried to understand.
18	Jesus loves us and walks with us on our journey. Love one another as he has loved us.
20	The impact of love on the recipients and its power to imbue strength in the recipient of such unselfish love.

Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.

1	Not any one character as he was speaking with his disciples. Collectively I identify with their confusion and troubled hearts as he commanded them to love on another after washing their feet. If I felt disconnected from anyone it would be Judas because of his pending betrayal
2	Connected with disciples – it is our job to be Jesus’ disciples
3	Blank
5	I wouldn’t say that I felt connected or disconnected with any one character, the represents the range of all types of people.
6	No.
7	The disciples as a group had the same strengths and weaknesses as any other group of people
8	Blind man – happy that this sight was restored.
9	I live my life from the perspective of being a helper/problem solver for others. So Jesus’ act of loving his disciples so much that he washed their feet for them touched that aspect of who I am.
10	Reflection – of grandfather, of members who have died
11	Blank
12	May be the disciples – if they are still seeing things the way the world sees them. The only other character is Jesus – I didn’t feel disconnected from him. I found it difficult to answer this question.
13	Blank
16	Neither
17	Actually from Rev. Tracy talking about her friend Deb who was able to connect strangers and become friends.
18	Compassionate, forgiving, love unconditionally, hope from hopelessness, sees good in all people, teacher, challenges us to be better persons, non-judgmental
20	Not clear

What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please describe some of his attributes as you learned today.

1	Jesus is love in action through his followers, then and now. Jesus is teacher, mentor and caring friend. He is wide, humble, obedient and forgiving.
2	Jesus as flesh – humanity like us. The day-to-day portrayal of love
3	Jesus as a separate person from god.
5	Jesus’ attributes of love and responsibility for those he loved was stressed in this story.
6	He was humble and did not see himself as too good to wash the feet of his friends.
7	That Jesus had human traits, the need to connect with others.
8	“Love in clothes” – sees people for who they are
9	-Loving friend, Savior willing to be servant
10	Enjoyed Jesus washing of feet – <u>humbling</u> -bridging the gap between us and God
11	That he was a teacher and leader concerned with his disciples and their acceptance/doubts of what the future might bring
12	Teacher – giving commands, most certainly a loving person. Confidant – he confides in his friends (disciples). Courageous – ready to show love by laying down his life for friends
13	Giving -not ever judging others.
16	I felt there was an emphasis on the all inclusive nature of Jesus’ love for us, but this wasn’t something I learned from this sermon. This was something I already knew.
17	Only that Jesus loved us more than I knew, and would help us.
18	I felt loved. I need to strive to be a better person. Need to be more understanding and less judgmental. Need to practice forgiveness
20	His inner strength knowing the purposes his Father has set for him, to instill in his followers an awareness of the power of true unselfish love on the recipients. His compassion to prepare his unknowing disciples for what will seem the end to their chosen status.

In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life? Please explain.

1	When I am supported, cherished and heard I feel God's love manifested. When I in turn try to follow Jesus' example of love and kindness I have meaning, purpose and joy in my life.
2	I need to rest in His love no matter what I do, where I go or what is happening in my life; I can depend on His love
3	Blank
5	His life is an example of what many of us strive for, and fail to reach.
6	It makes me want to do more to show my love & respect for everyone.
7	That what ever happens we must continue to love one another in our faith community.
8	Helps us to develop deeper relationships in church & community
9	I really liked the image of Jesus as "love with clothes on". We often use the term "We are Jesus hands and feet" for describing acts of service. But "Love with clothes on" take it to another level. That will stay with me.
10	<u>Patience</u> – love in action
11	Even though we may face challenges, there is an example for us that love endures and surrounds, sustains us.
12	If I was able to love like him, I would receive the gifts of the Spirit – gentleness, love, patience, joy, peace, self-control, kindness etc. I'm not sure we can attain it wholly in this life but it certainly would make us content and happy
13	Pause and reflect -love to others.
16	Encourage me to support others in believing in the love of Jesus and in trusting Him in that love.
17	That maybe I would be more comfortable talking about Jesus.
18	He loves us all and we need to love one another.
20	Compassion and love for those who need to understand or see what they may be missing in their narrow mindedness to failures or faults of others.

What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.

1	Jesus expects all who follow him and love him to carry on his work. In the scripture story today he charges his disciples to go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last.
2	Respect differences – show love
3	He loves all.
5	Jesus never gave up on his love for others.
6	That we are loved & need to show love through our actions & words.
7	That others are more important than yourself.
8	Love one another as we have been loved.
9	He loves us so much that he gave his life for our redemption. He gives us an example of how to love and show love for others in service.
10	Peace, patience, love, forgiveness
11	He was consistent in explaining that he brought and embodied God's love for all.
12	<u>Everyone</u> longs for something more – <u>everyone</u> . We are to love one another as he loves us. Love is an action not a verb.
13	LOVE – always there for you and me.
16	Not all of His teaching methods were direct. Some of his methods had to be “discovered”
17	That Jesus was more loving, and understanding, than I knew.
18	Blank
20	To try to develop a wider tolerance, understanding and awareness of other's situations. Some kind of “love” that will create a bond with others.

In what ways did you see Jesus connecting with the entirety of the Christian story? Please explain.

1	Jesus was just not commanding them to love one another for that time and place but to lay the foundation of Christianity for the future.
2	Jesus was the Son of God; without him there is no personal connection to the story. he is more real than a God who seems far away
3	Blank
5	As I said earlier, Jesus never gave up on his love for others, and his commitment to them, something all who feel they are Christians should strive for.
6	Love is the paramount theme of the Christian story & this scripture & sermon just reinforced our need to show our love & act in loving ways to one another.
7	This sermon is about a point when the disciples were told how to carry on the faith after Jesus was gone. Jesus was sending the disciples on their way.
8	I think loving one another sums it all up.
9	God loves us so much he gave his son to a human form. And death by crucifixion.
10	Ask and you can expect love, seek and you will find love & contentment
11	He was looking to the future and how folks might react to his crucifixion and departure.
12	God is love, therefore Jesus is love, and we are to love like Him. Hymn "They will know we are Christians by our love"
13	His unconditional love.
16	Blank
17	Jesus and God are the Christian story.
18	Blank
20	A basis of love, tolerance, compassion, understanding of the needs of others.

Was there anything about today that might have impacted your hearing of the sermon (distractions, temperature, illness)?

1	Just the desire to really hear and understand (and remember) what was being proclaimed.
2	Blank
3	Blank
5	There are always noises and other thought, crowding the brain, illness of mother-in-law, but these can be used to sharpen focus.
6	There was a very cute baby in front of me that drew my attention often.
7	I waited too long to write down my thoughts.
8	No.
9	No.
10	No
11	Blank
12	No
13	Blank
16	No, the setting and surroundings were not a distraction. I was not tire or achy. All was good!
17	No. not at all. In fact Tracy makes things meaningful and smooth.
18	Came feeling sad and unloved today – left feeling better and surrounded by love.
20	Distractions

APPENDIX M

Sermon #2

Sermon Details	Focus	Exegetical Points
<p>Sermon #2 Nov. 17, 2019 John 4:4-29</p> <p>Jesus meets the Samaritan Woman at the Well and offers her life-giving water.</p> <p>“to reconcile and make new...”</p>	<p>-Jesus is the One who brings life-giving water that keeps us from thirsting</p> <p>- our need is to belong</p> <p>-Jesus restores us to God, community and to ourselves</p> <p>-the life-giving water that he gives is about acceptance, welcome, belonging.</p> <p>- Jesus is the one who restores us and reconciles us to God as he offers God’s love to us.</p>	<p>-the expressed importance of inclusivity of all people</p> <p>-does inclusivity/acceptance extend when there is a difference of opinion as being expressed in “clapping” during worship?</p> <p>-lack of font, which for me is about baptism and new life , is not in their worship space</p> <p>-questions expressed about Jesus’ miracles, which inspires me to ask can healing and new life be experienced in another way?</p> <p>-what does healing and “making new” look like when they have just lost a community member, several are having long-standing illnesses and a beloved member has been re-diagnosed with cancer?</p> <p>-depict Jesus as “all about love” and with colored eyes and skin to represent diversity</p> <p>– how might this be experienced in the sermon?</p>

Exegetical Process (first steps) – Nov. 17, 2019

Brief Reflections On What You Know Going Into This Sermon

- a. Events in the world
 - firing of Hockey Legend Don Cherry
 - teachers' "work to rule" and possible strike
 - Trump impeachment inquiry

- b. Events in the Church
 - n/a at this time

- c. Events in the congregational life
 - fund-raising dinner – people getting busier with Christmas approaching
 - question around the appropriateness of clapping after anthem -could bring tension to the community
 - snow has come – difficult for some people

- d. Events in the lives of individual hearers
 - grief – anniversaries and recent deaths – well-known in the community
 - some have illnesses that are hanging on – not serious, but troubling to them

- e. Your state of being
 - busy, but happy to be
 - I noticed a new feeling of "lightness" this week
 - searching – actually, like the scripture – maybe thirsting
 - worrying about thesis sermons, but trying to roll with it

- f. The church year
 - this is the first Sunday in several where we have NOT had something special in the service – and we are not yet at Advent

- g. Other contextual considerations
 - did not get a chance to connect with people much this week, and noticing that as I complete the Exegetical process – don't know where people are at...

KWHL Chart for Preaching and Congregational Exegesis – NOV. 17

KNOW	WHAT	HOW	LEARN
<p>-this story is very long – perhaps do a dramatized reading to give it some context – not everyone likes having the scripture on the screen while it is proclaimed out loud</p> <p>-the importance of community is huge – they are very proud of that</p> <p>-in questionnaires some struggled with Jesus miracles – can this story speak of healing and new life, without it being a miracle?</p> <p>-questionnaires also had some questions about Jesus’ context -can we look at some of that in this sermon?</p> <p>- question around the appropriateness of clapping after anthem -could</p>	<p>- the importance of community is huge – does everyone feel that they are part of the community, or just those who are “in”?</p> <p>-how do they handle “differences” – are people excluded if they think differently?</p> <p>-what context can we cover from this reading? Conflict with Samaritans? Role of women?</p>	<p>-through the gatherings I hope to find out if there are some who do not feel part of the community</p> <p>-how will the worship committee respond to the question of clapping after anthems etc? – will discern this at worship meeting and note responses</p>	<p>- people believe that most people do feel part of the community – when church amalgamated there was warm reception and divisions not really noticed (more like pride for those who came to Trinity)</p> <p>-there are some folks who others don’t know much about, so still not certain how those people feel about being part of the community</p> <p>-worship committee did not want to isolate any – heard all of the concerns expressed, wanted to weigh all of the input – but not ready to make a decision about moving forward</p>

bring tension to the community and will this cause division – how do they handle different opinions – people who are not “like them” in thinking?			
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Sermon #2

John 4: 4-29 Nov. 17,2019

Growing up my neighbour and best friend, Diana, was Hungarian. She and her sisters were involved in Hungarian dancing with intricate, beautiful costumes that they got to wear. Their family would go to the Hungarian Club for special celebrations with other Hungarian Canadians, where they would speak their language and eat traditional food, and just enjoy being together.

For many years I wanted to be Hungarian too. I saw the sense of community that it brought to my friend and her family. I admit I was envious of the cultural traditions that she had – but more importantly I longed for that sense of belonging – to be part of a community and a people who gathered together and shared in relationships with one another. As a young person I desperately wanted to be included in such a gathering, so I thought being Hungarian would help that to happen.

That deep desire to belong – to be part of something bigger – to be included and welcomed into community still remains on my heart – as I know it does on many of yours. When I have met with you and you have shared with me about Trinity United Church, time and time again I have heard you express that it is the community that you find so important. That it is the welcome you receive and the friendships you have made, and the relationships that have been nurtured in this place, that keeps you connected. For you, and for me, and for many others, church, the community of faith has become so important as we have discovered family, kindred spirits, brothers and sisters in Christ – as we have found a place to be known, to build memories – to belong.

Those who write about church growth talk about a shift in church life. It's commonly known as the three B's. At one point in time - the way people would come to be part of a church was first to declare their faith – to BELIEVE. Then they would BEHAVE as a person of faith. And then the new believer would BELONG to the community of faith. Believe. Behave. Belong.

Now – church growth expert and writer Diana Butler Bass says that the order of the 3 B's has changed. In our world today – a digitally connected and yet SO disconnected world – people are looking to BELONG – they LONG to belong. So they may enter a community, a church and when they start to feel like they BELONG – then they start to BEHAVE like those around them. At first it might be practical things like helping with coffee or the dishes, or hanging light fixtures. It might move into ushering and THEN into study groups – and over time the behaviour might become praying or worshiping together. And THEN, with that sense of belonging and engaging in behaviour - THEN they come to believe. People come to faith after some time belonging to a community and being active in a community.

They Belong – Behave and then Believe.

It makes sense – after all having a sense of belonging is a human need. According to psychologist Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people cannot develop healthy self-esteem or confidence or a sense of accomplishment without first having a sense of belonging and being in intimate, connected relationships. And having the feeling that you belong is so important in seeing value in life. Belonging shapes our identity – it strengthens us and empowers us and gives us a foundation upon which to help us reach our potential. Belonging is core to who we are as people.

And we are not the first people, the first generation in search of a sense of belonging. In our scripture reading today from the gospel of John we heard about a woman – a woman who is not

named - a woman who lived on the margins; socially, politically, religiously as a Samaritan. She is also a woman who has been dealt with several harsh blows in her lifetime – “to have been married five times in ancient Palestine would be evidence of circumstances completely beyond the control of any woman at that time.”⁵ Perhaps widowed or divorced, the man she was now living with likely would have been the brother of her deceased husband - someone obligated to take her in⁶ – she has no one with whom she belongs – no sense of family that helps her to know who she is.

The woman goes to the well at noon- the hottest time of the day - a time when no one else would be there as most of the women would have gone in the early morning or late afternoon – in the coolness of the day – and she is alone.

However, when she gets to the well – there is Jesus. And even though it breaks all of the rules about Samaritans and Jewish people speaking to one another, and unmarried men and women being alone together - Jesus asks her for a drink of water – water from Jacob’s well.

As their conversation continues Jesus makes the woman an offer that she cannot fully comprehend – he offers her living water that will never make her thirsty again – water that will become a spring gushing up to eternal life. Jesus was offering her water unlike anything she had ever known before.

The water that Jesus was offering – the living water – was something that only God could supply. The Jewish people understood that in every human heart there is a thirst which only God

⁵ Karoline M. Lewis, *John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 60.

⁶ Lewis, *John*, 60.

can satisfy. The Hebrew Scriptures often spoke of the soul thirsting for God.⁷ Remember the psalmist crying out:

“As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.” Psalm 42:1,2

The psalmist declares:

“O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Psalm 63:1

In search of relationship with God, in search of being seen, in search of being known and belonging – the soul LONGS for God - thirsts for God. And Jesus promises the woman that he can give her living water – water that would keep her from thirsting ever again.

For the woman at the well, we can imagine her thirst - thirsting for someone to see her for who she really is inside. Thirsting for acceptance, for love – for a place of belonging. Thirsting to move from the margins of her community to a place where she is seen and known and loved. Thirsting for the new life it would bring her. The woman from Samaria wanted the living water that Jesus offered. She NEEDED that water. SHE knew that she didn’t want to be thirsty any more.

⁷ Don Swager, “The Woman at the Well. A life-changing encounter with Jesus”, Living Bulwark. <https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/june2013p8.htm>. Accessed Nov. 14, 2019

And what about you? How thirsty are you? Thirsting to be seen and known? Thirsting for belonging and to be connected to something bigger – thirsting to deepen your relationship with God? Or perhaps like many of us, you don't yet know what you're thirsting for.

To the woman at the well and to ALL of us who thirst, Jesus comes to us as living water; water that we need – water that nourishes our souls, water that quenches our thirst like nothing else can.

On that day at Jacob's well, Jesus sees the woman – truly sees her in her entirety – in her pain and her isolation and her self-doubt. And seeing her, Jesus invites her into a new type of relationship. He offers her the living water of acceptance and welcome and belonging. He helps restore her to her community, as she finds the courage and inner-strength to return to the city and share ALL she has come to know. Jesus offers her living water that comes from the well of God's love and brings new life to those who thirst. As it is worded in the United Church of Canada Creed – Jesus is the one who reconciles and makes new. Who brings her back into relationship with God and with her people and gives her new life.

And Jesus offers the same to us – the living water of acceptance and grace that sees beyond what others see. The living water of restoration as we are invited into relationship not only with God, but with God's people. The living water of welcome and belonging when we find our place and our voice in community. The living water of love that quenches all thirst and transforms us from within.

And we are invited to drink it in, to nourish ourselves and fill ourselves – to immerse ourselves in the living water that brings new life.

And what does this mean for the church? What does this mean for those who seek to provide a place of belonging and behaving and believing?

The Church is the place where we can share the life-giving water of Christ with one another, inviting each other to drink deeply from the well of God's love. It is the community where we can receive and extend welcome and acceptance as we intentionally make room for people of different backgrounds to find a place of belonging. It is the gathering where we can be restored and renewed as we deepen our understanding of who Jesus is. It is the people of faith who point to the love of God as we experience it and live it and share it with one another.

Jesus said to the woman at the well and he says to each of us "Those who drink of the water that I give will never be thirsty." May we drink and may we thirst no more. Amen.

Survey # 2

John 4:4-29

Nov. 17, 2019

What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?

1	A woman of Samaria leaves the city and goes to the well on Jacob's land where she encounters Jesus. Jesus asks her for a drink and a conversation begins which eventually results in the woman learning about living water and believing that Jesus is the Messiah. She returns to the city to tell the people who then went to the well to hear for themselves.
2	Samaritan woman at the well
3	Samaritan woman at well.
5	The woman at the well.
6	The Samaritan woman at the well & her encounter with Jesus. He told her that God would give her living water.
7	The Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus talked to her which was not typical at the time. The woman was a social outcast who was marginalized.
8	Jesus & the Samaritan woman at the well.
9	Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well.
10	The woman at the well.
11	Jesus' visit to the Samaritans and his encounter with the woman at the well.
12	John 4:4-29
13	He can do anything. His love for us tells us so.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	From the book of John. It's all about water, love and life.
18	Samaritan woman at well meets Jesus.
20	Jesus seeking water from a Samarian woman, isolated – on the fringe, 5 marriages, no real belonging, well at noon, hottest time

In the sermon, what did you hear?

1	I heard that a sense of belonging is in the core of human need when people experience this sense of belonging they eventually begin to behave as Christians and then believe in the Word of God as proclaimed by Jesus.
2	3 B's have changed so belonging now comes before Belief. People are looking to belong to a community.
3	Doesn't matter who you are or whether rich or poor if you believe in god.
5	I hear the story of the thirsty woman at the well, who was a Samaritan with a dubious life history, looking to get water when she thought no one else would be there.
6	Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman & asked for water. She was surprised as he was a Jew. He told her about herself & said that those who believe in God will never be thirsty. Then Jesus told her that he was the Messiah.
7	That our faith community should accept all people as Jesus did to the Samaritan woman at the well.
8	The deepest human need is to belong. The woman asks for a drink of water & he offers her living water – only God can satisfy.
9	We all want to belong. Life through Jesus includes everyone
10	The 3 B's behave, believe, belong – in our struggle we receive strength & courage through believing
11	Jesus offers hope and encourages all to believe that working with and engaging others enriches one's life as well as contributes to the community.
12	All of us need a sense of belonging. We desire a special bond. We at Trinity have loving relationships – sisters and brothers in Christ
13	Hope. If Jesus can do this and does – he can help me with anything!
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	How caring and loving Jesus was to strangers.
18	Samaritan woman was searching for acceptance. She wanted people to see who she was, not what she was. Jesus promised he could give her what she needed if she accepted and followed his way.
20	Conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman who thought it strange and unusual for a Jew to ask a favour of such a person and opposites.

How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.

1	I felt a sense of gratitude for my community of faith because I feel a deep sense of belonging. This is nourished by caring friends and a sharing of values related to our Christian beliefs.
2	So thankful that I have found my community
3	Kinda confused
5	It reinforced the desire to consider what is going on in others people's lives, and how we need to stop and consider what other people are trying to deal with in their lives.
6	Grateful that I have this faith & that through it I have found a "family" & place to belong as Jesus promised.
7	That I am part of an accepting faith community.
8	Comforted to know that through Jesus you can be accepted and belong.
9	Hopeful
10	That I'm thankful to belong to a caring community
11	It is good to be reminded that the strength and support of community uplifts not only others, but one's self.
12	Satisfied – content, thankful to belong to a fellowship of like-minded people
13	Secure in my relationship with God.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	The sermon made me feel great, because it is as I believe.
18	I have been down the path of the Samaritan woman. I could feel her pain. As Jesus continued to speak to her I could feel the hope he was offering her.
20	Blank

What did you learn? Please explain.

1	I learned the cultural reasons for the Samaritan woman's isolation from her people and that Jesus valued her as a person in spite of her life situation.
2	I never really thought too hard about why people attend church
3	Blank
5	I learned some of the history behind the enmity between the Jewish and Samaritan people.
6	I learned that belief – behavior & belonging has changed to belonging, behaving & belief but no matter the order of these, God will sustain & provide.
7	That we should make an effort to reach out to people who are not like us. The 3 B's believe, behave and Belong. If we are a member of a faith community we should attempt to engage all.
8	Jesus comes as living water. He is welcoming and belonging. We can be restored and renewed and never be "thirsty"/
9	I had never heard "and the one you are with now is not your husband" explained as the cultural expectation that the brother in law(s) would have to take her in if widowed. It had previously been presented as "living in sin" with someone.
10	God is truly the living water, and when we ask, we receive, even if it's not the answer we want.
11	That recognizing others who may feel disconnected or alienated is often difficult – they may not be amenable to outreach.
12	There are 3 B's – believing, behavior and belonging. Never thought of it this way. How thirsty am I? -for living water
13	To trust Him.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	That I should be more outgoing and share Jesus with others.
18	No matter where my path takes me Jesus will always offer me living water. I will thirst no more. I will belong and be loved.
20	A duality of the meaning of thirst and water. One physical and the other spiritual – satisfaction.

Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.

1	I am happy to say although I feel empathy for the woman I don't identify with her story as I have a strong sense of who I am as a woman and feel valued. One way I might identify with her as a person is that I am willing to listen and learn from others as she demonstrated in her encounter with Jesus.
2	Blank
3	Blank
5	I particularly identified with the woman at the well, who was viewed as an outcast and morally corrupt, not acceptable in polite society.
6	There have been times when I have felt like the Samaritan woman, not belonging, not doing as others did. I didn't drink & party & and it be lonely when you are younger to stick to those things.
7	I identify sometimes with the woman at the well. All of us sometimes feel we do not belong anywhere.
8	No
9	I connected with the woman because she asked a lot of questions to Jesus. I also like to know the "why" of things and the background – the big picture.
10	Sometimes we need to be at the well to be alone with Jesus, but when we go at noon or evening we connect with others and may give them a sense of belonging.
11	Identified with the woman at times when she did not realize that she was part of a community.
12	No. Perhaps felt disconnected from the woman at the well?
13	The woman at the well. I often forget what part He plays in my life even though I know he is always there for me!
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	Yes, the poor lady at the well who had a difficult life. Married 6 times. I should explain. This is opposite to my beautiful life.
18	Samaritan woman. I found I was once like her.
20	Blank

What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please describe some of his attributes as you learned today.

1	Jesus is portrayed as a man who has time for everyone in spite of their own doubts in their value and the value of others. In this story Jesus is a patient teacher who is willing to defy racial differences and show respect for women.
2	Jesus is love & acceptance. He accepts everyone no matter who they are & what they've done.
3	Jesus is go but not really.
5	Jesus offers to help a woman and a Samaritan, again illustrating how love and compassion for people should transcend boundaries of race, sex, class structure and self-righteousness.
6	Jesus was kind and didn't follow social norms. He offered help & guidance & deliverance to everyone.
7	That Jesus was teaching us to recognize our own biases and try to overcome them.
8	Jesus offers living water. He reconciled and makes us new. He can satisfy us.
9	Inclusive – full of love and hope for everyone, not just a chosen few – Jesus included her even when society would not
10	Blank
11	He was able to zero in on a person's vulnerability and offer necessary encouragement.
12	Teacher -compassion. Non-judgmental – Jews despised Samaritans – This didn't stop Jesus from talking with her or going through Samaria
13	He is always with us for support and love. He will/does provide.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	That he was able to reach many people, that they would never thirst again.
18	Jesus is kind, accepting, loving wise, empowering.
20	An all-knowing person and intelligent person who has keen insight of human beings.

In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life? Please explain.

1	Following Jesus example provides meaning in my life by experiencing joy and a sense of purpose when results are seen.
2	He will always forgive & accept me. If my goal is to be like him, then I must not judge others but accept them as they are.
3	Blank
5	This story illustrates how we need to implement Jesus' teachings in our current world, where there are so many divides of race, gender and culture.
6	It encourages me to be more open & welcoming to those who are different & to show them that we all belong to God.
7	That in order to belong ourselves we must also accept others.
8	I am understood. I belong. I am accepted.
9	I have always been someone who talks to everyone – I try to make everyone feel seen/included – everyone is a person
10	To have faith in believing our prayers can be answered through “his living water”
11	It reminds me to be sensitive to and aware of those hurting or isolated.
12	I might talk to strangers more often -might be more compassionate -might see the image of Jesus in others – It might make people develop a sense of belonging here
13	He promised us – I must remember this!
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	I think of the great distances he walked. I'm so fortunate, I don't have to.
18	I understand better how our church community works. He did it with his disciples. Belonging, behaving and believing are very powerful words.
20	Perhaps to make me read more of his life and experiences in the Bible.

What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.

1	That Jesus' most important mission was to bring understanding to all about God's love and that he made sacrifices to accomplish this. In the story that we hear in the sermon Jesus went through Samaria as a Jew and possibly risked himself. He experienced physical discomfort and fatigue to bring his message to all.
2	He loves EVERYONE. He is the source of belonging.
3	Blank
5	To me, the most important thing is what I talked about in the previous question, that we must learn to cross societal barriers.
6	That he is the Messiah & can offer everlasting love & life to those who believe in God.
7	This sermon is an example of Jesus overall idea that we must love each other and accept each other.
8	Jesus knows everything about a person and still offers living water to all.
9	-your past is your past – you cannot change it but your future hold the chance to make other choices – Jesus' love includes everyone no matter your past
10	Jesus is “our living water” and we need to be open to the spirit to “hear”.
11	That Jesus' grace is for all and forever.
12	He offers new life – belonging and acceptance to all. He transforms us – if we accept him. He revealed he is the Messiah.
13	We who know His love must share with <u>all</u> others.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	As always. He portrays so much love, and understanding.
18	Jesus gave us love and acceptance before he asked us to believe.
20	See above (images/understanding)

In what ways did you see Jesus connecting with the entirety of the Christian story? Please explain.

1	This story is one example of the many times Jesus crossed many social barriers to demonstrate his love for all in spite of racial, cultural, sexual differences.
2	He was placed on earth as the Saviour of all – For God so loved the WORLD.
3	Blank
5	This shows Jesus embodying those virtues that all should strive for; love compassion, humility and faith.
6	He Confirmed what the prophets had promised – a Messiah.
7	Part of the overall Christian message is to accept all even if they are not part of our group.
8	He brings hope to all that they may belong, behave and believe.
9	Christianity is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alive – God’s love
10	For all to come to him and love one another, no matter what their issues.
11	He proclaimed the love of God and the sustenance that faith provides to anyone at any point in life.
12	-Gave us more understanding of who Jesus is. Showed compassion and love. Living water – eternal life and a better life here on earth.
13	His practical application.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	Jesus and God are the entirety of the Christian story.
18	Blank
20	The water of life emanates from God and his son/prophet Jesus.

Was there anything about today that might have impacted your hearing of the sermon (distractions, temperature, illness)?

1	None
2	Blank
3	Blank
5	There are always distractions, the realism of everyday coughs and colds, child noises, etc. That is part of life. The goal is to focus.
6	No – but I have to admit to a brief image of you dancing with Diana in a Hungarian costume.
7	None.
8	No
9	Blank
10	No.
11	Blank
12	No. I have to go home and think on this so I hand it in on the following Sunday. Physically we will thirst again as humans. The woman seemed to understand it was a metaphor.
13	The last hymn was so appropriate!
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #2
17	I have difficulty hearing but Tracy speaks clearly and well, she makes the time go beautifully and quickly.
18	Blank.
20	Dialogue approach to the reading.

APPENDIX N

Sermon # 3

Sermon Details	Focus	Exegetical Points
<p>Sermon #3 Nov. 24, 2019 Reign of Christ Sunday Luke 23:33-43</p> <p>Jesus is crucified alongside two criminals</p> <p>“to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope...”</p>	<p>-Reign of Christ Sunday and what that means/why it is important</p> <p>-the crucifixion of Jesus</p>	<p>-people had a lot of questions pertaining to Jesus’ crucifixion, his radical side, the horrible nature of his death, as outlined in Questionnaire #1, so would like to address some of them</p> <p>-address that having questions does not mean we are less faithful</p> <p>-each of the pictures of Jesus that the gatherings drew addressed his crucifixion</p> <p>-there are several people in the congregation who have their own feelings of being on the cross as a result of grief, illness</p> <p>-while the town is getting ready for Christmas and the church is busy with pre-Advent, this text takes us to the cross – what does that mean? – what is their knowledge of Reign of Christ?</p>

Exegetical Process Nov. 24

Brief Reflections On What You Know Going Into This Sermon

- a. Events in the world
Everything in the news feels “trivial” this week – so much about the impeachment hearings, but don’t want to go there – might be good in another context/time, but doesn’t feel right right now
- b. Events in the Church
-some frustration about lack of connection with the wider church due to structure changes.
- c. Events in the congregational life
-this is a service where there are no other special elements
-continued concern about what to do around clapping after special music
-some frustration with workings of M&P committee as trying to discern fairness around staff issues (vacation etc.)
-women have been busy with getting food prep (turkey pies) and fund-raising
-some of our seniors are needing to transition into alternative housing
- d. Events in the lives of individual hearers
-upcoming medical tests
-death of a mother – a relief for mom, but still grief
-illness of a granddaughter, grandson
-anniversaries of grief
-dealing with chronic illness and some new medical concerns/diagnosis – some of this is hitting others hard as well, just based on the reality that their friends/people the same age are getting sick
- e. Your state of being
-it has been a good week – feeling I am connecting more
-this morning as I sit to write I am feeling frustrated - which is affecting my mood and making me distracted – need to just get into this!
- f. The church year
-Reign of Christ – likely not something family to many at Trinity
-the town is in Christmas-prep mode
-no special additions to this service as there has been the last few weeks – and waiting for Advent
- g. Other contextual considerations
-with still being new, everything is also new for the congregation – still in the process of relationship building for a long time forward
-I am aware of trying to meet the needs of my thesis requirements AND the need of the congregation – and not sure they are always compatible – wondering about preaching in a different style (maybe monologue?)

KWHL Chart for Preaching and Congregational Exegesis – NOV. 24

KNOW	WHAT	HOW	LEARN
<p>-this text might strike them as being odd to read at this time of the year – feels like a Good Friday text</p> <p>-some wondering about why Jesus had to die and how a father could do that -this was noted in the questionnaires</p> <p>-so many have been to the cross recently in terms of watching someone they live die or losing them to a terrible death</p> <p>-many who have died recently have been men – does this make a difference in terms of identifying with the story?</p>	<p>-this text might strike them as being odd to read at this time of the year – feels like a Good Friday text</p> <p>-so many have been to the cross recently in terms of watching someone they live die or losing them to a terrible death</p> <p>-I wonder what the majority think when they hear of Jesus' death – what does it say to them theologically? And how will they hear this text?</p>	<p>Ask congregation to give a "title" for the sermon after they hear it</p> <p>-feedback for the sermon survey</p> <p>-doing some pastoral visiting next week with some who are grieving – this will shed some light on how they heard the story</p>	<p>What did I learn? – I did not complete this section</p> <p>– have a tendency not to come back to it...</p>

Sermon #3

Luke 23:33-43 Nov. 24, 2019

Intro to the Scripture

This morning as we hear Jean proclaim the scripture reading, some of you might be wondering why, on earth Tracy picked this reading at this time. After all – last Saturday was the Christmas Parade, and Santa’s Village opened Friday night, and you have likely at least thought about your Christmas shopping, if not gotten it well under way.

So as we anticipate Christmas – as we move into the Season of Advent next Sunday – why in the world would our new minister think that hearing the story of Jesus’ crucifixion would be appropriate for this Sunday?

In the church year, this Sunday is known as Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the Church Year – and transitions us into Advent. Reign of Christ Sunday reminds us that Jesus has already come, and lives and reigns in many hearts. At the same time we anticipate when he will be born again into our hearts at Christmas – transforming us with his presence. This Sunday is the tension between what already is and what is yet to come. The scripture readings for Reign of Christ take us to Jesus’ cross – and this morning we encounter him there.

Luke 23:33-43

A beautiful way to read scripture and to deepen your understanding of the story is called Lectio Divina. It is the practice of reading through the scripture and noticing what words pop out at you – what phrases inspire or unsettle you. And then to read it again, and again. And for some the practice involves putting yourself into the story. Who are you? do you resonate with

someone in the story? Do you feel drawn to something that you see or hear or notice and if so, what does that teach you about God, or Jesus, or yourself?

This week, in practicing Lectio Divina with this biblical text from Luke – in reading through the account of Jesus on the cross, the words that continued to jump out at me were words like scoffed and mocked– when the leaders and soldiers were challenging Jesus to save himself – and in my mind’s eye I almost see them spitting the words into the dirt. Words like deriding, referring to the criminal who demanded of Jesus that he save himself and them . Even the name - ”the Skull” – the place where they crucified Jesus. Angry words. Cruel words.

And when picturing where I would be in the story – I clearly see myself in the midst of the crowd – in the middle of the group of people who stood by, watching. Can you see it? Might you be there too? Watching it all unfold? Watching as Jesus, the one who we had seen heal and restore..... and now seeing him up there on the cross – being hung between two criminals. The one who calmed the storm and taught us to love our enemies – being condemned and scorned and put to death. It doesn’t make sense. Nothing makes sense. All that he taught about life and love and God’s presence – the ways in which he opened our eyes to see those around us and welcome those who others turned away - and there HE is - on the cross – how could this happen? and what does it mean? And how do we make sense of something that feels so senseless?

And HOW could God want this? And if God didn’t want this, why didn’t God stop it from happening? Surely the one who Jesus talked about – the one who embraces wayward sons, who searches out lost sheep – the one who does not rest until the single coin and the lost sheep is found – God could not possibly WANT this to happen?

Yes, I would be in the middle of those feeling helpless and confused – those wondering if everything Jesus had taught would come to an end with his death – those who were scared, and yet immobilized because we could not make sense of what was happening before us. We could not understand how Jesus, the One we came to know as the Messiah – would have to die on a cross. What could it all mean?

And 2000 years later – we can still feel like the ones in the middle of the crowds – still trying to make sense of Jesus' crucifixion and death. Still trying to understand what it all means. As faithful people, as those who seek to live our lives following Jesus – we have questions about why he had to die, and what his death means, and how could a loving God allow such a thing to happen?

Friends, those questions are valid questions – real questions. They are also faithful questions to be asking ourselves, one another and God. And the good news is that we don't always have to have all of the answers. Christ followers and theologians since the time of Jesus walking the earth have wrestled with the questions that we wrestle with today.

And while the questions can sometimes feel overwhelming – while there are many days when we might wish we had clear answers to the WHY and the HOW COME of the crucifixion – I am learning to trust that when it comes to God, when it comes to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – sometimes we are called to live in the uncertainty – to embrace the mystery – to find meaning in that which we cannot always explain or concretize.

Because the reality of our faith, is that when it comes to Jesus – those who first followed him and those who follow him today have never encountered anyone like him. His birth, his life, his teachings, his healing, his calling us to a new way of life, his death and his resurrection – are

so counter-culture –so radical – so “of God” - that it makes sense that we struggle to understand it – at the same time that we are desperate to embrace it and live it.

And over the next weeks and months and years together – I will look forward to entering into the mystery with you – to exploring our questions – to sharing our wonderings – to opening up about our faith and our encounters with God – as we seek to deepen our understanding of Jesus.

And this morning on this Reign of Christ Sunday, our questions continue as the scripture reading invites us to stand with the crowds at the foot of the cross.

As we find ourselves trying to grasp the enormity of what is happening – we see the words inscribed above Jesus’ head, “This is the King of the Jews.”

They, too were mocking words – for the authorities knew that Jesus was not like any king they had ever known and – he was certainly not the type of king that people were waiting for. The kingdom that Jesus spoke about – God’s kingdom was not like anything THEY had ever seen or imagined. Instead Jesus was seeking to bring in a new reign – a reign characterized by inclusion, by grace, by hope, and by love⁸ -- the kind of love that extends beyond the self to the other.

Jesus was pointing to a kingdom where all would be welcome and accepted. He was ushering in a kingdom where those who had been filled with sorrow or ill or in pain – would find healing and new life. Jesus was bringing about a kingdom that would overturn the present reign of power – to bring about a new order – a new way of life – a new way of being in the world - a kingdom where peace and justice and reconciliation would be a reality and where love of God

⁸ David Lose. *Working Preacher*. Nov. 18, 2013. Accessed Nov. 22, 2019.

and love of one another would be at its core. The kingdom that Jesus talked about was new – so new and so threatening that the Roman Empire could not fathom it and would not stand for it.

So they crucified him. Those who could not imagine a world where they were not in control – those who tried him for treason and insurrection - those who wanted to strip him of his influence over the people – crucified him in an attempt to kill all that Jesus stood for.

And yet –even there on the cross – even in the face of scoffing and mocking and deriding – they did not win. They did NOT win. There as he hung on the cross, between two criminals – one of those men recognized what Jesus stood for. Saw him for who he was – the one God sent to bring about a new way of life – God’s way. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

The kingdom to which Jesus points – the kingdom of God that he came to bring about – could not be stopped by those who did not understand it and tried to oppose it. Could not be stopped by fear or violence or misplaced power. The kingdom to which Jesus points – the kingdom of God - was REVEALED upon that cross as Jesus invited the man into grace and acceptance and love. As he declared: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Friends – we do not need to understand – in order to be welcome into the kingdom of God. We don’t have to have all the answers. We don’t have to be perfect or have it all together. Through the birth and life and death and resurrection of Jesus – WE are invited in – to be part of the kingdom of God that is possible right now. Jesus meets us in our questions, in our uncertainty, in our confusion – and points us again to the kingdom of God – a kingdom where peace and justice reign – where inclusion and compassion are a way of life – and where love is the greatest power – as we receive it and as we share it with one another. Jesus welcomes us to live into the kingdom of God that he came to bring about.

And what can make that so challenging to grasp - is that in our day to day lives we struggle to see it. In a world where the news and our ever-present devices depict pictures of violence and people ostracizing one another –where memes and video-clips devalue people and where the destructive behavior of those in leadership is constantly put in our faces – it can be hard to recognize God’s kingdom among us.

But that cannot stop us from looking - looking for signs of the kingdom to which Jesus points.

My kids go through phases where they play punch buggie – you know the game – where each time you see a Volkswagen beetle you call out punch-buggie and you punch the person sitting near you – or as I try to encourage – you just call it. Well, apparently, or maybe just according to Butler-family-rules - there are more points for yellow bugs and even more points for yellow convertible bugs. And who would think that there are THAT many out there. But when you look – when you’re wanting to find them – you will start to see those cars all around.⁹

When it comes to seeing the kingdom of God in a world that often feels at odds with that kingdom, we can be like those in search of yellow convertible Volkswagen bugs – once we look we see them all the time.

And once we start looking for signs of the kingdom of God – we will see it all of the time. We will see signs of compassion and justice and kindness. We will see one another offering acceptance and grace. We will see healing, reconciliation, forgiveness and new life. As we stand in the midst of the crowds – as we LIVE in the midst of God’s people – we will be part of the kingdom of God before us and among us. We will SEE love in action – not just with a few

⁹ Inspired by Rolf Jacobson, *Working Preacher*. Nov. 17, 2019. Accessed Nov. 22, 2019

glimpses - but in great abundance - as God's love is revealed all around us and as God's love is lived out THROUGH us.

May we open our eyes to recognize the kingdom of God that is among us – the kingdom to which Jesus points and to which we are all invited to make real. Amen.

Survey # 3

Luke 23:33-43

Nov. 24, 2019

What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?

1	Jesus enduring derision from leaders while hanging on the cross between 2 criminals. One criminal deriding him and saying if he is the Messiah save yourself and me too. The other one saying they are getting what they deserve but that Jesus has done nothing wrong.
2	Crucifixion on the hill
3	Blank
5	Crucifixion of Jesus
6	It was Reign of Christ Sunday & scripture was from Luke – the story of Jesus on the cross with 2 criminals.
7	The story of the crucifixion of Jesus as told in the book of Luke.
8	Jesus was crucified with 2 criminals. He was mocked, scoffed, and derided by the angry cruel crowd. One of the criminals said that Jesus had done no wrong. Jesus told him “You will be with me in Paradise”
9	Jesus is crucified between two criminals.
10	The cross – the end & beginning
11	Crucifixion of Christ and mocking from crowd and persecutors – in contrast to recognition from the other man crucified
12	This is the reign of Christ
13	Jesus at the cross
16	The crucifixion of Christ.
17	It is from Luke. Is about Jesus being crucified with criminals. Jesus told them they would all join in paradise.
18	Crucifixion of Jesus.
20	Christ's crucifixion.

In the sermon, what did you hear?

1	I heard that questions regarding Jesus' death and resurrection are the same 2000 years ago as we experience today. We are invited to accept the uncertainty and accept the mystery of God.
2	Jesus was inclusive: He is bringing in a new kingdom of inclusiveness, love, sharing – those who wanted to rob his power DID NOT WIN
3	Blank
5	I heard that one of the criminals was able to see what the others could not or would not, that Jesus truly was sent to save us.
6	Tracy had us imagine we were in the crowd below the cross while Jesus was faced with scorn & anger from Roman soldiers. It helped us to feel his pain & humiliation & also his strength & humility.
7	That it is natural to have questions about the crucifixion of Jesus Why did he have to die? Why did he not save himself? What would I have done?
8	What did it mean to trust in God – to embrace uncertainty and mystery? Sing above Jesus had mocking words “This is the King of the Jews”. Jesus embodies inclusion, grace, hope and love.
9	Everyone scorned Jesus – taunting him to save himself if he really was the king of the Jews.
10	Find meaning – love your enemies – p.s. enjoyed music
11	That there is grace and hope for all from the example Jesus portrayed in his life and of God's unfailing support.
12	Putting myself into the story. Jesus the Messiah – to die on the cross, - being condemned and scorned being mocked by soldiers
13	Jesus promises us eternal life.
16	It's a mystery as to the reason a kind and loving God would allow such cruelty to happen to his son.
17	That Jesus and God loves us all. We don't understand why God allowed the crucifixion.
18	Jesus' crucifixion was confusing then and is still confusing today. Is it a mystery, why? How come?
20	Various views on the crucifixion: some crowd, soldiers, one being crucified with Christ who scoffed and one who resonated with him compassionately.

How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.

1	In the beginning I felt sadness as I heard about the mockery and derision that Jesus endured as he hung between 2 criminals. The silence of those in the crowd who did not speak up about the injustice that Jesus was enduring also made me sad. As I listened I began to feel comforted in the suggestion that we will see signs of God's kingdom when I really look for examples of compassion, justice and kindness.
2	Invited to His kingdom & reminded that He meets us where we are – think about where I am in the crowd
3	Blank
5	I felt sad that Jesus had to endure so much scorn and pain. But this was mitigated by the joyful ending.
6	It personalized the story for me & gave me a fresh perspective.
7	I have always had an uneasy view of the story of the crucifixion. I do not know how I would have reacted to the event.
8	Like the people in the crowd – helpless, confused and sad. Wondering why he had to die.
9	Blank
10	Sad and frustrated – the end before new beginning
11	Reassured that there is light out of darkness. Faith is the underpinning of a positive life.
12	Helpless -questions – how can a loving God allow this to happen? -tearful
13	Assured by his promise
16	Supported in my own belief that God loves us so deeply and truly, He is willing to sacrifice his son for our sake.
17	Made me feel comfortable, because Rev. Tracy explained things well.
18	I feel better knowing I am not alone in my struggles with the crucifixion.
20	Blank

What did you learn? Please explain.

1	I learned (was reminded) that signs of God's love are all around if I constantly look for them. Signs of compassion, justice seeking and kindness are examples of God's love lived through us.
2	-remember to ask questions – when you look, you will find – see the signs – love in action – see it and be it
3	Blank
5	I am very familiar with this story, but there is always the wonder and awe and depth of Jesus' sacrifice and what he endured.
6	That from the cross Jesus promised a place in heaven for those who believe in him, even if they are criminals.
7	About the method of Lectio Divina as a means of understanding scripture. Putting myself in the context of the times that it occurred.
8	Through Jesus we can find healing, new life and healing. Welcoming sign to live in the kingdom of God can be hard to recognize.
9	Sometimes you have to see someone with your heart and not your eyes.
10	When you are on the mountain things are clear – in the valley, tunnel vision. Look up – peace and hope
11	That the lack of understanding as exemplified at the crucifixion continues in many parts of the world today although many work to be faithful, just and caring.
12	Good news – We don't have to have all the answers. Jesus meets us in our questions – with compassion. In our world – look for signs of the kingdom – love, peace, joy
13	I don't need to have all the answers. The more I know the less I know!
16	Nothing I didn't already believe or know.
17	That I should be a better person. I should spread the word.
18	We don't always have to have all the answers about God and my faith.
20	How certain words can colour a story and how we use words without thinking sometimes.

Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.

1	No one particular character but would probably been one of the silent crowd who knew what was happening was wrong but afraid to speak up. It would have been very difficult to oppose the Romans. It might result in severe punishment or death.
2	Blank
3	Blank
5	I can't really say there was a character that I identified with, or felt disconnected from. All of the characters represent all of us in one way or another, all of our failings and our strengths.
6	The criminal who said that he didn't think he would go to heaven resonated with me because @ times I have wondered if I have done enough good in this lie to outweigh any harm I've caused.
7	If I had been present I do not know what I would have done.
8	Blank
9	I was bullied as a child so recoil from the soldiers taunting Jesus.
10	Yes – out in the crowd – unable to change the situation – pray for guidance, hope and peace – be patient
11	The crowd could be representing any of us – and our incredulity and searching for answers.
12	1) Probably the thief on the cross – that recognized Jesus had done nothing wrong – even asked Jesus to remember him. He got it right! 2) the other thief – I felt disconnected from – and the soldiers
13	Blank
16	No one I identified with but for those who derided Jesus, I was disconnected from them. My personal belief is that you don't hurt a person when they are down. You don't heap more pain on someone who is already hurting. I don't understand how the deriders could be that way.
17	Jesus. I identified with Him even from my earliest days in Sunday School. I loved those early stories.
18	I would be off to one side trying to make sense of it all. I would be observing everything.
20	Blank

What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please describe some of his attributes as you learned today.

1	Jesus was resigned to his fate and suffering. He was a kind, reassuring presence of the criminal who recognized that Jesus had done no wrong as he had. Jesus told him they would be together in paradise.
2	Loving – inclusive – forgiving, even to the last minute – no judgement (vs. judgement)
3	Blank
5	I think the story emphasized the deep love and compassion that Jesus, and God, have for their people.
6	Even in death he believed – although I kept thinking of the other crucifixion stories when he also asked God why he had been forsaken.
7	The idea that you can learn something about the story by imagining yourself as one of the people in the crowd. Jesus up to the end preached his message of forgiveness.
8	Jesus was very strong and faithful.
9	He was resigned to his duty. He showed God's love and mercy to those who taunted and persecuted him, even praying for their forgiveness.
10	Forgive them for they know not what they do
11	He is steadfast in his promise of life and love with faith. He is the image of the shepherd.
12	He was certainly courageous. Love – He displayed love when he was beaten, scorned. Forgiveness – “Father forgive them because they don't know what they are doing.” Accepting the circumstances.
13	He never gives up on his crusade or on us!
16	My understanding is that Jesus was an obedient Son and loved his Father therefore made a choice to suffer the meanness of others in order to do the bidding of God.
17	That he was very much like the rest of us, and died as we also do.
18	Jesus struggled with why he had to die. His love of God did not waiver though – even as he was dying he asked God to forgive his executioners.
20	Acceptance for the inevitable, tolerance for those around him and belief in his future and the criminal who also accepted his responsibility for his crimes.

In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life? Please explain.

1	That I am loved in my imperfections as he reassured the admitted criminal he would be with Jesus in paradise. The reassurance for me is that nothing separates me from the love of God.
2	-as a loving God, why did Jesus die? Why did God allow/want it? What a sacrifice they made & I need to work to be worthy of it – embrace mystery & be comfortable living in uncertainty
3	Blank
5	It is an ongoing exploration and enforcement of how we can live out the idea of love and compassion for all people.
6	Gives me hope that heaven is open for all who believe.
7	That I do not have to have the answers to all the questions I might have.
8	Be strong when confronted with problems. Pray.
9	Shown by Jesus' example, that we should pray for those who persecute/bully/disagree with us.
10	Healing and hope
11	It is the message of hope that encourages all to work for peace and harmony in the universe.
12	If I could try to live my love remembering these images, I would be more loving and accepting of others – Forgiving others, and praising God and have hope.
13	Try harder.
16	Jesus believed in his God and Father and trust his God, this means I need to believe in God and trust him as well even when I don't fully understand what is happening or being asked of me.
17	Ask for forgiveness. Jesus said, Lord the know not what they do.
18	See good in others, let love prevail. Practice forgiveness more.
20	Blank

What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.

1	For me – that Jesus did not die in vain. His teachings and examples have endured for 2000 years. One does not have to be perfect to experience the joy of God’s love.
2	-be inclusive – He even included the criminal – his personal “crowd” included all kinds of people
3	Blank
5	It is the fact of his love and the sacrifice that he made so that all of us would have a chance to live in paradise.
6	That even as he is being taunted & tortured, he still took time to comfort another.
7	That the message of Jesus was and is radically different from the culture of the world.
8	Trust in God as Jesus did.
9	He did not choose to save himself so that he could save us instead.
10	Give and forgive
11	Jesus suffered, but his suffering was accompanied by 2 others and so his humanity was magnified.
12	His forgiveness. He offers a new reign of love and hope. He offers a new way of being in this world. He meets us in our questions.
13	His never wavering love – He doesn’t give up!
16	Blank
17	No matter what, to love, to forgive.
18	Even as Jesus struggled he never lost his faith. We need to question our faith.
20	Blank

In what ways did you see Jesus connecting with the entirety of the Christian story? Please explain.

1	Jesus is God's gift to our world manifested in love for our neighbor. This is shown in the crucifixion story as Jesus forgives those who caused his death.
2	-Jesus brings in a new kingdom, one of inclusiveness (even in the face of mockery) – He is the guiding light – our goal that God wants us to strive towards
3	Blank
5	The story of his crucifixion ties in with the whole story of sacrifice and redemption that Jesus brought to the world.
6	The idea of life after death in the kingdom of God is paramount to Christianity & this story helped to confirm that.
7	It was the summation of his ministry. That we must change our views about ourselves and others.
8	Jesus assures us that we will be with him in Paradise.
9	Blank
10	Love your enemies, compassion, forgiveness, reassurance – new life
11	From humble beginnings to an end of life amidst all the anger, turmoil and sordidness of humanity, he remained a man “of the people” offering faith in God to all.
12	The love and forgiveness he showed – compassion for the prisoner beside him – “this day you will be with me in paradise”
13	Blank
16	Blank
17	Jesus was our link to God.
18	Blank
20	His unavoidable destiny and the reason for it: to show us the way, his sacrifices for us and God's love for us in spite of our sins.

Was there anything about today that might have impacted your hearing of the sermon (distractions, temperature, illness)?

1	None
2	I was really tired
3	Blank
5	There are always minor distractions, we need to reinforce our sense of focus.
6	No but I kept wanting to hear how to integrate the teachings into our own lives - @ Trinity "our purpose is transformation" and I would like the stories to help me live better in today's world.
7	None
8	No.
9	Blank
10	No
11	Blank
12	No
13	Blank
16	None
17	No distractions. Tracy conducts a very upbeat, refreshing service.
18	Blank
20	Illness.

APPENDIX O

Sermon Titles from Nov. 24th

- Why? Ask the Questions
- Jesus, King of a New Kingdom
- Last Call
- An Exercise in Not Understanding
- Courage, Love to Face the Unknown
- Walking with Jesus on Great Days,
On Bad Days, On Horrific Days
- Seek and you will find
- Never-ending Love
- Trying to Make Sense of the
Senseless
- The Questions Behind the Cross
- Don't Lose Faith – things Happen
for a Reason. We all are Loved
- Love in Action
- Don't Fear! I will Be There For You!
- Have You Seen It
- How do I Fit In?
- Questions, Questions...
- The Unknown Story of the
Crucifixion of Jesus?
- Paradise
- The True Signs of god's Kingdom
- Look for the Signs
- Seek, Find & Recognize Awakening
- Trauma of Being a Forced Bystander
- Love and Diversity of Jesus
- Trust in God
- Faith in the Kingdom of God
- Looking for the Signs of God
- Encountering the Holy Mystery
- What Could I Have Done?
- Why did He Die?
- Remember Me
- Hope Out of Despair
- Being Present in the Kingdom's
Mystery
- Remember that God is with us
Always
- The Purpose
- The Kingdom is come: look for it;
live it!
- Asking Tough Questions
- Awareness of God's signs of His
Kingdom
- Why me Lord. What have I ever
done?
- Are you a considerate, thoughtful
person?
- The God/Jesus Plan
- Unfettered Faith
- Leap of Faith
- Jesus' Death Gave the World
Another Chance

- Seeing and Being Seen
- Hopelessness gives Us Hope
- The Cars
- The sermon was very enlightening as usual
- Mysteries of God
- Unworthy
- Lets All Live in the Kingdom of God
- Why! Let's Look for the Kingdom of Peace and Love
- Questions
- God's Plan for His Son accomplished but new beginnings are possible
- Are There Signs of the Kingdom of God Here?
- The End Before the Beginning
- Faith, Hope, Love – New Life
- From Trials to Joy
- Good News
- Why and Always
- Why?
- Awareness
- Lectio Divina
- He Won
- Trust in God & Yourself
- Reading into the Word
- Looking for the Punchbuggy
- Boring
- The Kingdom of God – Can You See it?
- Love Misunderstood
- He shall Reign
- Trust God to Remember Me!
- Believe in Me!
- Faith
- Join Me in Paradise
- Were you There
- Survival – no- Why No?
- Clear Vision
- A Perplexing Passage
- The Kingdom of Christ
- In God we Trust So Jesus Shall Definitely Reign

APPENDIX P

Sermon #4

Sermon Details	Focus	Exegetical Points
<p>Sermon #4 Dec 15, 2019 Advent 3, Communion John 1:1-2. 14-18</p> <p>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh</p> <p>“the Word made flesh...”</p>	<p>-Jesus as the Word made flesh</p> <p>-the incarnation – can I connect the incarnation to the sacrament of communion?</p> <p>-God sent Jesus to all people</p>	<p>-we have moved into the 3rd Sunday of Advent – who is Jesus?</p> <p>-inclusivity and belonging – Jesus is for all people</p> <p>-30th Anniversary of Ecole Polytechnique</p> <p>-in the midst of grief, personal illness and transition what does Jesus bring?</p> <p>-many uplifting positive Christmas things happening – a great pageant last week that was a non-traditional way of telling the familiar Christmas story</p> <p>-White Gift Sunday happened last week and the outpouring of food and gifts was inspiring, showing their concrete outreach that they often articulate</p> <p>-the service is very full today with communion, Advent Candles – how do I “cover” everything well?</p>

Exegetical Process (first steps) – Dec. 15, 2019

Brief Reflections On What You Know Going Into This Sermon

- a. Events in the world
 - Christmas all over.....
 - 30th anniversary of Ecole Polytechnique shooting (six female engineering students killed – began to really raise awareness for gender violence)
- b. Events in the Church
 - this is still a quiet area in our reality right now
- c. Events in the congregational life
 - people LOVED the pageant last week – a really positive feeling
 - last Sunday was also White Gift Sunday and the response was positive and huge
 - today is Advent 3, but we have not been able to celebrate Advent in the same way as Advent 1 church was cancelled due to weather, Advent 2 was the pageant -in addition to the sermon we are also having communion this Sunday (postponed from Advent 1)
 - change in weather makes it difficult for some people
 - movie night on Friday (this ended up being a great success – good community builder for younger families)
 - nursing home services later Sunday afternoon
- d. Events in the lives of individual hearers
 - recent surgery knew replacement
 - continuing deterioration due to Alzheimer's
 - ongoing grief/loss
 - challenging news regarding cancer diagnosis and treatment
 - family Christmases
- e. Your state of being
 - this is a busy week and weekend for me – hockey tournament and my family Christmas on Saturday
 - we are not ready for Christmas – feeling very distant to me right now, and yet in the midst of it at work
 - stress about this final sermon being delayed so late
 - really enjoying the Trinity people and my ministry here
- f. The church year
 - this is Advent 3, and we have not really addressed Advent yet – will do that with Children's story as well as sermon
- g. Other contextual considerations
 - it feels like Christmas is coming quickly and I haven't had a chance to address Advent yet
 - next week (19th) is our blue Christmas service and I have been sending out personal invitations to those who have lost people due to death – this has me aware of those folks, and them as well

KWHL Chart for Preaching and Congregational Exegesis – Dec. 15

KNOW	WHAT	HOW	LEARN
<p>-we are the third week into Advent and haven't talked "Advent yet" as Advent 1 was cancelled due to weather, Advent 2 was the pageant – they decorate for Advent, but not sure what their knowledge/traditions are around Advent as they used an alternative set of "Seasons" in the church year prior to my arrival</p> <p>-I'm not finding this chart helpful this week – so not going to keep plugging away at it!!!! – I think I'm too distracted and want to move on changing my sermon from when it was postponed Dec. 1st – because I didn't do a KWHL chart for Dec. 1st, I feel that doing it "after the fact" is not helpful</p>			

Sermon #4

John 1:1-2, 14-18 Advent 1 Dec. 1, 2019

There is a well-travelled road near our home – that has 5 schools on it within 3 km. You can imagine that it's best to avoid that route just before school begins and at the end of the day when buses and drop-offs and pick-ups and excited children and ambivalent teens are all vying for the same space.

And all along the street in this school zone there are signs like this – (picture of sign) signs reminding you that the speed limit is 40 k.m. an hour. And you might think that words and numbers on a sign would be enough for drivers to slow down. But as we all know, and likely might confess to – sometimes those words –those signs start to lose meaning – and we forget what they're all about.



So to take it one step further – and at various times – these start to go up (picture of the flashing warning). I imagine you've seen them – devices that clock your speed – flashing the



number repeatedly to let you know the speed you are actually going in that 40 km. zone. Oh, the first time – you kind of shamefully put your foot on the break and slow down. And maybe even the second time – but I have watched countless cars go flying by that flashing warning without even appearing to notice or heed what it says. The words weren't working. The flashing numbers weren't working. So, what do you do?

This past Spring I was startled to encounter this (show picture of the child) – and let me tell you – whatever speed I was driving beforehand, I was creeping along once I saw the sign. The words. The warnings – had not impacted me the way the sight of that child portrayed along the side of the road hit me. When the words took on human form – the message became SO real. (Pause)



Our passage from the gospel of John also speaks of words that take on human form. John teaches us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God.” And that THAT word “became flesh and dwelt among us”. These two lines are John’s complete birth narrative telling us that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promise - for us.

And when the Word took on human form (picture of Jesus) – the message became SO real. When the Word became flesh – when God revealed God’s self and lived among us - or as the Message version of the bible translates it – when the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood – THAT is when the message of God became so real.

You may remember that scripture tells us that for years God had spoken to the people of Israel - generation after generation – inviting them into relationship – calling them to hear the Word of the Lord – trying to communicate God’s love for them. And the people...well....they might have heard the word at first – but it didn’t have much staying power – and soon they forgot.

Then God sent prophets - those messengers who called people back to God - who warned them about what they were doing and how they were living, and tried to draw their attention to

another way. And no matter how obvious or persistent those messages were - God's people found them easy to ignore.

No matter how God came, or who God worked through - no matter what word was spoken or action was taken, God's people could not grasp God's message of love for them – they couldn't understand.

Until...until the Word became flesh. Until the Word became flesh and lived among us. Until Jesus was born – and moved into the world in such a way that he made God known, and he made God's love real – showing us that love is not a nebulous concept – that love is not simply words – but that love can be seen and felt and lived and experienced. Jesus came as the presence of God among us.

When the Word became flesh – when Jesus came to live among us as one of us – he came so that we might touch and feel and see God. He came so that we might experience God's love for us up close and personal. He came so that we might know that God is WITH US – RIGHT HERE with us.

And that is the promise of Christmas. That is what we anticipate each year during Advent as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus; the incarnation – the in-breaking of God into the world – revealing God's self through Jesus - so that we might witness and experience God's deep and abiding love for us – and receive the grace upon grace that Jesus offers. So that Jesus might make real what hope, peace, joy and love look like.

And it is through Jesus' life and his teachings that we come to see and understand the nature and the ways of God – that we come to KNOW God more fully.

It is in witnessing Jesus engage those who others deemed to be less than, that we come to witness the depth and breadth of God's welcome and acceptance. “By hearing about the ways

Jesus healed the sick, we can discover that our God is the kind of God who can put together the broken pieces of our lives. By observing the ways Jesus forgave the very ones who rejected and betrayed him, we can realize how far God will go to embrace US with forgiveness. By studying the ways of Jesus, we don't need to wonder about how"³⁰⁷ God wants us to live. We can simply live as Jesus did – reflecting the love and grace of God.

In Jesus, the Word made flesh – we see firsthand how God moves into the lives of God's beloved people and transforms us, so that we too, might BE God's presence in the world – so that we might be part of the world's transformation as WE reach out with intention and the Word becomes flesh in us.

The Word becomes flesh when a church community responds to White Gift Sunday with bags and bags of food and warm winter items for people they do not know. The Word becomes flesh when friends just show up and offer what you need without ever really knowing you needed it. The Word becomes flesh when last Friday people across our country lit candles in remembrance of Ecole Polytechnique, and re-committed to ending gender violence. The Word becomes flesh when two simple words, "I'm sorry" at an individual or a corporate level lead to reconciliation and new life, and when the presence of God is experienced through the actions of God's people. The Word becomes flesh when the community of faith comes to the table to touch and taste God's love poured out for us. The Word becomes flesh when God is made real and known and breaks into our lives.

Early Tuesday mornings at the hockey arena, tired parents watch their children develop their hockey skills. And one little girl – maybe 3 years old quietly eats her breakfast, and watches her brother and plays. This past Tuesday there was no quiet. Instead this young girl had discovered a

³⁰⁷ Martin Copenhaver, *To Begin at the Beginning* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1994), 36.

wonderful game. Each time she would walk by one of the other daddies – he would pretend to reach out to her with a “Boo” and she would laugh and laugh and laugh. And then, in anticipation and hope - she would do it again. And the laughter was contagious – with the 3rd and 4th and 15th time she did it, all of those parents were smiling and laughing – as we witnessed her surprise and her joy each time.

Not unlike God reaching out to us – breaking into our lives - even when we expect it –even when we anticipate it – we are still filled with such surprise and joy when it happens as each Christmas we celebrate AGAIN God’s reaching out to us in the birth of Jesus.

And my prayer for you this Holy Season is that God might reach out and touch you, so that you bubble up with great joy. That the Word that became flesh, might transform you and fill you with deep peace. That the baby born in the manger might embrace you in love that you are inspired to share. And that the One who dwells among us might be a sign of hope for all that is yet to come.

May it be so. Amen.

Survey # 4

John 1: 1-2, 16-18

Dec. 15, 2019
(rescheduled from Dec. 1, 2019)**What is the scripture story that was proclaimed today?**

1	John 1, vs. 1-2, 16-18
2	The word became flesh.
3	John 1:1-2, 14-18
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	It was the story of Jesus conception & birth.
7	That God became flesh in the person of Jesus.
8	Christ became a human being. Word became flesh.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	Peace, Joy and love
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	John 1, 1-2, 14-18
13	Blank
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	From the book of John
18	Birth of Jesus was God's promise to us. Jesus was human.
20	Jesus who made God known to us.

In the sermon, what did you hear?

1	God was there in the beginning but it took the birth of Jesus – “The word became flesh” to make God’s love known and real.
2	Words in human form give a deeper message i.e. Jesus as fulfillment of God’s promise – sometimes we don’t see things if they’re always there; become complacent to the message
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	God sent his son in flesh to make folks pay attention to His word & to bring hope.
7	That we understand God through the life and teaching of Jesus.
8	Jesus came in human form to fulfill God’s promise. Jesus made God’s love real. People could see, touch, hear and experience God’s love.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	The circle of life, birth to death, celebration
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	In school zone – 5 schools on the road no one (not many) paid attention to the speed zone until a figure of a child was raise. In the same way mankind didn’t pay attention until Jesus came – the word became flesh.
13	Blank
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	About what Jesus could do and what he did. He was the link to God.
18	When Jesus took on a human form we listened. Through Jesus’ teaching we experienced the true nature of God. Being tangible made the story so much more believable.
20	How John testifies that Jesus is the one from whom grace and truth come. Jesus is the unforgettable sign which reveals God’s love through his son’s death.

How did the sermon make you feel? Please explain.

1	Distractions and the “busyness” of this time of year have got in the way of my usual enjoyment of the advent season. Today’s sermon gave me a sense of excitement and anticipation as I await Christmas with the promise of Jesus’ birth.
2	I always wonder how I can explain “faith” to people – it’s not logical/scientific (especially the trinity and how God & Jesus relate to each other)
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	The story always leave me in awe but I had never considered that God was trying to get our attention in a new way.
7	Blank
8	Determined to follow Jesus’ example and teachings. We can be God’s presence in the world.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	Very refreshing
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	Hopeful, thankful for His coming – trusting
13	Good – I liked it. Reassuring.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	Very interested. Very comfortable
18	Certainly gave me a better understanding of the Jesus story. Felt God’s love.
20	Your illustrations were excellent as they made the meaning of Jesus’ death as the sign from God of his love and truth.

What did you learn? Please explain.

1	I learned that as human beings we need to see, feel, and experience God's love for it to be real to us. At the birth of Jesus this became possible as we see it mirrored in loving activities when following his example.
2	Love should be seen, felt, lived, experienced just like Jesus.
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	Blank
7	That Jesus was a fulfillment of God's promise to us. Our knowledge of Jesus and his life should affect our behavior.
8	Each Christmas we experience joy and surprise. God might reach out and touch us.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	A great time of the year – church family means so much
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	In the Old Testament people forgot and went back to their old ways – until the birth of Jesus – word became flesh – it can be felt, seen, touched and see the experience of God with us
13	Blank
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	Actually it reconfirmed what I had already been told.
18	I have never had the story explained to me this way. Gave me clarification and understanding. So simply presented but so powerful.
20	Blank

Was there a character in the story that you identified with? Felt disconnected from? Please explain.

1	Blank
2	-struggling with God/Jesus relationship
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	I am always amazed at Joseph's willingness & faith to take Mary as his wife in her condition. I identify with their bling faith at this point in my life.
7	No
8	Blank
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	God in the flesh
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	At times I identify with all mankind. I feel lost in the ways of the world until I practice spiritual disciplines
13	She (Mary) was chosen to raise God's son – I was chosen to raise 8 children – 3 bio, 2 adopted and 3 step – God gave us both the job to raise his children.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	The main figure was Jesus.
18	Blank.
20	Blank

What image/understanding of Jesus did the sermon portray? Please describe some of his attributes as you learned today.

1	The sermon portrayed Jesus as God (the word) in human form. Jesus' attributes as cited in today's sermon included being humble, charitable, giving, forgiving.
2	Jesus as the flesh of God's love – Jesus came so we could know God is with us
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	The sermon told me more about his parents, their trust & faith in God & their willingness to follow the angels' words.
7	That by becoming flesh Jesus had all this weakness that humans have.
8	Jesus is full of forgiveness and truth. He brings peace, hope and joy.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	The film was very interesting – Christmas and birth and communion – fulfillment
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	Image of Jesus – Through Jesus we come to understand God's love, and forgiveness.
13	Blank
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	How loving and caring Jesus was.
18	Jesus was real and human.
20	Of his meaning and importance of what Divine love is.

In what ways might this image of Jesus evoke/bring meaning in your life? Please explain.

1	When I think of the above mentioned attributes a sense of peace and hope well up in me. I am reminded of when I try to follow Jesus' example I am rewarded by a sense of calm and feeling that I am validated.
2	-suggested we should be like a child and be surprised with excitement EVERY time we hear the story – as God reaches out to touch us – live like Jesus to reflect God's love (by our actions)
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	Sometimes faith is all we have & we have to trust in the path that God has put before us.
7	If Jesus was flesh and had all of our physical weaknesses we also can live our lives according to his teachings.
8	I will be inspired to share God's love – reaching out to help the less fortunate, the lonely, and those that grieve.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	Reinforce our reason for the season
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	-make me more loving, forgiving, more joyful, thankful. Give Glory and praise to God!
13	To try my best and remember God is here to help me.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	Knowing that God and Jesus knows what I do, makes me behave and be a better person.
18	Offers us hope, peace, joy and love.
20	Blank

What is the most important understanding about Jesus that you heard today? Please explain.

1	That Jesus is fulfilling God's promise to us. He is the Word in human form. When love is seen, felt, lived and experienced it becomes real for us.
2	-be transformed – like Jesus
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	Blank
7	That God became flesh in order for us to understand his message.
8	Jesus made God's love real.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	Humbling, refreshing
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	Jesus gives God's love through God's power. In our community of faith – bread and wine – we can find joy and belonging. God reaches out to us in surprise and joy.
13	Blank
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	He asks us to love as Jesus loves.
18	By understanding God's message through Jesus we can know God more fully.
20	See image/understanding answer above.

In what ways did you see Jesus connecting with the entirety of the Christian story? Please explain.

1	Jesus is the beginning of the Christian story. The story is still alive and possibly more meaningful than ever 2000 years since his birth. If all followed his example the world would know peace and harmony and respect for the natural world.
2	-He was the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	His birth brought the prophecy of old to life, pulling the threads of early Christianity together & humanizing the Christian experience.
7	Jesus and his life is the Christian story. We seek to live our lives according to his life and teachings.
8	Jesus personified love and peace and set examples for Christian living.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	Father to Son to communion
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	In the way that he loved – coming as a babe in a lowly place makes me accept. We are inspired to share that love.
13	We need the <u>physical</u> being of Jesus to help “get the message” from God.
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	Jesus and God are the Christian story among many others.
18	Blank
20	He was the true sign of the love and grace God means for us.

Was there anything about today that might have impacted your hearing of the sermon (distractions, temperature, illness)?

1	Blank
2	Blank
3	Blank
5	Participant 5 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
6	My mind was wandering to my own health.
7	No.
8	No.
9	Participant 9 accidentally filled out the survey for Dec. 8 th pageant day – responses are not recorded here.
10	No
11	Participant 11 did not submit survey #4
12	No. I made notes but did not do the questions for 1 week so I fear I did not do justice to the sermon.
13	I arrived <u>cold</u> after an hour at the arena and had a slight headache! I did enjoy your sermon thou!
16	Participant #16 did not submit Survey #4
17	Tracy is very focused – no going to sleep in her services. When I was so sick with cancer, in the hospital, I was visited by a real angel. She spoke in depth about God and his teachings. (editor's note: This survey had a signature immediately following the comment. I could not decipher the signature, but makes me feel that the writer wanted to communicate this info to me.)
18	Blank
20	Blank

APPENDIX Q

Questionnaire #2

Based on your understanding and in your own words, who is Jesus?

1	Jesus is the incarnation of god on earth. He is fully human and appointed by God to be the word made flesh.
2	-son of God, God made flesh, our savior – an example of love and acceptance/inclusion for us to follow
3	Jesus was the physical being that was sent to us to represent the Spirit that is God and was sent here to die on the cross to proclaim the love god has for us.
5	Jesus is the son of God, who was sent to offer us salvation, and everlasting life.
6	Jesus is the son of God who lived to teach us how to treat one another and love God.
7	Jesus is the Son of God who came here under humble or ordinary beginnings. From these beginnings he was able to crate a new narrative for humanity based on love and acceptance.
8	Son of God. He made God's love real. His example and teachings give us a roadmap to follow.
9	God sent his son Jesus to the world to show God's overwhelming love for us.
10	God's promise to send his Son who became flesh among us.
11	A living presence in lives today offering hope, sustenance for the spirit, and strength for those of us in any time.
12	God made flesh -incarnated. Jesus is love.
13	Son of God – physical reminder "He" is here.
16	Jesus represents the son of God. I feel He is God in human form for us to understand & relate better to God.
17	The son of God put on this earth to help us all.
18	Jesus is the son of God who was sent to proclaim God's message to us.
20	He is the Divine messenging of God (his father) who living is, in the flesh, the meaning of God's purpose for us.

What has helped you to know this?

1	I was brought up in a Christian home and exposed to the stories of Jesus as a very young child. As I continue my Christian journey I have experienced positive results in following Jesus' examples and these have reinforced my early learnings. Mostly, I just know it in my heart. The latest sermon based on verses from John 1 has further reinforced my understanding of Jesus.
2	-bible stories, examples within the church
3	Blank
5	I have had many years of growing up in the Baptist faith and now United, have attended many services, bible studies, etc.
6	Blank.
7	Covering and understanding various stories of Jesus in the New Testament.
8	The scriptures in the 4 sermons – Good Samaritan, Crucifixion story, John's story of Word becoming flesh. Woman at the well.
9	-the stories of the bible – messages of worship
10	Bible teachings (we are not alone – we live in God's world)
11	The scriptures as revealed in services and sermons as well as the grace and support offered by many throughout the world.
12	-searching truth for myself! Attending worship, practicing spiritual disciplines, Bible study, reading
13	The sermon today!
16	Years of faith, listening to sermon and workshops
17	The teachings, even from when I was very young. Sunday School was a beautiful start.
18	Scripture and sermons. Book studies.
20	Your series of sermons climaxing on Dec. 15

Was there a Biblical story or scripture reading over the course of the study that helps you to define Jesus? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

1	As I said in the previous answer John 1 verses put into words what I know in my heart. Hope, peace, joy and love are all present in my life because of my Christian beliefs.
2	Repeated stories of Jesus as an inclusive person; who embodies love for ALL
3	I think they all had a little bit of info that helped.
5	There is a story that sticks in my head, thought it was not one from the course of study. A woman with an issue of blood that she had suffered for many years, felt that all she had to do was touch the hem of Jesus' robe to he healed and she was.
6	The story of the Samaritan woman at the well because he offered hope to all, not just a select few and was inclusive.
7	The story of the Samaritan woman a the well. This showed one of Jesus' main ideas about accepting others in spite of social conventions.
8	Woman at the well – Jesus offers her living water that only God can satisfy. Anyone can accept God's love.
9	The woman at the well. Jesus didn't care about what other people thought of her, the social judgement. He saw her heart, who she truly was inside.
10	Lord's prayer, Pray every day and be thankful for what you have received.
11	The story of the crucifixion in ?Luke is the foundation for Christianity – that Jesus assured the criminal on the cross that he was to be with Him. That such a man could be accepted by Jesus is emblematic for us – acceptance belongs to everyone
12	Jesus and the woman at the well – forgiveness, love
13	What was Mary doing to raise her son the first 12 years? She did a great job!
16	Not really, my definitions of Jesus was formed decades ago
17	The readings from the book of John, seemed to me to be very important.
18	John 1:1-2, 14-18 Jesus was real and human. God loves us.
20	Dec. 15 – John's

Over the course of the study was there a Biblical story about Jesus that unsettled you? If so, which one and what does the story say to you?

1	The crucifixion story always unsettles me. The cruelty that existed in the religions, race and cultural struggles is still present in today's world. Jesus was able to forgive and love those who subjected him to his cruel death. If we are able to do the same there is hope for peace in our hearts and our troubled world.
2	-still struggle with how to explain Jesus and faith to non-believers. There are no <u>logical explanations</u> for so many things in the Christian belief system.
3	No
5	I don't find any of the stories of Jesus unsettling, although there are other biblical passages that disturb me.
6	Blank
7	The story of the crucifixion and what I would have done if I had been there.
8	Crucifixion story – always unsettling. But we should be faithful and strong.
9	No.
10	Blank...
11	Blank...
12	No. I was not unsettled. Maybe I should have been.
13	Blank...
16	None were unsettling
17	In court Jesus being condemned to death. To be crucified. How? Why?
18	The crucifixion of Jesus. But as we progressed through the sermons I had a better understanding as to why Jesus was crucified. It is such a powerful message that God loves us and walks among us.
20	The blindness of those who refused to accept Him and led Him to his crucifixion.

In looking back over the 4 sermons what was the image of Jesus that you most identified with? Please explain.

1	The image of Jesus as a wise and kind friend. He prepared his disciples for life after Jesus' death. He befriended a Syrian woman who came to a well when he was resting and taught her about the way to achieve eternal life. He comforted a criminal who hung on a cross next to him. Even in his suffering he assured the criminal that he would be with him in paradise because the criminal had recognized Jesus and admitted that he had been condemned justly.
2	Jesus as love – repeated message of inclusion reminded me to love everyone and be less judgmental
3	Blank
5	The image of Jesus as a loving and caring man of faith, but who could still express anger at the sight of injustice.
6	Kindness
7	The idea of not following social conventions such as prejudice and accepting others.
8	Woman at the well – God's love is inclusive and welcoming.
9	Jesus is love with clothes on (personified). We should treat others with love and care regardless of what they look/act like on the outside.
10	Teacher, leader, healer
11	The healer, sustainer, and guide to lead a fulfilling life. Jesus was able to engage with the woman at the well who was skeptical of him at first. His perceptions of her vulnerability (coming to well when no one else was there) meant his impact on her was greatest.
12	The image of love, forgiveness, acceptance, peace
13	He shared everything, love, time, food. Giving like this is important to me as I do this too.
16	Inclusive love without conditions or constraints
17	His understanding. That he would listen. That he would see when people needed him.
18	Jesus at the well. Loving unconditionally is hard to practice. Seeing good in all people. Hope for the hopeless. All things are possible through love.
20	His sacrifice of his life for us Nov. 10 – culminating on Dec. 15 as the messenger who sacrificed himself to clarify God's intent.

Does this image of Jesus help you to define your faith? Please explain.

1	Yes. I have always enjoyed an optimistic outlook on life. Jesus is my mentor and friend. I believe my belief in God has changed me and continues to change me. I have a responsibility to love and forgive and by doing this others can see faith in action.
2	It is Jesus that I most relate to, rely on & trust. It is the Jesus that I aspire to emulate.
3	Blank
5	Yes, it does, because it portrays what we should all strive to be in our lives.
6	I strive to treat others with kindness & to share my faith & spirituality with them.
7	The faith community must lead the way in accepting others.
8	Yes, - my faith embodies inclusion.
9	I follow his example of how to look after others – treat each other with respect – reach out in love
10	Yes – humbling, stand for what you believe, not a fence sitter
11	Even when not recognizing a person or situation (such as the woman at the well), we may find it a moment to trust – and have faith. It reminds me of the gratitude I feel for warmth of family and my need to extend this to others.
12	It has helped me to define my faith although maturity, age, experiences have helped me in the past. Doubting is good because it causes one to search for themselves.
13	Yes
16	It does exactly define my faith but it is a role model for me to try to emulate
17	I think it makes our faith more secure. More normal.
18	Jesus gives us the platform & guidance to practice all that is good.
20	To some extent being aware of others' needs and trying to accommodate them, minor sacrifices we can call them.

Does this image of Jesus shape how you live your life? Please explain.

1	Please see previous answer
2	I'm really trying to emulate his love and acceptance in a non-judgmental way. I want people to see Jesus in me every day, in all I do.
3	Blank
5	The image shapes our behavior towards others, and toward ourselves.
6	Of course. I try to follow his examples & teachings, placing my faith in God & treating others as he did.
7	It causes me to reflect on my personal ideas and values.
8	Yes, I try to be friendly to everyone and try not to judge them.
9	See last answer.
10	Yes - encourage people – share times and talents
11	It is the temptation to rush to judgment that one tries to hold in check.
12	Yes. I try to live my life as I think a Christian should. -Honest, loving and forgiving. – I try to live with integrity. I am not a fundamentalist so I drink wine occasionally but watch my priorities.
13	Yes, a reminder of how to live every day. I need all the help I can get!
16	Acts as a role model, an ultimate goal to work towards
17	I think it all helps me be just a little better person.
18	I try to practice goodness as Jesus did. He challenged us to be better people.
20	Yes – as previous answer.

In looking back over the 4 sermons what was the image of Jesus that you least identified with? Please explain.

1	The acceptance of Jesus in preparing for his death. How difficult it must have been for him to prepare and comfort others when anticipating such a cruel end to his live.
2	-I have trouble remembering things that don't resonate with me or that I struggle with. I'm sure that there are in my mind and may pop back up but they aren't in my consciousness at all times.
3	Blank
5	If there is anything that I can't identify with, it is probably his place of privilege in society as a man.
6	I didn't like the image of him inviting himself to someone's house. It seemed pushy and entitled.
7	The thief on the cross.
8	Crucifixion: Would I have been so brave and steadfast?
9	Not sure there were any.
10	Blank...
11	Blank...
12	I would have to go over them again but I think there was no image I least identified with. He was perfect and we are imperfect as humans.
13	Blank....
16	None
17	That the area Jesus was into. I wish he was able to cover even greater distances.
18	I least identified with Jesus on the cross. I didn't understand why he had to die.
20	Blank....

In thinking back to your answers to the questionnaire prior to the series “Encounters with Jesus”, do you perceive a change in your understanding of Jesus? Please explain.

1	I do not perceive a change in my understanding but a deeper knowledge and more comprehensive understanding of Jesus.
2	-more emphasis on inclusion – love the bible-based explanations and examples
3	Blank
5	I don't know that there is a change but certainly a deeper understanding of his life.
6	No. the stories are well known & well loved & I did not find anything new or transformative.
7	Yes. The change is about this emphasis on accepting others.
8	Probably. I've had to think deeper than usual and think about his many attributes.
9	I always knew Jesus was love, but after this series I have come to know his love is overwhelming – there is no “I will love you only if...” – that kind of love is human manipulation of Jesus.
10	Yes – as we mature (get old) we look at life from a different view (perspective)
11	Jesus seems to be more querulous in his engagement with ordinary folk – in order to reveal himself and explain his message.
12	I would like to say yes but I knew he was a God of LOVE and studied the fruit of the spirit. This has kept my faith strong. I hunger for more.
13	Blank....
16	No
17	No. Only confirms what I had been told.
18	I understand why Jesus had to die. I can see now the great love God has for us.
20	It has become more indelible.

What would have an impact on your understanding of Jesus? Please explain.

1	Hearing the stories of Jesus and having them being related to today's life situation. This makes Jesus more real and authentic to me.
2	-continued Bible reference and how they set an example for us
3	Blank
5	I am impacted by people that I encounter that live a life of love and acceptance towards others.
6	If the lessons he taught could be related to current lives with an eye toward how we can interpret them in our modern lives.
7	Blank...
8	Blank...
9	Blank...
10	Taking time to read the bible
11	Blank...
12	More study. I am not "there yet". I never will be in this world.
13	More help understanding Bible Scripture. I really should attend "Bible Study"!
16	I'm not sure anything would change my understanding of Jesus. He is good & right & just and all loving & forgiving. I can't see anything changing that.
17	To speak with him.
18	Blank...
20	?

Is a person's understanding of Jesus important to their faith life? Please explain.

1	If we follow his examples we can experience hope, peace, joy and love. I can't imagine how my faith life would be manifested without Jesus. In saying this it does not diminish my understanding that other religious faith have their own way to God – eg. Islam: Mohamad.
2	Yes. He is the example we are supposed to follow. He is the whole basis of the Christian faith. His birth, death and resurrection define our belief system.
3	Yes it is important to understand because it is hard to believe in something you don't understand.
5	I believe so, yes, because he is the embodiment of what we can do with our lives.
6	Yes & no. For Christians it is crucial to understand the life and work of Jesus as the template to how we live. But, many religions do not put him in the center and yet still have faith in God.
7	A person's understanding of Jesus would define their faith. Through out history people have been influenced by their understanding of the ministry of Jesus. Sometimes this has led to problems like how we deal with First Nations People.
8	Yes. The more you understand the more you can embrace God's kingdom.
9	I think it is because we follow Jesus example. How you understand Jesus is the example you follow.
10	Yes – I would think they would have an (more) optimistic view – glass half full or half empty.
11	Blank....
12	Oh yes! It keeps us grounded in our faith life. In past my faith journey has led me to know Jesus is real and we can have a personal relationship with him.
13	Yes, but still a lot of mystery to me!
16	I think it is. Faith is what I think of an intangible. You can't touch it or feel it. It's something inside you that is very personal. Knowing Jesus as I feel he is, is what supports my faith.
17	Yes. Very much so. The more we learn of, and talk about <u>HIM</u> makes us more comfortable in his presence.
18	The new understanding I have received through these sermons has opened and encouraged me to be a better person. It was a true wake up call. Sometimes we become complacent in our faith journey it was a true kick in the pants for me.
20	Each of us must decide and accept or not what of Jesus' life & death we have been exposed to in our life's experience.

APPENDIX R

Journal**Nov. 10th Sermon #1****Reflection – Preaching Sermon 1**

I spent a great deal of time honoring the process of Lectio Divina for the scripture reading. Reading it again and again in different contexts. Then I did the Contextual analysis chart and the KHNL chart. I found all of this helpful there was some frustration about not being able to answer all of the questions about what I know and don't know about the congregation. I wish that I had more time for my research. I think this could really be powerful over a larger timespan.

That said, the practice of preparing was really helpful for me to take the TIME to exegete the congregation and the culture. I didn't have the time to study what I had learned about them (from the gatherings etc) prior to preaching. I think this would have been helpful, on one hand – but also wanted to just “begin” and see what responses I got.

The sermon focus was on Jesus as the one who BRIDGES THE GAP between us and God – the one who reveals God. And he does this as he is an expression of God's love – with that expression calling us to love one another. In reflecting on the theology itself, in retrospect, what I am seeing is that I still did not clearly articulate what I had hoped to about Jesus. I think I got close, but then need to then move to our loving one another feels like it weakens the idea that Jesus is the bridge/conduit for God's love. I wonder if I could have just stayed there? Was the inability to do that because the scripture took me further (I do feel that I did not cover SO much of what could have been covered with that periscope) or is it an inability to make a bold claim about Jesus? Or...sometimes I think it's in an effort to satisfy so many things in the sermon (keep them hooked, ensure there's a “mission” from Paul Wilson, keep the context in mind) – sometimes it feels like I am trying to cram too many things into one sermon – not in terms of content, but in terms of ensuring I have met “homiletic requirements”. I'm not sure I always do this, but for these thesis sermons I am definitely feeling the pressure!!

Theological Claims – I think that seeing Jesus as the one who bridges the gap between God and God's people is a claim that I am very comfortable making – it does not feel threatening or controversial, so I guess perhaps it feels “safe”. UCC Creed – “Jesus works in us and others by the Spirit”.

Journal – Nov. 12

I have just read through the purple sheets – Questionnaire #1, focusing specifically on Questions 4, 6, 7. I am amazed by the level of some responses. Some really know their bible. Others are not able to answer the questions (or don't want to). But some of the questions people have astounded me – and makes me feel the weight of the importance of what we do. There are so many REAL questions that lie on people's hearts – so many things they wonder about or that leave them unsettled. My response as I read is that I wonder what is behind some of their questions – what are the pastoral issues behind them? What are they facing in their lives that causes this question at THIS time in their life?

As I was quickly reading them over first (before typing them up) the most powerful line just struck me “I wonder if Jesus would recognize himself if he saw what we have made of him?” – I want to know who this is and talk to this person (whoever it is – it is confidential). It has intrigued me so much – and I continue to have that reaction as I read the responses.

I also see how this is years of work ahead of me – and this excites me! I want to get at it – to have the opportunity to explore these questions.

Some of the responses focus on God more than Jesus – I wish I could ask that person if that is because they misread the question, or is it rooted in a Trinitarian understanding of God?

Nov. 17th Sermon #2

The Woman at the Well

Again this week I enjoyed the amount of time I took to spend with the text – reading it through several times and making notes. What kept coming up for me was how the woman continually tried to deal with “details” and practicalities – made me wonder, “Does staying with practicalities help us to cope when we’re struggling?” – Jesus took it to words of faith. I also reflected on whether, because he was tired and sat at the well – did he need life-giving water too?

Why did she leave her water jar – did she feel she no longer needed it? What does that mean?

With all of the reflection, in doing the Contextual Analysis, I did not find it as helpful this week – it felt repetitive. I realized that I had not been in much contact with the congregation during the week, so this meant I felt pretty disconnected (had not done any pastoral visiting due to a funeral), and no real meetings. That impacts knowing the context as well. I did not take the time to do the KWHL chart early in the week– thinking it would also not have changed much. I did it after preaching, which really is like cheating!

I did take the time to read through Questionnaire #1 and was blown away by what people wrote (see above). However, where this became problematic is that I see the questions people have – and I want to focus on them. But because my thesis weeks are back-to-back and I have to do the worship prep in advance with the music folks, I have already chosen my scripture and I don’t feel I can address the topics right now. This is a flaw in my research as the timing is so condensed that I’m not able to really respond to some of the congregational exegesis that I am doing. I know I will be able to over time, however it will not be part of my research and I would have liked to have included it in the research as I believe it will be relevant when I preach to their questions.

Sermon Focus: our need is to belong. Jesus restores us to God and to community and to ourselves– the life-giving water that he gives is about acceptance, welcome, belonging.

Theological Claims– thinking of the UCC Creed – Jesus came to reconcile and make new. Jesus is the one who offers us life-giving water - while this seems like such a simple image, it’s also somewhat nebulous – what does life-giving water do? My focus became on restoration/reconciling – but then wondered if that is really what Jesus’ water is about. It is about “making new” - but how does that happen?

Jesus is the one who restores us and reconciles us to God as he offers God's love to us. Theologically this is about forgiveness and grace – but that got messy with the scripture reading, as Jesus never mentions forgiveness to the woman. He SEES her and knows her – and accepts her still.

Reflection After Preaching –

UGH – as I went into worship and looked out, sitting in front of me, as always, was the family whose home was completely flooded out a few years ago. HOW did I not think about that as I was doing the exegetical work? It is a good reflection – that the contextual analysis Sheet likely needs to have a question on it about how might THIS particular reading affect those in the pews. I know about the flood – it just didn't come up when I was thinking about all of the CURRENT contextual things. Ugh – I didn't do the KWHL chart before preaching – it would have come up there. So...in my not completing that chart it had consequences to my sermon and the impact it might have had for the family who heard it.

In the moment, I wasn't able to change my sermon – however was able to include something in the prayers. I also sent them an e-mail expressing my wish that I had thought of this as I was writing and apologizing that I didn't.

It also makes me think of how it would be good to consider having people speak to particular texts – i.e. – what would have happened if I had had the family talk about what life-giving water means to them.

The other interesting thing that happened from an exegetical standpoint was that because we had the scripture read in two voices (with the woman and Jesus) – it was interesting to hear the tone of voice that was used. The Jesus that was portrayed sounded condescending rather than compassionate – the accusation of “five husbands” came through. So it makes me wonder if that is a reflection of how Jesus is portrayed for that man, or how he has heard the story preached. Theologically – I'm still not sure that I make the bold claim for Jesus's identity. In this reading Jesus is the one who gives life-giving water, so who does that make Jesus? Jesus is the one who points us to God – who reconciles us to God and to ourselves. Through showing us God's love for us, we can come to love ourselves. Is this enough?

Nov. 24 Sermon #3

Pre-sermon prep

So, I recognize that I will need to address that we are moving toward Christmas as I am preaching on the resurrection. Because Trinity UC has gone with different “seasons” (not traditional church year) – the idea of Reign of Christ will likely be foreign to some. It would have been so easy to “not go there” however I feel if I am being faithful to the thesis research and deepening understandings around Jesus – we have to go to the cross.

My focus from the UCC Creed will be “to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen – our judge and our hope” and will look at why we need to go to the cross for the birth to make sense. I will read through Ann Weems’ poem on the cross and the cradle for some wisdom.

I also want to address some of the responses to the Questionnaire #1 that people shared. Some of those comments might be:

- that he was able to be crucified.
- the Radical side – who throws money changers out of temple. The Jesus who was a political dissident, someone the Romans felt was a threat.
- that Jesus died on the cross. Is that a sacrifice a father could do?
- Why him?
- Gethsemane – disciples to wait with him – Jesus shows his humanity and his fear – disciples fall asleep and not attentive to him during his fear and agitation – he is resigned to his fate – shows how difficult it can be to be a committed follower
- crown of thorns and that he died a horrible death

I am also going into this sermon having re-read the Stoorvogel article and wanting to keep it in mind in terms of the factors that affect change from sermons. I think for this sermon I could try to preach remembering that presenting something in a new way can have impact, as well as addressing some of their current beliefs in a new way.

The Sermon – now that the sermon is done and not yet preached – I’m not certain I accomplished any of the things I set out to do. This one has been a struggle. On the one hand I wanted to address atonement –but the fullness of that felt too much for one sermon. I think it would be a great three-part sermon to do in the future. But I did address that the questions we have/they have – are valid questions – but not easy questions to answer. This feels faithful to

acknowledging their questions, and yet I would have liked to go further – however again, it just felt like such a huge topic to cover in one sermon.

It is the morning of the sermon and I realize I'm not sure that I specifically addressed who Jesus is in this sermon – I talked a lot about the kingdom to which he pointed – but not sure I specifically addressed Jesus himself – will look again at this.

Post-Preaching

The Tuesday After...that sounds a bit like the morning after with a hangover or something. But this thought likely hit me just as hard. As I was rehashing Sunday in my mind again, and looking to this coming week through the Contextual Analysis and the KWHL I had a revelation that I am still trying to process.

Preaching theology requires trust and relationship between the congregation and the preacher. On the congregation's side, they need to know that the preacher knows what he/she is talking about and will not push them too far beyond their comfort zone. They need to know that the preacher has their best interest at heart as they hear new ideas and challenging thoughts. They need to know that the preacher is faithful and seeking to find answers, just as they are – and that the preacher might not have it all together but is faithfully trying to grow and share the growing with them. The congregation cannot HEAR someone they don't trust – especially when the topics are challenging to where they are or are inviting them to think differently. Any good preacher can invite a congregation into a light story, or a whimsical sermon – or even a sermon that makes you think. But this morning it really hit me that my congregation might not be able to go into a deeper place right now, because they don't know if I will go there with them and if I will help them through.

At the same time, the preacher has to trust their congregation will not dismiss or condemn them for new thoughts or challenging words. The preacher needs to know that her/his people are for them, not against them – and will be forgiving of sermons not landing in the best way, or not hitting home. The preacher needs to trust that the congregation is wanting to hear a Word for God and is not just there for the community – and preach to that – knowing that the Word they preach has the possibility of bringing transformation.

In my current context – at this early stage in my ministry (not yet 2 months in), our relationship is still very much at a surface phase – we have not yet truly bonded – we have not

been through enough or had enough time together to have a trusting relationship. I think we like each other (I like them) and I think the courting is going well – with the potential of a good relationship. But we are not there yet.

And so, after preaching a sermon where I was hesitant to really hit home with a solid theological stance and very much feeling like it did not land as I wanted it to, I am feeling very vulnerable with the congregation and a need to play it safe. This doesn't work for my thesis and I think the message this week could be very powerful. It would be a good time to really address the incarnation. However I am feeling like my people and I – (can't put it all on them) are still very much in the "let's keep it light and get to know one another" phase – and that my job is to entertain them. I know that is not true for everyone. Some of the feedback from the seniors that I have received suggests that they are looking for theology and a clear message – but I could be wrong. And I don't think that is true of the middle-age folk – they seem to be about community and keeping it light. It takes me back to the meeting with the Board, before my arrival – and the emphasis on having fun in worship and liking lively music to "bop" to – can this happen and still have a solid theological core to a message? I think it can – I'm just not there yet. The "pressure" of preaching "good theology" and preaching sermons worthy of my thesis work – has locked me up a bit.

December 1st – Sermon 4

I am dreading this sermon – for all of the reasons I wrote about earlier in the week. It's terrible, but the idea that it might be a snowy day is really appealing to me – in that maybe there won't be as many people there.

And YET...I have been holding onto the image from the pictures I am using for 5 months now. The picture of the child instead of a speed sign (see sermon) was such a powerful image to me when I first saw it and I KNEW I needed to use it in a sermon at some point. This is the time...I can do this.

Another challenge this week is that my sermon needs to be short AND would be ideal to tie it into communion. This is the second time I will be presiding at communion at Trinity UC, so that is really important to me. I would love to be able to make a connection from the idea of incarnation to the theology around communion – I just don't know if I can do it all in a shorter

sermon! I have to remember that I can't cover everything in one sermon – it's just feeling more important because this is for my thesis and because I love these pictures – and because I'm still new and feel the need to have this sermon be good – both theologically and homiletically as it's really important to me that that be true – but also because I'm still in that “I want them to like me” phase so a good sermon will help. O.k. – pathetic, but true!!!!

Text and Theology – realistically I am only focusing on John 1,2 and 14a – and really only on 14a – the Word became flesh and lived among us. Not only is this in the scripture, but also a line in the UCC Creed “who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh...” -I love this image of Jesus, and yet struggle to fully articulate it. There is SO MUCH in this – do I deal with “In the beginning was the Word...” And all that that implies? I don't think I can. For Advent 1 it makes sense to deal with the Word becoming flesh (well, honestly – this would be better for Advent 4, but my thesis needs it done now!!!). I need to do some more reading and reflecting.

Preaching day – hey – we got snowed out so now I need to move this to Dec. 15th. Still the same issues with timing etc., but I can look at the sermon again and rework some of it that might need re-working. Yahoo!!!!

Post-preaching Reflection

In the busy-ness of everything I forgot to write this after preaching, so am relying on memory. I think the sermon went better than I was anticipating, but primarily because the entire service came together well. The video I used for the communion liturgy was very powerful, and I think it was a really good addition to the sermon, in that it took “the Word made flesh” further by putting flesh on it. (The video was the music “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” accompanied by video clips of Jesus' birth and life. It was very powerful. Can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugV6QGcafEE>)

I had a lot of feedback at the door as people were leaving – many people comment that I like that I preach from the bible, so that is a good thing. I don't think it's just the “polite” response – but I will know better when I read the survey responses – which likely won't be until January!!

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