

At the 3pm service on May 14th 1882, the day the first building on this site was dedicated, the Rev. David Beaton of the Congregationalist Church rose to give the message. He preached on one line from the Gospel of Matthew, “And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.” It comes from the story of Jesus’ transfiguration. Jesus, Peter and the brothers James and John head up a mountain to pray. While they are there, Jesus is changed, transformed and he becomes dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear. Peter wants to build a dwelling place. Then that voice from heaven comes saying, “This is my Son, marked by my love, focus of my delight. Listen to him.” (Matthew 17:5) Then the disciples, filled with fear, fall to the ground. Jesus touches them and tells them not to be afraid. Then comes the line that was used as inspiration 135 years ago, the translation from *The Messages* puts it this way, “When they opened their eyes and looked around all they saw was Jesus, only Jesus.” (Matthew 17:8)

My friends as we sit here today, 135 years after the first building on this site was dedicated, we are still gathering for worship and trying to figure out what it means to lift up our eyes and see Jesus. 135 years later we are still following in the ways of Jesus. 135 years later and that same passage of scripture which we normally hear at the beginning of lent can be a reminder of what we need to be about as a people of faith.

In that 135 years some things have changed. The hymns, the music, the choir gowns and in January of 1914 that first building burned down. But one important thing has not changed. With their eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, 101 years ago they decided to rebuild even though the war was coming, even though it was expensive, even though they knew it would be hard.

I'm in awe of our forbearers who took the chance to build a church here in this place not once but twice. They were a people of faith and vision. They lived in a time when the church was expanding and growing. Sundays schools were filled to capacity. They had a message to

share and a vision of people to gathering in faith.

Over that 135 one of things that changed is the churches place in society. One time churches were the centre of community. Today that is not necessarily the case. We hear regularly that the church is dying. Just week I read an article from the Washington Post, “If it doesn’t stem its decline, mainline Protestantism has just 23 Easters left.” The author writes, “The news of mainline Protestantism’s decline is hardly new. Yet the trend lines are showing a trajectory toward zero in both those who attend a mainline church regularly and those who identify with a mainline denomination 23 years from now. While the sky isn’t falling, the floor is dropping out. The trajectory, which has been a discussion among researchers for years, is partly related to demographics. Mainline Protestants, which has been the tradition of several U.S. presidents, aren’t “multiplying” with children as rapidly as evangelicals or others of differing faiths. And geography matters. Places where Protestants live are now in socio-economic decline, and

parts of the country like the Sun Belt are become more evangelical with every passing winter.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/28/if-it-doesnt-stem-its-decline-mainline-protestantism-has-just-23-easters-left/?utm_term=.13ffd67196c1&wpisrc=nl_faith&wpmm=1

It sounds pretty daunting doesn't it. 23 Easters left. We don't only hear this story of decline and hopeless in the papers. We talk about it in our churches and in our meetings. We lament over all the things we've lost – lower attendance. No children. No youth. No volunteers. Where have those good old days gone? Here is what I know. The message of Jesus Christ is timeless and there is no amount of change that can diminish the good news of Jesus. He isn't going anywhere and neither are those who follow in his way. The church may be changing but it isn't dying. As Paul writes in Hebrews “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) We can choose to look at the statistics of decline and

nod our heads in agreement. We can remember the good old days when pews and Sunday schools were full. We can look back with longing for days long gone. There is no future in looking backward with longing.

Jesus' invitation is here and it is now. It our turn to do what our forbearers did when they first built a church on the site. We can lift up our eyes and see Jesus, only Jesus. We can find new ways to tell the stories of his love, of his welcome, of healing, of the new life. We can reach out and meet people where they are. We can follow in Jesus' footsteps and offer care and support to those on the margins of our community.

Perhaps the most powerful thing we can do is tell our story to others. I know, we are out of practice. We accepted that idea that we don't talk religion with other people. We need to start. If we don't share our story with others, if we don't tell people why we come to this place each week, how will they know? The time has come for us to be brave and share with others why we believe in God and how sometime it's

not easy because doubt creeps in. Talk about the times when God comes powerfully into our lives offering healing, hope and help. Find new ways of telling that age-old story. Like those who went before us, we lift our eyes to Jesus who guides us as we dream new dreams.

This congregation over the generations has worked with tenacity and hope to share message of God's love and to help the people of this city. That legacy continues in all of you today. Just three short years ago, this congregation faced a challenging choice: close our doors or take a chance on something new and different. Once again, this community of faith lifted their eyes to Jesus and made another big change. Your courage held create Cochrane Centre, a not for profit that has built 10 homes for people in need in this community. The legacy of people who first had the foresight to build a church on this site continues in a new way.

We do not know what the future will hold for us as a congregation. Here is what we know. Whatever tomorrow brings, we face it with our brothers and sisters in faith. God continues to

guide this congregation as we dream new dreams. And we know, that when we keep our eyes lifted to Jesus, we will have all that we need to continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.