

The Road to Redemption: Ed Evans Finds Peace and Belonging at St David

Written by Ainsley Munro

When you visit St David on a Sunday, you will likely be greeted and offered a hug from Ed Evans. His gentle spirit and genuine concern for everyone's wellbeing is a welcome respite for many visitors coming to church or the free Sunday community breakfast for the first time.

Ed's path to Christianity was a rocky one. He grew up in an alcoholic home where beatings were frequent and personal tragedy was part of the narrative. Ed left home involuntarily at age 14 and worked in construction as a young adult, using hard drugs to cope with trauma and selling them to coworkers to make ends meet.

In 1983, a crewman named Greg joined Ed's construction team who was Christian. Ed felt extremely threatened by his faith and did everything he could to show Greg that he was not welcome on the team. Instead of quitting as Ed hoped he would, Greg took everything in stride, which only made Ed angrier and more determined to force him out.

One day, Greg assembled everyone at lunch hour to say that his faith was solid and that no matter what the crew did to show him he was unwelcome, he would continue to care for them and be Christ in the world. Ed felt familiar rage rise in him, and he shouted "What has your God ever done for me?" as he rushed to assault him. But when he reached Greg, Ed was physically stopped by what Ed could only describe as an angel protecting him. Ed dropped his weapon, immediately fell to his knees, and accepted Christ on the spot.

"I truly believe that God needed to clean my wine bottle before he could put new wine in," Ed says when speaking of the experience. It's clear during our chat that this continues to be an emotionally charged event for Ed nearly 40 years later.

Greg brought Ed to his church and got him involved with youth groups, where he was able to meet other people his own age and start to open up about his past life experiences. He got more involved with church and caught the attention of the pastor and her family. They took Ed into their home, got him sober, and led him in Bible study and daily devotions in a warm, stable home environment he had never experienced. "God feels our needs so strongly," Ed says, "and I think he knew I needed a family. He gives us the power to speak to the storms in our lives and say 'Be at peace.'"

Ed's foster father brought him along on trips to lead worship on reserves and Ed got more involved in welcoming ministries in the church, which eventually led him to formal education. He completed a bachelor's degree in theological Bible study after getting by for a long time with no more than a Grade 6 education and was eventually ordained in the Pentecostal church.

When he moved to Orillia with his family in 2009, Ed visited several churches to see where God was calling him. When he entered St David for the first time, he was warmly welcomed in and taken under the wings of Rev. Martha Tatarnic and several parishioners.

"I knew as soon as I walked in that this was the place," he reflects. "I felt deep love, honesty, truth – and folks weren't acting this way because it was Sunday and they were at church, they were doing it because that's where their hearts are all the time. They don't look at what title or past experience you have - they just share the purest love of God with you."

Inspired by the spirit of service he found at St David, Ed got involved with programs including the Harmony Centre counseling service, community garden, and Sunday morning community breakfast. Sunday fellowship with church members and visitors makes a huge difference for Ed and his family, and he knows that the church's many programs are vital to the people of Orillia.

"We draw in a lot of people off the streets who are living hard lives," he says. "A lot of churches in Orillia don't offer nearly the scope and scale of the programs we have. They're important not only for building the wider church, but also just to reach out to folks who need that sense of community with us and one another, to feel seen and heard."

When speaking about the challenges facing the church at large and St David in particular, Ed is optimistic.

"Jesus is in the back of our boat – even if he's asleep, if he's in that boat we've got nothing to worry about. He can be asleep in my boat anytime he wants rather than not in my boat at all."

To find out more about St David Anglican Lutheran Church and the programs we provide, visit us on Facebook or our website: www.stdavidsorillia.org