

May 7, 2020

Trinity Musings #13: Rev Brian Goodings (self-isolating in my office at Trinity United Church: Collingwood)

(Warning: like the books of Esther and Song of Solomon...no direction mention of God is made herein. This is certainly not the case in my tent in the midst of a howling storm!)

I have a friend who calls me a techno-wienie. He calls me other things too but I'm not going to share them here. He just can't see why I spend so much money on camping gear. I have a few tents that retail for many hundreds of dollars. He says, "You could get the same tent at Walmart or online from Amazon for a fraction of what you paid at that overpriced high-end outfitters."

Well, no, actually you can't. Although they may look the same. The knockoff manufacturers really know what they are doing. I've seen tents almost identical in looks to mine (same colours and same shape) but they are...well...crap. Zippers, poles and material are made of the cheapest materials available. Stitching is brutal and the flooring is usually just garbage. Even the pegs are junk and bend or break. But the tent looks good, at first, and think of all the money saved!

I have to admit that on most days, the cheap tent is pretty much as effective as mine. In a campground, it keeps the bugs out and most of the rain, at least during a drizzle. When, after a season or two, the zippers jam; seams unravel; poles break; or the bug mesh rips, you can just throw the whole thing out and get another one. Or maybe even buy two if they are on sale. As long as you stay camped close to your car, the cheap tent is probably fine.

Difference is you can't really venture far from the car or house. If you're camped out on a rocky point on Georgian Bay or on Lake Superior and a thunder storm hits, the cheap tent is almost certainly going to disintegrate and you will be in real trouble. (Andrea, my wife can tell you a harrowing story about the shredding of cheap tents on the Bustard Islands during a tornado.)

I remember one of the Canadian astronauts (Chris Hadfield maybe) saying the thought running through his head when he was looking at the space-rocket the day before launch was... "That rocket is going to take me to the stars!" His family, standing beside him, looking at the same spacecraft were thinking, "Everything on this was the lowest bid."

When the proverbial hits the fan, that's when you need the best gear. The old saying, "Hope for the best, prepare for the worst" is a very wise guiding principle. Engineers design storm water systems with capacities to handle floods that might happen every hundred years.

We have been going along for a long time cutting expenses and diminishing systems and networks because we have been willingly led to believe we can get away with paying less. It all about lower taxes buddy!

When the Covid-19 hurricane hit, suddenly our bargain-basement-deal thinking proved why it's so inadequate and renders us ill-prepared (pun intended) for anything but sunny days.

Who knew we no longer could produce Medical Personal Protection Equipment or even many respirators in Canada? It's been cheaper to get them from other places for years...think of the money we are saving. What could possibly go wrong?

Who really knew (or cared much) that our nursing homes were so overcrowded. Why not make someone with dementia share a room with three others? What do they know and who are they going to tell anyway? It's cheaper.

Who knew (or cared much) that the staff in our nursing homes were working for just over minimum wage in more than one home? If they had full time, or more hours, they would have paid benefits. Why not just keep them under the minimum threshold for benefits to keep the costs down? Many of them are first generation immigrants anyway. They should just be happy to have work- shouldn't they?

And so on and so on...

I know that sometimes “good enough” really is good enough and paying more money is often about luxury, not necessarily function. My Suzuki motorcycle and ten year old Toyota Rav get me to the same places as my friends with BMWs and Audis...although they do arrive with more style.

It seems to me that Justin and Doug, on our behalf and with our cheque book and blessings, are out looking for “better tents” right now. The deal we thought we had, turned out not to be such a great deal.

We are shoring up defences that had been eroded by spending cuts and we are building capacities we didn't think we really needed.

This Covid-storm is going to blow for a while and we now know we need the best protection we can afford. When the next pandemic comes, and it most certainly will sooner or later, we, or our children might be better prepared.

Techno-wienies rule...at least right now.

