

**Retirement/Farewell Service – Community CRC, Kitchener, ON  
May 31, 2020 – 10 AM**

A blessed Sunday to you all!

My name is Carel Geleynse and it has been my privilege to serve as a pastor at Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ontario, for the past 9 years and 5 months. Today marks the end of my ministry at Community CRC and signals the beginning of my retirement. Since 1981 I have had the joy of proclaiming the good news of Jesus to God's people. I would never have dreamed that that my final message would be taped from my home because of the on-going pandemic and our inability to gather in large groups. I would never have thought that I would not be together with all of you on my final Sunday as one of your pastors, but such is the reality and so I say farewell from a distance. There is something sad and very strange about all of this...

Just so you know, this message is accompanied by an order of worship, including a song play list (some of my favourites), that can be found on the Church at Home link on our website – [ccrc.on.ca](http://ccrc.on.ca).

Welcome to my home and thank you for joining us in worship this Pentecost Sunday as we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Amanda Bakale, preaching on Psalm 66, asked us to consider following the example of the psalmist by sharing a story of what God has done in our own lives. This morning as I close out my formal ministry at Community CRC, and as I begin my retirement, I want to share with you something of my journey and story, a journey and story that think about with deep gratitude and a journey and a story which reflects God's ongoing faithfulness.

**Our Scripture Reading this morning** is from the book of Acts, chapter 16. But before we go to the Scriptures please join me in **prayer**: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Remind us of who you are. Remind us of your presence and faithfulness. Remind us of the good news of Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. Speak to us through your Word and Spirit and encourage each of us on our life's journey as you lead us. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

### **Scripture Reading: Acts 16:1-10**

The Word of the Lord!  
Thanks be to God.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As I mentioned, in the opening remarks, this is the final time that I will be preaching as a pastor at Community CRC; actually this is my final scheduled worship service. I don't know what the Lord has in store for me in the remainder of my life, but this day marks an end of 38 plus years of ministry. So this is special for me and I am deeply grateful for the years the Lord has given me in ministry.

As one comes to any farewell service, the question is always "What in the world is one going to preach about?" The Bible is full of material and as John wrote at the end of his gospel, "the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written about all that Jesus did" so preachers really have an inexhaustible treasury from which to preach, but nonetheless the question always remains, how do you end? What message do I leave with the congregation?

As I was thinking about my final message, and as I thought about the fact that today is Pentecost and we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit – who fills, lives among and moves the church - I could not get the line "He leadeth me" out of my head. "He leadeth me, O blessed thought! O words with heavenly comfort fraught! What e'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me." Many of you

recognize those words from one of the favourite hymns of the church. (It is in the playlist for this service.) Well, those were the words that kept floating around in my head. Then when Pastor Amanda preached on Psalm 66 and the story that the psalmist had to tell about his life, I had my cues and clues as to what to end my ministry with.

Since many of you don't really know much of my story other than the part that intersected with you for the last 9 plus years, I thought I would use this occasion to tell you something about how I have experienced the Lord's leading in my life, and thereby take the opportunity to remind us that our God is a sovereign God, who directs our paths, often even without our understanding about what is going on. I chalk that up to the leading of the poured out Holy Spirit.

On numerous occasions, people have asked me and others who have come and gone, "how do pastors know where to serve or not?" "How did you know to come to Community CRC back in 2011?" How did you decide to serve the churches you did? Those are, indeed, interesting questions, ones to which I'm not sure I always have a satisfactory answer other than that I strongly believe that the Lord was leading my life. Of course, looking back it is always easier to see how the Lord has led. When you are in the trenches it is not always that easy to see the Lord's leading.

Before I say more about this, consider Proverbs 16:9, "*In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.*" A proverb is basically a truth statement, and this is certainly one that I have found to be true in my life. Yes, a person may be called to ministry, or anything else for that matter, and a person may choose to work in specific places, and someone may lay the best plans for the future, but ultimately it is the Lord who is sovereign and it is the Lord who establishes or determines our steps, whether we understand that or not. There is so much more to life than meets the eye, something that we do not often see or even want to see. But if we understand something of how God is at work in the world and in the universe and even in our lives, then when we come to the end of our lives, we can only give Him the glory!

Let me get at the “he leadeth me” theme by going to the Book of Acts and chapter 16. If we were to have an opportunity to interview the apostle Paul and ask him about his life and God’s leading in his life, I suspect that he would give us a broad perspective on his life, and he might even quote Proverbs 16:9, as a truism that certainly was so in his life.

Paul, first known as Saul was, originally, well known for his persecution of the early Church. Saul would have people of “The Way”, as the first Christians were known, arrested and put in prison. He created terror in the hearts and minds of many an early believer. But one day, on his way to Damascus, to persecute the church in that city, *he* came face to face with the Lord Jesus, the very one whom he was persecuting. Saul was knocked off his horse and blinded by heavenly light. He was challenged as to his persecution of Christians. Well, as it turned out Blind-Saul was taken to Damascus. After some time of retreat, he was visited by a prophet, who informed him that his name would now be Paul. He also informed Saul that the Lord, the very one whom he had persecuted, now had a task for him in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord Jesus, through the working of the Holy Spirit was equipping Paul to be his servant. Well, as is so often said, “The rest is history”.

After his encounter with Jesus Christ, Paul became one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. His zeal for the gospel and his desire to share his story was unstoppable. If you go to the book of Acts, you become aware of a man who seemed to have endless energy as he took on the task of preaching the gospel in place after place. He completed three missionary journeys that took him from Jerusalem to as far away as present-day Turkey and even beyond that to Greece. He went from city to city, usually first of all stopping in the local synagogue, preaching the good news of Jesus, who had appeared to him “as one untimely born.” Finally, Paul’s zeal led to his arrest and landed him in the city of Rome at the center of the Roman Empire in Italy, in Europe. Three missionary journeys and a fourth trip to Rome! The Lord had prepared the way for the spread of the Gospel! Through the

working of the poured-out Holy Spirit Jesus was to be known by all the nations!

But, as the passage we read from Acts 16 would have us know, Paul was not the one who would be preaching the Gospel wherever he wished. On the contrary, there were occasions when he was even forbidden to go somewhere. There were occasions when he was stopped dead in his tracks, so to speak, and he had to change his plans. *“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.”*

Fascinating! Paul must have spent time organizing where he was going to travel, and then he made it so that he would actually take the route he had organized. I doubt it that Paul just went travelling and left it open as to where he would go. Once churches were established in various places he would go from church to church “delivering the decisions reached by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, for the people to obey (Acts 16:4).” “The decisions” he went about delivering, had to do with the decisions made at the council of Jerusalem as described in Acts 15.

There had been a challenge to the early church concerning the teaching of salvation, “by grace through faith.” There had been those who had suggested at first and later on insisted on it, that any Gentiles or non-Jews who were new to the Christian faith, needed to undergo the physical rite of circumcision in order to be admitted as full members of the church. In other words, the message was, “if you want to be a Christian, you need to obey the Jewish laws, or you had to become a full Jew first.” This did not go over well with leaders like Paul. A synod meeting was held in Jerusalem for the express purpose of condemning such teaching. The synod did, indeed rightfully so, condemn the teaching and reiterated that one is saved by grace through faith and that one’s walk ought to reflect that grace. This was the message that Paul, Timothy and others were now bringing to the various churches in Asia Minor.

So as we open to chapter 16 we find Paul in Derbe and then Lystra where Timothy joined him. From those places Paul continued westward toward the Aegean Sea and the west coast of present-day Turkey. He did

this because he had been (16:6) *“kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.”* Did you notice that? The Holy Spirit kept him from preaching in the province of Asia or to the north of the cities we know Paul spent some time, like Antioch, Colossae, Ephesus, Smyrna, and the like. We don’t know how the Holy Spirit did this, we are not told, but Paul had to go to the coast. He had to continue on his chosen path. He was not allowed to divert to the north, in spite of the fact that we can probably suspect Paul very much wanted to go to Asia and also preach the gospel there. He wanted to do that everywhere he went, but it was not to be. The Lord directed his steps. A second time when they came to the border of Mysia and tried to enter Bithynia, way in the north of Asia Minor, we read, *“but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to (v. 7).”* They had plans, and God said “No!” Paul and his companions could only go west and not north.

We don’t really know how exactly all this worked. We don’t know how it was that the doors were closed to them. Perhaps a prophet came with a message from the Lord or perhaps the reference to the “spirit of Jesus” had to do with Paul seeing Jesus once again, like back in Damascus – we don’t know. Certainly, Paul was very much aware of the fact that they were being coaxed to go west and nowhere else. Once they reached the Aegean Sea and stayed in Troas, the reasons for the closed doors became apparent. For in Troas the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision. In the vision, Paul saw a man of Macedonia, the land on the other side of the Aegean Sea, calling to him. The man was begging Paul, *“Come over to Macedonia and help us (v. 9).”* That call, led to Paul understanding why the doors to Asia had been closed and so he concluded that the Lord had called him to preach the gospel in Macedonia.

Isn’t that interesting? God deliberately closed some doors to Paul and Timothy and directed them in other ways. Proverbs 16:1 says, *“To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue.”* Or Proverbs 16:9 *“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.”* Consider the statement of Proverbs 20:24 *“A person’s steps are directed by the LORD.”*

*How then can anyone understand their own way?” Jeremiah prayed, “LORD, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps. (Jer. 10:23).”*

Through all of these sorts of verses we are reminded that our God is a sovereign God. We may have the best laid plans, but ultimately where we go, when walking in His way, is where He would have us go. The Lord’s design is to always make sure that the Kingdom is served and His name and cause is advanced. Out of our confusion and out of our best laid-out plans, or not such well-laid out plans, he brings purpose and reason and correction. *“I want to go to parts of Asia and to Bithynia to preach the Gospel.” “No, you may not go there!” “Go west, you are needed in Macedonia!”*

“He leadeth me!” is a hymn that Paul probably could have sung along with “God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.” All because He is sovereign, the Lord of all – the King!

Coming to the end of my time as pastor at Community CRC and coming to the end of my formal ministry, caused me to reflect on my years of service - my coming and my going. What in the world ever made me go where I went? What brought me here? In the pastoral calling process there are always many human factors that play a role. You assess where you are at in terms of your ministry in a given place, your energy level, your vision for the place, your involvement, your future and so on. Other factors include such things as family, housing, education needs for children, fit with congregation, perhaps a need in a congregation and the attendant suitable gifts, who knows? There are so many human factors. At a certain point, based upon the information you have been given and based upon what you experience, you make a decision. In all the years of ministry that I have behind me, it was never clear to me upon accepting a call, why exactly I accepted the call I did. I remember that my mentor in my first congregation, the late Rev. Jacob Geuzebroek, always said that we ought not to spiritualize the calling process too much. He always said that the Lord called us to serve in His orchard or vineyard, but we choose which tree or vine we are going to work on. And there is something to that not only in regards to ministry

but all walks of life, but at the same time the reality is also there that “He leadeth me.”

And, indeed, that is my testimony. Already from a young age I knew I was called to ministry, a call that has been affirmed since.

I will be forever grateful that I began my ministry in Port Perry, Ontario in 1981. It was a place where I could settle into a ministry rhythm with some wonderful caring mentors. But, because of our housing situation, knew right from the beginning of our time in Port Perry that we would have to move in June of 1985 from the house given us. So then it was either move to another place in Port Perry or elsewhere. Of course, the Lord knew that too...

In February of 1985, lo and behold, I was called to serve the Charlottetown CRC on beautiful Prince Edward Island. Somehow I remember, when flying back from my mid-winter visit, that there was not much doubt in my mind as to what to do. So, in 1985 my wife and I, together with a one-year old son moved to the Island. I was not quite a rookie, but I might as well have been one. At that time, together with folks all along the spectrum of theological thought, the congregation was united in purpose and ministry. It was a special time for us and an opportunity to become firmly rooted in ministry. But then after 8 wonderful years on the Island my wife and I, along with our, now four, children, literally floated away from PEI (there was no bridge as yet)...I still see the Island disappearing into the distance... We made our way to Calvary CRC in Flamborough, Ontario, a congregation traumatized by a split.

In Flamborough we went “on our way rejoicing” (the theme of the inaugural sermon based on the devotional book written by Rev. Louis Tamminga). We, indeed, went on our way rejoicing seeking to rebuild a reason for being and seeking to build a joyful spirit. Through it all we were constantly reminded of God’s amazing grace as we learned what it meant to be the church.

Towards the end of the 9 years, as can happen in ministry amidst constant giving of oneself, I was almost burned out. At that time, I knew I really could not continue the way I was. Something had to be done, and actually something radical had to take place if I really wanted to continue in ministry. The solution to the problem, at least in my mind was a year off, or a sabbatical. As radical as that was, I remember we explored the possibilities and the Lord led and provided.

In July of 2002 we left Canada, filled with expectation about what the Lord had in store for us as a family. We left Canada for the country of Haiti and were involved as partner missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions, as it was known then, teaching at Quisqueya Christian School in Port-au-Prince. What a year that was! It was a time of learning to be dependent on the Lord for all things. It was a cross-cultural experience; it was a life-changing experience! We still have fond memories of that time in our life!

After a year in Haiti, we came back to Ontario, but now without any sort of work but anticipating a returning to ministry. It was then that we truly learned that while we plan our ways, yet the Lord is sovereign and he directs our steps. It was in the summer of 2003 that I courted various churches throughout southern Ontario. We had it all figured out that our children could go to the same schools as their cousins and we had it all figured out where we could live to have great access to parents and so forth. But congregation after congregation decided to go in a different direction and so there was no call forthcoming from any church in Ontario. It was like the Lord was saying “no” to our best laid plans. What were we to do?

Then a phone call came from a city called Chilliwack, in the Fraser Valley of BC. Please come and have a look! We would like you to visit! Chilliwack? So far west! Chilliwack, who ever heard of Chilliwack? We relented and went – and the rest is history. Why Chilliwack, became apparent one week after our arrival. The church, which had only been pastorally vacant for 10 weeks, was faced with a huge safe church issue which they became aware of only one week after our landing in the city. Those were the issues that I was called upon to lead them through.

Where it would all lead, we had no idea. But seven years after arriving, that work seemed to have come to some sort of a climax and conclusion, and then Community CRC of Kitchener came on the scene. My farewell message in Chilliwack was a reflection on why God had led me there. The farewell message was taken from the book of Esther “for such a time as this...”

For such a time as this I was called upon to serve Cornerstone CRC of Chilliwack, and then it was over and a new chapter opened in Kitchener in January of 2011 where took up my present position and had an opportunity to serve in a unique pastoral team setting for which I am deeply grateful, and I had the opportunity to serve in a congregation that looked at ministry from a Communities perspective.

As I look back over my ministry life and over all the places we have lived and served, I am keenly aware of the closed doors and at the same time keenly aware of the opened doors. I may have had all sorts of plans as to where to live and what to do along the way, but ultimately it was the Lord who led my steps. But I often only saw that once I had the opportunity to look back.

Fascinating way to look at life, isn't it? *“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.” “A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way?”* How often don't we think we have everything in hand? We have made all sorts of decisions about the future, but really we have no understanding what we are doing. We cannot see the future, so we have no idea what lies ahead of us. What we are experiencing right now in this pandemic is a case in point. When we started 2020, we had no idea we would be living as we do now. We have no idea what lies ahead of us. But God does. God has a handle on the past, the present and the future. He has more than just a handle – he directs it! Of course he does, and that ought not to surprise us, after all, he is sovereign!

And the exciting thing is that our sovereign God is not a self-seeking God. On the contrary, after we messed up and after we decided on our own direction, the Lord decided otherwise. He promised to send his Son, Jesus, and send Him He did! Jesus came, became like us in

every way and walked the path of obedience all the way to the cross. Oh there came that day in the garden – “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” ...but it was not possible, the answer was “no”, and Jesus knew it. So in obedience he said, “not my will but your will be done.” And Jesus died; rose again; ascended into heaven taking his rightful place on the throne and then he sent the Holy Spirit. Because of his obedience, Jesus repaired that which had been broken, and we are reconciled sinners. Now all of history is heading for the day when Jesus will come again and take us to himself, when all things will be made new! What a day that will be!

Meanwhile, pay attention to how He directs our paths and our steps! It is exciting to note that He does, and a good thing too that He directs our steps, because our way is not always the best or in line with the Kingdom! “He leadeth me, oh blessed thought! O words with filled with heavenly comfort!” Amen!

### **Prayer:**

Father in heaven, Lord of lords and King of kings, we bow before you in all humility, understanding that while we may have the greatest plans and ideas, it is you who directs our steps. Father we are grateful for your grace in our lives and also for your discipline. We may not always like it, but it is for our own good. Lord help us not to get lost in the weeds of life but to see the larger picture, always the larger picture, in which we recognize that you are the sovereign on the throne and we are your servants empowered and encouraged through the poured out Holy Spirit. Thank you for the years you have allowed us to be together in the pastor/congregation relationship. To you be the glory! Continue to encourage us as a congregation as we move forward with continuing and new pastoral leadership. Grant us your vision and direction as we move forward. May those who serve in ministry at CCRC continue to point us your people to you, oh Lord. May they encourage us to look beyond ourselves to see the broader picture of life in which Jesus is Lord. Come Lord Jesus! Amen.

### **Benediction**

Now as I close out this message on this Pentecost Sunday in the year 2020, and as I close out my ministry at Community CRC, allow me one more time to say: Lift up your hearts, the receive the blessing of the Lord and go in peace:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Amen.