

January , 2023 - Epiphany 3

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, your loving kindness always goes before us and follows after us. Summon us into your light, and direct our steps in the way of goodness that comes through the cross of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Gospel Reading - Matthew 4:12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

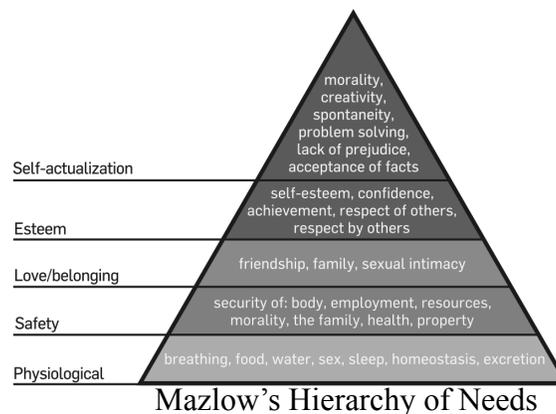
As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Sermon

Abraham Mazlow was a psychologist and philosopher, who articulated a theory which states that humans action is motivated by the desire to meet certain needs that we have. What Mazlow did with these needs, which hadn't been done before, was put them into a hierarchy, a specific order in which these needs must be met. He went so far to say that it is only when the more fundamental needs are met that people can begin working on the next level of needs.

In order to help people understand his theory, the following diagram has been created.



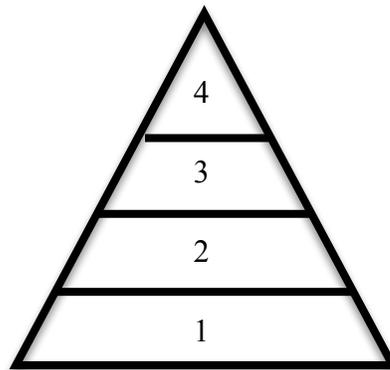
We can see that the bottom level is the one without which there is no life. Without air, for instance, life will only last about 30 seconds!

Once we have air and water and food, we can work on the next level and strive for employment and a home and belonging to a family, etc. And once that is achieved, we can move up again, and so on, up to the pinnacle, which Maslow called “self actualization.”

It is important to acknowledge that we move up and down this pyramid as we move through life. We don't stay in one place, or on one level. We might be doing really well, and suddenly there is a death in the family, and we find ourselves in the second level again, worrying about safety and “belonging” issues, and we can't work on the “upper levels” until those more fundamental questions are dealt with.

I think this is a helpful tool for us to consider as we move into Annual Meeting Season. We, as individuals, a congregation, and as a parish, need to acknowledge what our priorities are. We need to discern what level we are currently on, in our own “hierarchy of needs.” Then we will be in a better position to evaluate where we are called to go, where we are called to grow.

So, I would like to suggest that we invent our own pyramid, which will look like this.



As with Maslow's pyramid, the most fundamental level is number 1. What we are saying about anything we put into the number 1 category is that we cannot be the church without this particular thing.

I have included a list of things that we make use of, or have, in our community of faith. Read through the list, and consider how important each thing is for our life together.

Apply it to your experience of church - What's really needed? If it's central to who we are, give it a 1. If it's nice to have but not required, give it a higher number.

Where would you put:

- The Bible
- Hymnals
- A pulpit
- An altar
- Stained glass windows
- Singing
- A pastor
- An organ / piano
- A constitution and by-laws
- People to sit on committees
- Baptism
- A baptismal font
- An accessibility ramp
- A washroom
- An accessible washroom
- A parking lot

- A building
- History
- Faith
- Communion
- Friends and/or family
- A sermon
- Prayers
- Jesus

Here is the list again, with what the people in church said about these things on Sunday morning.

- The Bible - *1s, pretty much from everyone*
- Hymnals - *Generally 2 and 3*
- A pulpit - *3 or 4 (especially since the current pastor doesn't use it!)*
- An altar - *1s and 4s; for some it is central, for some, a card table would do*
- Stained glass windows - *Mostly 4s, but a couple of 1s and 2s*
- Singing - *1s from everyone (which is why our early Covid experience was so difficult)*
- A pastor - *A couple of 1s, but mostly 2s (leadership is crucial, but the question is, does a leader have to be ordained?)*
- An organ / piano - *3 and 4; nice to have, but not required to be God's people*
- A constitution and by-laws - *1s and 2s; we need to have some kind of structure to guide our life together*
- People to sit on committees - *1 to 3; we need people to lead, but a specific committee structure might not be necessary*
- Baptism - *1s from everyone*
- A baptismal font - *1s and 4s, we need a way to baptize people, but some realize that any bowl of water, or even a river or lake, would do*
- An accessibility ramp - *1s and 2s; not only do we have people who need ramps, having one also says a lot to the wider community about who we are as a congregation*
- A washroom - *2s and 3s; not too long ago, many church buildings in Lunenburg County did not have washrooms, and while it might have been inconvenient, it wasn't required to be church*
- An accessible washroom - *1s and 2s; again, this says a lot about who we are*
- A parking lot - *4s from everyone (especially from Zion, who doesn't even have one!)*
- A building - *1s, 2s, 3s and 4s (we need a place to gather, but does it have to be the current building? More discussion required!)*
- History - *This was hard, because our history is part of who we are, but new congregations are formed all the time, and they don't have a history... yet!*
- Faith - *1s from everyone*
- Communion - *1s from everyone*
- Friends and/or family - *1s from everyone*
- A sermon - *2s, 3s and 4s (we need instruction and inspiration, but those don't only come from someone preaching)*
- Prayers - *1s from everyone*
- Jesus - *1s from everyone*

This was an interesting exercise. I think some of the responses surprised some people. Are you one of them?

As we move through our Annual Meeting Season, we are invited to remember this experience. We are invited to recall that other people have different rankings, and we are called to be a community together in spite of those differences.

Most especially, we are called to remember that when Jesus called his disciples in the gospel reading for today, he did not say, "Follow me, and I will show you how to use a hymnal correctly." He did not say, "Follow me, and I will show you which building design is most pleasing to God."

He said, "Follow me, and I will show you people who need your accompaniment."

May we be like those disciples, and follow Jesus. Even if we need to leave some of our number Ones behind. Amen.

Prayers of the People

A - Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for creation, the church, and all in need.

[*Short pause*]

A - God who continues to come, all we have is a gift of your generosity. May we express our gratitude in all we do, in all we are. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

A - God who continues to come, you meet our needs every minute of every day. Increase our awareness of your care, that we may not take anything for granted. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

A - God who continues to come, our lives fluctuate between being satisfied and being needy, from being overly full to being almost empty. Help us accept that to be alive means to be in process, and that change will be a constant companion. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

A - God who continues to come, enliven your church, that as individuals and as a community, we may discern what is truly important, and build our life together around your promise. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

A - God who continues to come, open those who are sick, who are cut off and who are hurting to your healing presence, especially those we name before you.

[*Long pause*]

And open **us** to being the vehicles by which your healing **becomes** present. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

A - God who continues to come, our needs **are** met. We **can** trust your promise. Inspire us to follow your call. God who shines,

C - Illuminate our lives.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.