



LESSONS for LIFE

FEBRUARY 8, 2009 11:00 a.m.
SHARING OF STORIES: Featured Guest:
JACKIE RICHARDSON

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: 1 CORINTHIANS 9: 16 - 18

Gospel: MARK 1: 35 - 39

Rev. Brent Hawkes, C.M:

I think I'm being absolutely accurate when I say that on a pretty regular basis we have great worship here at MCC Toronto. We take the best from a variety of traditions and combine those traditions together and we celebrate great liturgy, we celebrate music together here at our church. When we were preparing for Black History Month Diane (Leah) and I had some conversations about how we might take one service and do something very different during that month, and together we came up with some ideas and this service came out of that collaboration and we're very excited to present to you something new and something different today. Not only have we changed format but we said if we're going to do this we've got to have the best; we have to have the best! And so Diane went and got the best this morning: Jackie Richardson is Canada's premier gospel and jazz singer; she is a Canadian icon; she is a gift – she is amazing. Diane says it was a wonderful experience working with her in preparing for today and in the many things they've done together over the years. And so we're going to worship now in word as Jackie shares some of her story with us, and in song as she shares with us the amazing gift she's been given. Could you welcome Jackie Richardson please. (applause).

Jackie Richardson: in song – with great accompaniment of piano, bass, piano, saxophone and drums:

*Lord I want Jesus to walk with me.
I want Jesus to walk with me;
All along my pilgrim journey,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.*

*In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
When my heart is almost breaking,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.*

*When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
When my head is bowed in sorrow,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.*



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When Diane invited me to come and join you today I was thrilled to be coming to join in with the wonderful choir I've had the joy of singing with before but had never joined with you in your service and I was so glad to come back and be with you. I love you all so very much. Thank you for having me. (applause). Thank you.

And then, all four of us have been friends over the years and had many occasions on different projects to work together and Tom, George, Colleen and Diane I'm so glad to be here with you but Diane asked me to do just a little bit of talking and I thought, oh gosh, what am I going to say? And then I got to talking and I didn't know when to stop! I'll tell you just a little bit about myself because I wasn't born here in Toronto. I came when I was seven years old from Pennsylvania and there's three rivers in Pennsylvania that meet and that's where I was born. My Dad used to say that he met my mother on the Monongahela where it meets the Ohio and Allegheny, and that's Donora Pennsylvania. That's where we grew up. It was a steel and coal mine area and my father had gone through all his schooling and everything but there still wasn't any jobs for him to apply for other than working in the steel mills; so I think he was very happy when my uncle went to New York on a visit and met this beautiful Torontonion, Amy Gehry and she was there studying violin and he fell in love. So he came back and said, "We're moving to Canada." So that's how we got to Toronto: my father and my uncle Rich came and started an advertising company here on King Street, a little west of Broadview, and it was called *Wayne Distributors and Advertising*. They used to hand out the hand bills, the samples and the soap and shampoo and stuff – and we had boxes and boxes of the stuff in the house and that company has kind of – in one form or another – going still today, although my father passed in '84 and Wade (sic) lost my uncle in 2008. So with that there's been quite a few in the family. I was one of eight and when I was three years old I had three siblings older and two sets of twins younger and the youngest twins were Ronnie and Wanda and unfortunately Wanda passed away at three and a half months, so we were raised as seven. I told the story earlier about the bond of twins because when my mother passed away in '97 we put us seven that survived her, her children, and my brother called every one of us up and he was so upset because we had forgotten about Wanda, to mention her name; and he said that he thought about her every day and so that's the power of the time in the womb and the connection. So there's been my sister Betty – and if you don't mind I'll tell you something because Betty – we've been doing a family group called *The Richardsons* and when my daughter is with me there's four of us called *The Richardsons*, and when my daughter is not with us we're called *The Richardson Sisters*. My sister is singing at Hugh's Room on February 28th and it's been a long time since she did solo, so if you've got nothing to do on the 28th, go and hear her. Somebody tell her, okay? So it's my sister Betty I sing with and my daughter and my sister Judy, who's older than me and she was the one that started us off and when she got married she stopped singing, so that's kind of like the early days of the Richardson clan.

And now we'd like to do another song for you: *Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen*

*O happy day, o happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away!
O happy day, o happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away!*

(the choir joined in as Jackie sang the whole song)

I came to rehearsal and Diane said, "I want you to hear the intro that we're putting on, *O Happy Day*," and I said, "That's perfect." I'm sharing with the rest of the world what is happening with us and I think that right now we get a sense of what my parents talked about: we came through the second world war



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and my parents always talked about how everybody bonded in those terrible and trying times. Everybody bonded and everybody shared and in this year, 2009, that's exactly what we have. We have this world crisis and we are getting a second chance for everyone to reach out to each other and the whole world is saying 'yes.' Let's sit down and listen to each other's views. Let's talk and let's find a common ground so that we can share in this bond; and so I was really really happy to be able to go to Washington and see the inauguration of President Barack Obama and I thought so much about – especially about my family. I have a book here that's called *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White* written by Henry Wiencek and this particular gentleman went down to Virginia and he was doing research for the Smithsonian about plantation houses that were still left standing and he came across this gentleman who was a judge. He looked like Colonel Saunders and he was a walking historian and they sat down and started talking about his family the Hairstons. He then started talking about over the years the families have joined together and the black and the white families are social with each other and stay in communication. He became really intrigued and so he invited one of the elder Hairstons over and they talked; and what ended up was that they ended up dropping the other project – researching for seven years – and then coming up with this book. With this book, when I was standing there in Washington, D.C. and thinking about my uncle and my father who brought us here from Pennsylvania so that we could have a better life, because certainly the mines would have killed my father while he was still very young, and it was just that they'd have been so filled with joy not only because of that thing happening but that around the world this has never happened – where people are talking to each other across the world as we're talking with each other right now. I heard that for the webcast you're getting calls from Russia and places for this service, and that's how close we are. When I got this book and saw the cover and on it is a picture of my great-grandfather as my father's mother is a Hairston – and my great grandfather is here with his three brothers and that was the first time seeing them – when I got this book.

So, in talking about the importance of knowing who you are and being treated as you are but sharing with everyone our differences because we really are brothers and sisters and the joy that comes out of us being together is like none other, so I'm really grateful that so many of us are here today to see that happen around the world and it's a wonderful thing.

In closing we'd like to share this song with you.

The reason I sing so hard, I don't want to be lost.....I don't want to be lost when Jesus comes.....

Amen.