

FAITH AND HOPE IN NEWFOUNDLAND

(What I did on my Summer Vacation)

A Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, August 11, 2019

St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

The Very Rev. Ken Gray

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN IN NEWFOUNDLAND discover many things about Newfoundlanders:

- They are resilient, colourful, musical, humorous, historical, proud, extroverted and great storytellers
- Geography, weather, location and a certain amount of isolation have imbued a fierce pride and social determination in those who call "The Rock" home
- Annie Proulx says this about Newfoundland in the novel *The Shipping News*

It takes some time to get used to the rock

It's a place like no other

The people that came here, came by accident

Those that stayed. strange things can happen

Omens, restless spirits, magic

- Kathie and I met a wide variety of characters, living and dead (one visits the cemeteries you see) where we discovered the life of the Rev. Dr. John Clinch who I will introduce to you now.

CLINCH, JOHN, doctor, Church of England clergyman, office holder, and judge; b. 9 Jan. 1748/49 in Cirencester, England; m. 17 June 1784 Hannah Hart of English Harbour; they had seven sons and one daughter; d. 22 Nov. 1819 in Trinity, Nfld.

The harbour at Trinity was first used by fishing ships around the 16th century. Fishermen from the West Country of England began using Trinity as a summer station in the migratory fishery in the 1570s. Trinity was later settled by merchants from Poole, England during the 18th century, citing reasons such as the easily defensible harbor and abundance of shore space for fishing premises.

The medical and missionary pioneer John Clinch is noted for introducing the Jenner Smallpox vaccine to British North America (1800) and is accredited with the creation of a valuable glossary of Beothuk terms. (The Beothuk are the aboriginal people of the island of Newfoundland.

In the absence of a clergyman he organized public worship, read sermons, and performed marriages, baptisms, and burials . . . He was eventually ordained in England and appointed as missionary to Trinity Bay in 1787.

Clinch performed a multiplicity of functions. By 1799 he had become a salaried judge of the surrogate court of Newfoundland (as judge and priest he recorded the indiscretions of many cemetery residents in vivid detail). Most of his energy however went into caring for the sick. It is likely that he performed one of the first vaccinations in the New World, in 1798 on his wife's nephew Joseph Hart. His old friend Edward Jenner had told him about the new procedure and had even sent threads of vaccine. In January 1802 he reported to Jenner:

I began by inoculating my own children and went on with this salutary work till I had inoculated 700 persons of all ages and descriptions, many opportunities soon offered at St John's (where the smallpox was making great ravages) which offered convincing proofs of the safety of the practice to the inhabitants and servants in Trinity Bay.

In a fictional biographical account, Edmund Burry paints a picture of the scientist/preacher Clinch:

He set to work long into the night preparing a Sunday sermon that would - uncharacteristically for a Church of England minister - preach the virtues of science over and above prayer, in order to overcome one of the most feared of diseases. He would preach how the will of God sometimes needs assistance from man (sic) to perform the Almighty's greatest feats.

Reaching beneath his clerical robes he brought out the worn and tattered prayer book (Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*) he had received from his parents when he left home at thirteen. He thumbed through it slowly, stopping at the section titled, *Meditation and Prayers for Sick Persons*. Finding the prayer he needed, he raised his head to look at the faces of the congregation and spoke:

“This prayer book was a gift from my parents when I left home at thirteen to train as a surgeon. I have carried it with me all these years as it reminds me of my family and my twin sister. For many of you the sight of this prayer book in my hands was an omen of bad news as you watched me select a prayer from its pages to read at the bedside of your sick and dying parents, husbands, wives, and children.” He paused to ensure he had their attention.

“We are subjected daily to the ravages of many diseases: typhus, cholera, dysentery, and so many other internal disorders, the causes of which we cannot comprehend and perhaps never will. No person in this church today has escaped the pain and suffering of the most dreaded of these diseases, smallpox . . . However, my friends, we now have before us an

opportunity to remove the threat of smallpox from our children forever. Please bow your heads and pray with me as we remember our dearly departed, but with a renewed hope that I shall never again read this 'prayer for sick persons' at the bedside of one of our smallpox stricken loved-ones:

. . . (Hope, Clinch assures us) that we shall not perish, but only be changed, and in the midst of languishing and departing struggles can bear up under, nay, can triumph over agonies and death itself. Here then, I will fix my thoughts; I will come before the Almighty with a song and make my prayers under the God of my life.

STUART PAYNE

Over time a number of Newfoundland clerics have had noteworthy social ministries, no less so the retired Archbishop of Newfoundland, Stuart Payne. In a memoir: *Cut from the Cloth of Fogo: A Life of Teaching, Travel and Ministry*, Payne said he wrote the book so that younger generations may learn from his example that despite having a difficult childhood - he grew up poor in a large family and lost his father at a young age - they can draw inspiration to follow their dreams and accomplish whatever it is that they feel called to do with their lives. "It is my number one reason for writing this book . . . that young people can **learn from the past and have hope in their future.**"

And to this single word: *Hope*, I offer the following single verse from the Letter to the Hebrews:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Herein lies the challenge, not only for clergy and lay leaders, but for every passionate, thoughtful, and courageous Christian. It is in the application

and combination of faith and hope that the Christian moves, responds and rests. We can refuse to respond to life's challenges and act as victim. Or we can gird our loins, and with Abraham, Mary, Cruikshank and Clinch and other biblical and saintly characters; we can rise to the challenge, **without assurance of any particular success or outcome, but in and through the knowledge that we do so, not as orphans, but in the company of a loving, compassionate and present God.**

If Kathie and I gained nothing else from our Newfoundland sojourn, we savoured the stories of resilience accompanied an absolute refusal to give up hope, or abandon faith, not always a *religious* faith, but a faith in a spirited people, fed by a marvellous community, which can dust off perils and find another way, to not only *survive*, but *thrive*.

I beg your indulgence for one final story. If I have introduced you to Stuart Payne and John Clinch, let me finally introduce you to Zita Cobb. Zita Cobb is the founder and Innkeeper of the Fogo Island Inn. Growing up on Fogo Island, a remote fishing community off the northeast coast of Newfoundland, Zita developed a deep belief in the inherent value of place and a profound respect for the human ways of knowing that emerge from respectful relationships with nature, culture, and community.

After the collapse of Fogo Island's cod fishery in the latter decades of the twentieth century (well described in a series of National Film Board documentaries from the late 1960s) Zita decided to study business in order to understand the global economic systems that had disadvantaged Fogo Island and numerous other small communities – bringing many to the brink of extinction. Zita's university education and business career drew her away from Fogo Island to the high-tech industry, where she prospered, but never forgot her roots. The fruit of her searching and

yearing is the Fogo Island Inn, an award-winning luxury property designed by Newfoundland-born architect Todd Saunders.

The Inn operates as a social business . . . and returns a large amount of profit and benefit to the Fogo Island community (65%). As an 8th generation Fogo Islander, Zita grew up immersed in the profound hospitality that Fogo Islanders and Newfoundlanders are known for. Like other Fogo Islanders, she understands that hospitality is rooted in the love of a stranger, and she has put this belief into practice as founding Innkeeper of the Fogo Island Inn.

In love of the stranger we find Jesus' own hospitality embodied and encouraged. In the experience of Newfoundlanders we met and enjoyed, we discovered a communal and hopeful spirit worthy of imitation. In the social, political and spiritual heroes of the rock we discovered ways in which Christian witness has transformed culture and history. And finally, I must say, that having experience enriching travel, it is indeed good to sleep in our own bed and to be back home.