

On the weekend of July 21 and 22 2014, L'Arche Greater Vancouver celebrated its 40th Anniversary and L'Arche International's 50th Anniversary. The weekend was wonderful and included a beautiful reflection of L'Arche, Below is the sermon given by Reverend Doug Graves at the thanksgiving service at South Burnaby United Church.

CELEBRATING  
The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of L'Arche Greater Vancouver  
And  
50 years of L'Arche International  
June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, 10:30 AM

South Burnaby United Church

The Reverend Doug Graves

*Readings – Isaiah 58: 6-11 and Luke 14: 15-23.*

What a beautiful gathering this is! And what a privilege to be part of it!

As some of you will know, the community of L'Arche Greater Vancouver has been an important part of my life for many years. So I must begin my reflections this morning by thanking Annelise and the worship team for inviting to be part of this morning's worship

What a beautiful gathering! And what beautiful readings! They are both; I think you'll agree very "L'Arche friendly" readings.

The first is one of several very well known passages written by a prophet who was inspired by the great prophet Isaiah, but who was not actually Isaiah. This prophet lived much later - during the time of exile in Babylon, in fact. And so he is often called "The Unknown Prophet of the Exile"

Whoever his was, his writings were clearly very important to Jesus and helpful to Jesus as he tried to discern God's purpose for his life.

Is not this what God asks of you, the prophet writes: ***"to loose the bonds of injustice... to let the oppressed go free... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house"....*** And as you do this, he adds, you shall be called ***"the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in"***

***"The restorer of streets to live in!"*** What a great image. And what good summary of how L'Arche Greater Vancouver has impacted the community of Burnaby, and indeed Greater Vancouver. We have indeed been, with others, restorers of streets to live in, which is to say, neighbours helping neighbours shape of a more human world.

The Gospel Parable of the Great Banquet which has been so well acted out for us, is also very L'Arche appropriate reading. ***"Go into the streets and and lanes of the town" says the King, "and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame....Go out into the roads and lanes so that my house may be filled"***

And so it has been for L'Arche around the world for 50 years and for L'Arche here for 40. The invitation to join with those with intellectual disabilities and their friends in creating families of faith and nurture has gone out, and people have responded, and a small sign of God's loving purpose for the world has shone like a candle in the darkness.

A little history for those whose knowledge may be sketchy... The first L'Arche home was founded in 1964 by Jean Vanier – the son of a former Canadian Governor General Georges Vanier, who renounced a career as a Naval Officer and, briefly, as a university lecturer to share his life with two men with intellectual disabilities, Raphael and Philippe, in the village of Trosly, 90 kilometres north of Paris. He called the tiny community “L'Arche”, which is French for “the Ark”, in honour of the biblical ark, because he hoped it would help to *“save the helpless from drowning in the deluge of our civilization”*

Jean's original idea was to live simply and quietly with his new friends. But within 6 months a local psychiatrist asked him to take in two of his patients, and then some more. Soon other people came to join the new community, and a second, and then third house was opened, and a movement that would eventually span the globe was on the move.

Two of the early assistants, Steve and Ann Newroth from Toronto, returned to Canada in 1969 to fund the Daybreak community in Richmond Hill Ontario – the first of what is now 29 communities in Canada. That was followed in relatively short succession by communities in Ottawa, Edmonton, Stratford, Calgary, Victoria, Winnipeg, and Toronto.

Which brings us to 1974 and the arrival in Vancouver of Judy Leckie from L'Arche Daybreak to found, with some friends, L'Arche Greater Vancouver. She was soon joined by folk like Barbara, Ken, Gwenda, and Arthur – all of whom are here with us this morning - and the little ark on Sussex Ave was afloat.

The house itself – the one that is still known as Shiloah – used to be the United Church of Canada's local home for unwed mothers. Reverend George Morrison, our chief administrative officer at that time, had become a friend of Jean Vanier and thought that the Burnaby house – no longer being used for its original purpose, might be ideal for a L'Arche home. And thanks to some good local work by the Reverend Gordon How, working on behalf of the United Church, the vision became a reality.

In 2008, 44 years after L'Arche was founded, and 34 years after this community was founded, 260 folk representing L'Arche communities around the world, gathered in Calcutta, India, and among other things approved a statement of Mission and Identity for “L'Arche that we had been working on for several years.

Some of us will know this well. Some of us may never have heard it. All of us, I trust, can be nurtured by hearing it this morning:

**We are people with and without intellectual disabilities,  
sharing life in communities, and belonging to an international federation.**

**Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together.  
We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another.**

**Our mission is to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities revealed through mutually transforming relationships, to foster an environment in communities that is inspired by the core values of our founding story, and that responds to the changing needs of our members; and to engage in our diverse cultures. Working together to build a more human society.**

I like that statement a lot I like its clarity about who we are, and who we are rooted in. I like its emphasis upon our mission to make known the gifts of our core members. I like its recognition that we are working with others to heal God's world.

And I like the fact that it's not a statement we created out of our heads, but is, in fact a summary of what we have learned about ourselves over the years – a statement of what we have discerned about ourselves and our role in God's mission through our living and serving together.

It's true. Through who we are and how we have lived we have helped to build a more human society. That's something to celebrate. And I'd like to conclude my reflections by doing just that as I briefly lift up three examples.

First, in a society that increasingly values people by their status, their income, and their achievements, our community is a living reminder that real joy in life is seldom a result of status, income and achievements – at least worldly achievements - and more a result of the quality of our relationships with others and with God.

And this is the point where I must thank my friends at Nazirah House – especially my oldest friends – Gwenda, Sue, Patrick and Ken – for all that you have taught me in this regard. You have taught me what it really means to accept others, to love others, to be patient with others, and to be patient with oneself. You have taught me how to live with limits, and to find joy in them. You have truly been my teachers in the way of the heart, and I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am.

Secondly, in a world that is tearing itself apart because of differences – differences of race, of standard of living, of skin colour, of religion – our community is a vibrant example of how people with great differences can live together. In this, as in every L'Arche community, we see day in and day out people reaching out to each other in spite of profound differences – difference in language and race, of ability and disability, of religious tradition and cultural background, of belief and non-belief – people with enormous differences living and working together and creating something new and precious in the midst of all the difference.

And finally, in a world where we can't help but wonder about how ready the young people of our world might be for the difficult new world realities we who are older are leaving them, our community has for 40 years been welcoming young people from all over the world as assistants for periods of anywhere from six months to 2 years and beyond and has watched them slowly but surely become deeper, wiser, more patient, and more compassionate people. Then we have

blessed them, said goodbye, and sent them out to live the rest of their lives in ways that can't help but make this a better world.

That's hundreds of young people touched by L'Arche Greater Vancouver, and in their turn touching the world... hundreds of young people helping in their way to restore streets to live in and inviting others to share in God's banquet of abundant life.

So rejoice and be glad, friends. Rejoice and be glad for all that God has done in us, among and through us over these forty years. Rejoice, be glad, and give thanks that the Ark which God built through Judy Leckie and her friends remains very much an ark for our time.

Thanks be to God. Amen.