

Sermon: Anniversary Sunday

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles PC, May 15, 2022)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

“Over 300 years have passed since these and many changes. Even in the 300 years over which we must look to the original edition of our King James Version of the Book. Would have seen many a change and many a book left behind but this 20th Century is not leaving “The Book” behind.” That is how Rev. Archibald G. Cameron opened his sermon, the one he preached on the passage of Joshua 1:8, sometime in-between 1925 and 1930. Rev. Cameron was the first minister of St. Giles Presbyterian Church. He was first appointed by the Presbytery to guide St. Giles when it was granted congregation status on June of 1925. In February of 1928, he was officially inducted as minister of the congregation. His tenure only lasted until 1930, five short years.

The manuscript of this sermon was recently uncovered and retrieved from the storage closet, by Don Tate, in a session authorized project to catalogue historical documents and artifacts of St. Giles. The hand-written manuscript on ten separate small, slightly yellowed, loose leaves, is then painstakingly transcribed, again by Don. It is on a display table at the basement, along with a number of other documents that you may find interesting. I do encourage you to check it out after the service.

The sermon itself is based on the passage of Joshua 1:8, in the King James Version: *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”* (Joshua 1:8)

The book of the Law, or the Torah, that the passage refers to is the first five books of the Bible. In the context of Joshua receiving the reign from the departing Moses, this particular verse is part of a larger and longer instruction that God is giving to Joshua, as the Israelites were making preparation to cross over river Jordan, into the land that God had promised, first to the patriarchs, then to Moses and the entire people of covenant. In that context, the success of Joshua as a leader, will largely depend on his obedience to the book of the Law, which he is told specifically to meditate on it day and night, and not to deviate from it to the left or to the right.

However, in the sermon that Rev. Cameron prepared and preached, Joshua was never mentioned. The passage of 1:8 is used primarily as a generic

text, whereas the book of the Law is understood to represent the entire Bible, or 'The Book' as Rev. Cameron calls it. He seems to have a tremendous high regard for the King James Version of The Book, listing a number of changes that had taken place since it was first published and authorized. Here I quote: *"Needle has given place to sewing machine. Candle has given place to electric light. Pack Saddle has given place to parlour car. Six weeks sailing has given place to 6 days steam"*

Given the longevity of the King James Version of the Bible, Rev. Cameron gave it this following praise. Here I quote, *"What a book-never so widely read, no book so universally accepted as a religious authority. My wish is not to pronounce a eulogy on it, to argue for its divine origin, or defend it in any way but rather to urge its claims to our attention, particularly as laying the foundation of all time Knowledge, Way, Salvation."*

He then compared The Book to a number of great works of literature, to Iliad, to Paradise Lost, and many other works of genius and taste. All pale in comparison to this great Book of Religion, to the King James Version of the Bible.

Rev. Cameron does not seem to differentiate the Bible from the version that he so admired. Nevertheless, his love for the authorized version, *"the work of 47 scholars appointed by King James, 7 years spent and worked"*, is unabashed and unmistakable. So much so that he would argue that the reason it had received such a wide dissemination of the revealed treasures of God, is manifestly the conviction that the religion they teach is the 'Universal Religion'—outshining any other faiths, be it Brahmanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or the Muslim faith taught in the Koran.

Much of the final part of his sermon is in sort of point-form with short phrases. I must admit that I have a hard time following his notes. However, he did end the sermon with this much clarity: *"There is but **One Book** = lamp to light our path. The words of God in Scripture...the only rule to direct us how we may serve Him."*

It is a fascinating sermon, perhaps not the best exegesis. But it does give us pause, a reminder of a not so distant era where the Scripture in the English language, is really only heard, read, in one particular version, the Authorized King James Version. I have a strong inkling on that particular Sunday when this sermon was preached at St. Giles, serious efforts were made by parishioners to memorize the verse of Joshua 1:8,

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth;
but thou shalt meditate therein day and night,
that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein:
for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous,

and then thou shalt have good success.” (Joshua 1:8)

What is the purpose, you may ask, for us to look back to a sermon that was written and preached almost 100 years ago? What is the use, you may ask, for us to catalogue and preserve historical documents and artifacts of congregational life here at St. Giles? It all rests on the biblical notion of remembrance, which extends far beyond nostalgic recall. Remembrance embraces a comprehensive range of human experience. Remembrance integrates fully faith and life, Remembrance sets for us, the goal of complete obedience to God. Correspondingly, forgetfulness is seen in the Scripture, as one of humankind’s greatest spiritual maladies. Hence, the psalmist reminds us in Psalm 103:1-2, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits.”*

In light of such understanding of remembrance, I do not want to forget to present to you materials on our denomination’s mission work in Malawi, the initial focus of this Anniversary Sunday. Malawi is often referred to as the “warm heart of Africa” because of how kind the people are, and for its grand landscape and beautiful wildlife. The PCC’s partnership with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, or CCAP began in 1969 with the appointment of the Rev. Brian and Mrs. Elizabeth Crosby. In total, 73 mission staff and volunteers have served in Malawi. The PCC has partnership with two Synods, Blantyre and Livingstonia. The Blantyre Synod covers the entire southern region of Malawi. It has over 1.2 million members. Most of its members live in rural areas. There are approximately 185 ordained ministers serving over 600 churches and 700 prayer houses.

The Rev. Dr. Blair and Mrs. Vivian Bertrand with their three children served in Malawi from 2017 to 2020. Due to COVID-19, they returned to Canada earlier than planned. Blair began a new appointment in August 2020, as Malawi Liaison based in Canada. Blair works with the Principal of Zomba Theological College, assisting with development of curricula, policies of the College, coaching the Malawian PhD candidate, developing the ZTC library, and encouraging research and academic exchanges.

He also works with Theological Education by Extension (TEEM) assisting with lay training materials, revising Diploma workbooks, and developing lay Bible Curricula. Because there is a shortage of ordained ministers in Malawi, even a CCAP congregation that has an ordained minister can expect to have a lay preacher $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time. TEEM has been helping to equip this group with a solid theological and Biblical education for over 40 years.

Another missionary that International Ministries currently supports is Rev. Joel Sherbino. He is based in Ontario and serving at Paris Presbyterian Church.

He also serves as the part-time Malawi Liaison focusing on prison ministry, called Friends of Prison. Rev. Sherbino provides support and encouragement by phone and email to local chaplains and Friends of Prison volunteers. These volunteers visit 17 different prisons sharing the Good News of God's love and forgiveness. Through Bible study, worship, personal counselling and distributions of medicines, soap, sleeping mats and Bibles, this prison ministry is making a difference for those who have been neglected by society and family.

Another ministry that I want to highlight is the Leadership Development Program. As in Canada, developing leaders and enhancing existing skills of people among our church partners, is important and appreciated. This program provides grants to students associated with our overseas partner churches. In the past students might study in Canada at one of our theological colleges but many now study in institutions in their regions. Programs are not limited to theological studies. Currently, the program is supporting two students studying MTh Ministry Studies and five students studying Master of Theology. Women in Malawi face many obstacles including economic reasons which discourages them from pursuing higher education.

In this last slide, I would like to highlight the Rev. Dr. Takuze Chitsulo. In July 2017, Rev. Chitsulo became the new Principal of Zomba College. After five years of study, Takuze had completed a PHD in Biblical Studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal, in South Africa. His thesis focused on the Book of Habakkuk and its relevance to the socioeconomic situation in Malawi. In his thank you email to the PCC, he shared "*You didn't only educate me, but you taught the whole church in Malawi.*"

There are many other aspects of the PCC mission work in Malawi that I will not have time to highlight. St. Giles is part of that work, through our long association with a number of members of the congregation originally from Malawi, and through our generous giving to the Presbytery World Service & Development, and the Presbyterians Sharing. I should also note that there is a photo album downstairs, along with the collection of historical documents and artifacts. An album with congregational life of a church in Blantyre, Malawi, taken and left for us by the late Sam Banda.

These are all part of our memory, our legacy, worthy our our remembering, with the hope that by such remembrance, we would be able to interpret what God is doing in our midst, in light of God's known faithfulness in the past.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.