

These Windows Can Speak
Part 7: The Lamp
In Memory of Ed and Kitty Foxton
Text: Psalm 119:105
Preached by Bruce D. Ervin
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He stood near the door faithfully every Sunday: welcoming the people to church, offering them a bulletin, showing them to a seat. That's what Ed Foxton did. He offered hospitality. It was his ministry.

He was a quiet man. Intelligent, loyal, dedicated; a man with a sense of duty. It was that sense of duty which led Ed into the military during World War II. He went overseas, being stationed in England, and there he met the woman who was to become his beloved Kitty. She too knew something about loyalty, dedication and a sense of duty. Having married Ed, she followed him back to Canada. Not an easy thing to do when it means leaving behind family and friends and the land of one's birth. It helped that she was madly in love with the guy!

Imagine what it must've been like for Kitty and the other war brides who came to Canada in the years immediately following the war: going to a land that they'd never seen, becoming part of a family whom they'd never met, sometimes living in places and pursuing a life style which was totally foreign to them: for example, middle class London lasses suddenly finding themselves on hard scrabble farms in Saskatchewan. One can imagine them all standing at the rail of the ship as they catch their first sight of Canada: the long profile of Nova Scotia stretched out before them. Then, as they come closer to shore, the gritty waterfront of Halifax and behind it the heights of Citadel Hill. Closer still, and now they're canning the crowd for a familiar face as the ship pulls into Pier 21. Simultaneously scared to death by this new adventure and shaking with excitement at the thought of being in the arms of their soldier boys.

That's the way that we're called to live: heading out on a new adventure and not having a clue what lies ahead; leaving behind the familiar for the unknown, scared to death yet shaking with excitement.

We need a light to show us the way. Jesus the Christ is that light. "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path," the Psalmist says (Psalm 119:105). God's Word shows us the way. And the Word personified is Jesus. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). That's the way that John's gospel begins. That's the way that John starts to tell the story of Jesus: the Word of God made flesh; the Word personified and dwelling in our midst.

We need a lamp to guide us into the unknown, and that lamp is Jesus. He shows us the way. Again and again he says to his disciples, "Follow me." We might not have a clue where we're headed. We might not know how we're going to get there. But Jesus knows these things, and that's good enough. He has a

way of calling us into the unknown and showing us just enough of the way to get us started. It's kind of like hiking on a trail that's taking you through a place where the woods are dense and dark indeed. The only thing that you have to guide you are the trail blazes on the trees. You keep moving from one blaze to the next. Maybe you can only see one blaze at a time. Maybe you don't know where the trail is headed beyond that blaze. But that's okay. Once you reach that blaze you'll be able to see the next one. You only have to see as far as the next trail blaze at any given time. You have to trust that when you reach that one you'll see the next one. And when you reach the next one you'll see the one after that.

That's the way in which Jesus guides us: showing us only what we need to know to get started on the adventure. Then showing us only what we need to know to tackle the next leg of the journey. And we get frustrated with that process. Sometimes we want to see the entire map laid out before us. We want to know what to expect every step of the way. We want to say, "Hey Jesus, can't you be more specific, for Christ's sake?!" But maybe one reason why we're not shown the whole map is that if we *did* know everything that we'd encounter along the way we'd never have the guts to get started!

Jesus is like a lamp unto our feet. He shows us enough so that we can take the next steps, but no more than that. No wonder that the most prominent symbol in the Foxton window is a lamp. When you leave behind nearly everything that is familiar, as Kitty did, and you begin an adventure into the unknown, you need to rely on Jesus to show you the way. "Your word is a lamp for my feet...O God."

If we're going to live life like an adventure, we need a light to show us the way, and the courage to try new things. And remember that courage is *not* being fearless. No, courage is being scared to death of something, but doing it anyway. Imagine the courage of a grape vine: sprouting forth as a young shoot when the only existence that it has ever known is being a tiny seed. That takes courage. Emerging from the comfortable darkness of the ground and breaking into the new experience of sunlight. That takes courage. Branching out in new directions and producing fruit when it could still be killed by a late frost. That takes courage.

Jesus had that kind of courage. He wasn't afraid to try new things. Or, if he *was* afraid, he did it anyway. New things like healing someone on the Sabbath; healing someone on the Jewish day of worship and rest. Now devoting a day to worship and rest is a good thing. Setting aside one day a week when no work is done and life can be enjoyed with a kind of carefree laziness is a blessing. You ought to try it some day. I ought to try it some day! If you're a Muslim, that day is Friday. For a Jew, it's a Saturday. We Christians are called to observe that day of rest on Sunday. The great monotheistic traditions of the world – those that worship one God and *only* one God – know the wisdom of setting aside one day a week so that the one God can be your sole focus that day; setting aside all of the usual busy-ness of life so that God can be worshipped and enjoyed. That's a good thing. But by the time of Jesus, that good tradition had become so old and rigid that it had lost much of the joy and

freedom with which it had come into being. Rest is all well and good, but if a crisis comes along you deal with it! The woman whom Jesus healed on that blessed day of sabbath rest: maybe she was so bent over that she couldn't keep her balance. Maybe Jesus saw that if someone didn't do something fast, she'd keel over and bash her head on a stone. So maybe the first thing that he did was to simply reach out his hand and steady her. But when you have the gift of healing, touching someone does more than simply steady them; it heals them. There was *power* in those steady hands! Jesus touched the woman and she stood up straight and started praising God! Not a big deal for Jesus. But a huge deal for the woman! And a huge deal for those *watching* Jesus and the woman. Jesus the healer was practicing his vocation on the Sabbath! He was working! Kind of like when I have to go to a meeting on a Monday, which is *my* day of rest. Generally speaking, that's not a good thing. But when a crisis hits, you do what you gotta do.

This was but one example of Jesus' tendency to strike out in bold new directions. Jesus left behind the familiar world of Jewish tradition for the unknown territory of religious innovation. That takes courage. No less than striking out across the ocean for a new land, that takes courage. But if you're going to live life to its fullest – if you're going to live the abundant life that Jesus offers us – then you're going to live with that kind of courage and boldness. In order to do so, you need something or someone to ground you; you need something or someone to steady you. Frequent shots of rum might work in the short term, but for the long haul, you need to be rooted and grounded in something or someone like Jesus. No wonder he said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches" (John 15:5). No wonder we have a vine and its fruit-bearing branches in this window which honours Ed the citizen-soldier and Kitty the courageous war-bride. But Kitty points out in her description of the window that the vine and branches have to do with even more than a courageous individual or a courageous couple. The vine with its branches is a symbol of the Church! The Church of Jesus Christ. The Church which is the body of Christ! As Jesus left the familiar behind and struck out in bold, new directions, the Church is called to do likewise. And the Church which is rooted and grounded in Christ is able to do so. Like a branch in a vine, it has the strength and the resources to do so. "I am the vine, you are the branches," Jesus said. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit."

If the Church is going to live life like the adventure that it was meant to be, we need a light to show us the way, the courage to try new things, and caring souls who offer hospitality. You're more likely to venture into the unknown if you have some hope of a warm welcome at the end of the trail. You're more likely to keep going in the face of difficult odds if you think there's someone waiting for you on the other side. When I was hiking the Appalachian Trail two years ago, one of my toughest times was the day when I tackled a stretch of the trail called "the roller coaster." It's called that because you go up and down 7 mountains in the course of maybe 6 miles. Up one side, and down the other, with a stream at the bottom that you have to ford before you can start up the next one. There's a sign at the start of this section which says, "Welcome to the roller coaster. We'll

see you on the other side at the Blackburne Trail Center, *if you survive.*” Real encouraging! Well, after the first 3 or 4 hills I was about done in. But I met this couple coming the other way who told me that as I came down the last hill toward the Blackburne Trail Center, the caretaker would meet me with a can of pop in his hand. And his wife would soon have a nice big dinner ready. I said, “What? No beer?” Actually, I was thrilled to know that there would be someone waiting for me. The promise of hospitality kept me going for the rest of that difficult day.

Life can be lived to its fullness when there are caring souls who offer hospitality. That’s one of the reasons why it’s so important to welcome folks at the church door on Sunday morning. Long time members and newcomers alike, it’s important to welcome them. For many folks, coming to church is a brand new experience. Especially if you’re coming to church for the first time shortly after arriving in a new country, it’s a new experience. It helps if you know they’ll be a warm welcome. That’s why Ed Foxton’s ministry of hospitality was so important in this place. During those years in the 1950’s, ‘60’s and ‘70’s when Knox was growing by leaps and bounds, Ed was at the door. If you were a first time visitor, he greeted you as if you were an old friend. If you were a long-time member, he knew exactly which pew you sat in each Sunday and he showed you the way to your familiar place. Traditionally, the bells in the church steeple called folks to worship. That’s why there are bells in this window: when you answered the call and arrived at the church door, Ed was there to greet you. So just remember, the next time that Lynella Reid-James asks you to be a greeter on Sunday morning, that when you say, “Yes,” to her, you are honouring the memory of Ed Foxton.

Jesus the Christ is the light who shows us the way, the vine who roots and grounds us and gives us courage for the journey, and the one who – through others – offers us hospitality. But you know, when you’ve reached the end of the journey, when you’ve run the race, it’s nice to receive a gift from the one who is welcoming you. I once arrived at a fancy restaurant without a tie and jacket on. So at the door they offered me a nice jacket to wear. I had to give it back when I left, but it was still nice to be welcomed with a gift. It makes me think that when the day of resurrection comes, and we arrive at heaven’s gate, someone will be there both to welcome us and to offer us a gift.

After Ed died, Kitty missed him terribly. This kind man, this avid gardener, who greeted people with gifts of vegetables and fruit and flowers from his garden, who loved his wife and family dearly; she missed him terribly. So on that day of resurrection, which we anticipate but which those who have gone before us already celebrate, on that day of resurrection, I think Ed was waiting for Kitty with a smile on his face, and his arms opened wide, and a beautiful red rose in his hand. A rose for his beloved, joined together once again for all time. Perhaps something like that is the welcome which awaits us all when we, like Ed and Kitty, reach the end of our journeys, and are greeted with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for you” (see Matthew 25:31-46). Amen.