

Come Home

5th of Easter – 10 May 2020

Our readings begin with an act of despicable violence. Stephen, a Deacon was martyred by an angry mob. In this snippet, we don't hear why he was stoned, and in the larger scheme of things, it doesn't really matter. There is an important character introduced, called Saul. He didn't get his hands dirty, yet was the architect of the stoning. Saul, you may know, was a persistent persecutor of the early Christian Church. He was known as a zealot. He belonged to a Jewish sect known as the Pharisees, that was not best pleased with these Christians.

Saul's self-proclaimed mandate was to eradicate Christianity and that began with the stoning of Stephen. We'll hear more about Saul and his life and transformation in the coming weeks.

Next to the Psalm in which we heard words of comfort. Psalm 31 is titled "Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies. This Psalm would have been known by Stephen and it is likely they brought him comfort. "Do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness, deliver me". "Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love".

It is hard to keep the faith when things are difficult. In times of uncertainty it can be tempting to take the easy way out, to take the well-travelled road with the easy answers. To be a disciple it means taking the road less-travelled. It means speaking the truth, even if it means speaking alone. It's not rewarding and it's certainly not easy. Yet it is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus.

In Peter's first letter, he writes of Jesus being the cornerstone. A stone that had previously been rejected had become the cornerstone. Did you know the cornerstone is the most important stone in the foundation of a building? If the cornerstone is not shaped and placed properly the building will fail.

Peter writes "once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy".

What does home mean to you? For some of us, home is where we grew up. While our parents were alive, home was where they lived. Some of us grew up in only one home while others of us moved more often. Many people ask if when I go to Ontario, am I going home? The answer is no. In my own life, home is where I am. I don't need to go beyond 45 Ridgemont Drive to be home.

In our Gospel today, John writes of Jesus being the way to God. It's a relatively simple concept for us, as followers of Jesus, to embrace. If we want to know God we must also know Jesus and we must also know the Holy Spirit.

The beginning of the passage Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

We live in troubling times. We all yearn for a return to pre-COVID times. And yet, we will never see that time again. We will, eventually, know a time when we can gather together and hug one another...yet that time will not be for a long time.

We now need to wear masks in certain stores. We must maintain a 6 foot distance between us and our "neighbour" when we venture out to businesses. It can feel frightening, it can feel isolating, it can feel frustrating. And yet, we are called to lead with our hearts.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled". Uh huh..that's much easier said than done. These are very troubling times. We want to go and gather with our friends! We want to plan and go on vacation! We want to hug our grandchildren for goodness sake!

"Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places." I believe in God. What has that got to do with COVID-19? And my right to go where I want to go!

As followers of Jesus, we believe in the summary of the law. Believe in the Lord God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We must love God as well as our neighbours. If we believe in God, we must love our neighbours as ourselves. Which means exercising caution around those who have a weakened immune system. It means being patient.

The phrase "in my Father's house there are many dwelling-places" has, been translated in many ways. One says "many mansions" and other says "many rooms". Does the translation really matter? There is a difference between a room, a house, and a mansion. Please remember in the days of the temple, there were smaller rooms around the exterior where people could gather for private prayer.

Jesus is not talking about Heaven as Home. He is speaking about the Church, the Temple as Home. We are learning to be Church in a different format...in a different way. As good as it is to see you all on Zoom, it's not the same as being in our Congregation's buildings. I miss Jack and Sheila. I miss Shirley. I miss Evelyn and Gus. I miss Tillie. I miss Diane. I miss Scott. And I miss all of you.

When we gather together, we have a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that will be waiting for us when we leave this life and enter the next.

The province of British Columbia is rolling out a four phase plan to re-open the province. You may have noticed that there was nothing specifically mentioned about Churches re-opening. I believe that was intentional. Dr. Bonnie Henry and Minister Adrian Dix will be having a phone call in the not-too-distant future with the heads of religious faiths to discuss the action plan.

What we need to be mindful of, is that when we decide to gather, it may be, at first, in small groups, outside the buildings, to keep transmission rates low. The majority of our Parish demographic is particularly at risk. We must protect everyone. And while it breaks my heart to not see you face to face, for now, this is what we must do. It won't be forever. Yet it will be for awhile.

Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". When he uttered these words, his disciples could not fully understand what he was saying...that in knowing Jesus they already know God, and through God they already know the Holy Spirit. In all honesty, 2,000+ years later we are STILL not sure what this means.

And it may be that we are not meant to fully understand. But that thought is best left for another day.

Bill was a beloved parishioner of mine in Dorchester. The last year of his life he spent in and out of hospital. When he went into hospital for what was to be the last time, he slipped into a coma. He would rouse every dozen hours or so, not quite sure where he was. I went to see him most every day in the last 10 days of his life. I'd arrive at the hospital with a coffee for his wife Madeline and one for him. And when I'd arrive he'd open his eyes and say "Am I dead yet?" And every day it broke my heart that I had to say No.

You see, Bill was not afraid to die. He was ready to go to his heavenly home. His body was sick and weak. His faith was rock solid and strong. And yet, his heart wouldn't stop pumping so he could go to be with Jesus. He knew his wife, his three daughters, his sons-in-law, his four grandchildren would all be okay.

When we speak of our love of God, we know what it is to come home. Home is a place where we are loved unconditionally. Where we need not fear. Home is our favourite place to be. Our earthly home is the place where we have our very best days. This may be because we can rest in the arms of our beloved. It may be because it is where our bathtub is. It may be because it is where our bed is. Or our favourite chair and blanket. It may be because it is where our family gathers.

Regardless of where home is, as followers of Jesus we know, with absolute certainty, that God is there. Christ is there. Holy Spirit is there. And so, my sisters and brothers, when we are feeling less than lovable, when we are beside ourselves, when we are empty and anxious it is then that we most need to rest in the arms of our beloved God. It is then that we most need to feel that unconditional love which comes from the Divine. It is then that we must come home.

To that place that is less a physical place, then it is a state of mind. To you who are troubled, who are weary, who don't know who to believe and where to go...to you I extend my hand in love and peace and invite you. Dearly beloved, most precious child of God. Reach out, take His hand. Come home.

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Acts 7.55-60
1 Peter 2.2-10

Psalm 31
John 14.1-14