

## In God We Trust? World Food Day – 18 September 2020

This past week has felt like a month. Honestly. Between two funerals, with another one happening this Wednesday, meeting with a family about baptism, meeting with a couple about marriage, our first Wednesday Eucharist since March, the AGM for the Pacific Mountain Region and the usual worship planning and sermon writing...egads.

One of the images that is used often in Churchland is that of bread. When Jesus gathered with his friends, he used food leftover from the meal. He used bread, which was likely unleavened, and wine, which is nothing like the wine we drink today. He took two ordinary things and through words and possibly gestures, he made them extraordinary.

I have led Virtual Communion twice. Both times were very moving experiences. Last night I experienced my first Virtual Communion at home, in my pjs, watching it unfold on a screen. I had some bread and sparkling water and was incredibly moved by the words I heard and the faces I saw.

A few of these people I have met face to face. Some I have come to know through Zoom. And most of them I was seeing for the first time. In the end there were over 300 people joining together for Communion. Two musicians sang from one location. Two ministers were in a sanctuary and had two large loaves of freshly baked bread, two pottery chalices and a large pitcher filled with wine. The table was one of plenty.

When the time came I sat in front of my tablet, bread on a plate and sparkling water in a wine glass. I heard the words, I sang the songs, and when instructed I ate the bread and drank the water. It was incredibly moving. And then it came to me...like a bolt of thunder. What made the Last Supper so incredible wasn't the vessels used. It wasn't the bread and the wine. It was the disparate gathering of fishers and labourers, tax collector and betrayer who shared these ordinary things. THAT was what made it so special. That particular group would never be gathered together again in that way. And yet only Jesus and possibly Judas knew that.

It's only recently that there's been yeast and flour at the grocery stores. For several months, beginning in April, you could not get either. A grocery store manager from New Zealand said they had sold a year's worth of flour and yeast in six weeks. SIX WEEKS! It seemed there was always someone looking for a scobie or yeast starter for bread. I have never baked bread. And honestly, I don't really have a desire to. I do like to eat bread, especially freshly baked bread. Bread was always available when I was growing up. My Mam was not taught to cook or bake so our bread was the white sliced bread, the store brand or whatever was on sale. We would receive our supper and there would be a small plate with buttered bread on it, to stretch the meal. It was never discussed why the bread and butter was there, but it was always there.

My Dad usually got paid weekly on a Thursday. If he got his pay packet on Thursday (back in the days when he was paid with cash) we would go to a restaurant for supper and then go grocery shopping. If Dad didn't get paid until Friday, we would have bread, butter and jam for supper on Thursday night.

A few years ago my brother and I were waxing poetic about our childhoods. He was too young to remember Thursday night bread and jam. When I told Mam how I always thought of jam as a treat (and I still do) she started laughing. She worried for years that she was depriving us with such a simple meal.

She thought I would know that meant we were poor. Isn't it interesting how differently adults and children view things?

In today's Gospel, Jesus is confronted by Pharisees and Herodians who are trying to trick him into committing blasphemy. They ask him a seemingly innocent question...“is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Jesus is fully aware of their malicious intent, and after asking who is on the face of the coin – the Emperor, he infamously replies “give unto Caesar (the Emperor) the things that are Caesar's and give to God the things that are God's. Now, because those questioning did not get the answer they were expecting, they “left him and went away”.

So here's the thing...how many of you have American currency in your possession? What does it say on every bill and coin?

It says “In God We Trust”. And there's a whole other sermon on why it says that.

What does it say on every Canadian bank note and coin?

Nothing, other than the spelling in English and French of the numerical denomination.

So, do you trust in God?

I mean really and truly trust in God?

Ron Heifetz, the keynote speaker at the PMRC AGM yesterday talked about the pressures put on people in leadership in a time of crisis. This is especially true for leaders in ministry, either lay or ordained. We are called to be a “non-anxious presence” in a time of great anxiety.

One of the most lovely things said to me, was when I was calling around to folks who don't have internet, to let them know we were re-opening the Worship space for the 13<sup>th</sup> of September. One parishioner said to me that she wasn't worried about following the COVID-19 protocols. She wasn't worried about going back into the building because she trusted me enough to know that the protocols would be established and followed properly. She trusted me.

A person who epitomizes non-anxious presence to me is Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.'s Chief Medical Officer. Apparently she has to have around the clock security, because of the continuing death threats she gets when the case numbers spike or when she tells us to stay home and make our bubbles smaller. And yet, she is seemingly unflappable.

Recently, I've had a staggering number of funerals and in working with every family I'm seeing increased anxiety and stress. Families which were mildly dysfunctional are now incredibly dysfunctional as they don't know how to cope in a time such as this. Which, I guess, is where I come in, explaining the protocols, and if necessary, enforcing them.

We are truly living in unprecedented times. I'm still having difficulty wrapping my head around what COVID-19 is, how it is transmitted, what the best protocols are. And as such I will always err on the side of caution to ensure we stay as safe as we can. We are living in a heightened sense of anxiety and fear and we must do our best to stay as calm and non-anxious as possible.

Every day on the Facebook Page for Knox United and Christ Church Anglican a list of six things is published. They are always in this order:

1. Breathe deeply, in and out.
2. Wash your hands, for at least twenty seconds.
3. Wear a mask if going out.

4. Pray
5. Clean
6. Be

The reason why there are six things is to remind us when there are things that seem outside of our control, there is always something in which we can regain some of that control. Breathing is our life force, without it we get sick and die. Washing our hands is not only good hygiene, it is proven to keep us safer. Wearing a mask is becoming common-place and while it may be uncomfortable, it is also keeping us safer.

We can always pray, even if we don't have the words. Each day there is a suggestion of a group or individual for whom we can pray. Occasionally, we are encouraged to pray for ourselves.

Cleaning is something that has always brought me peace as it is a way I return chaos to order, or regain a bit of control. We do not generally function well in clutter and chaos.

Being is something with which many of us struggle. To sit and day-dream, or be still in silence can be difficult and off-putting. Yet because we are surrounded with too much information, some of which is absolutely untrue, we need time to unplug and recharge.

When I take my Sabbath day I try to stay off social media and especially off news pages. Whatever is happening in the world can wait 24-48 hours for me to reconnect with my soul.

At the Opening Worship for the PMRC AGM, our Moderator, the Very Reverend Richard Bott referred to us as God's Beloved. I love that image. It's a title of intimacy. Someone who is loved without measure. When our Regional President the Right Reverend Blair Odney, was closing out our time together, he, too, referred to us as God's Beloved's.

And while we didn't get to hang out a meal times, or chat while waiting in line, we did have a chance to connect in a differently intimate way.

COVID-19 has caused us to learn new ways of doing things. And new ways of being. My fondest wish is that we not go back to how things were before March. My fondest wish is that we learn from the trust we have bestowed on one another. That we remember the lessons we shared pre-COVID in how to be community and marry those with the lessons we have learned during COVID, so that we come through this time with a better understanding of who we are. A better understanding of whose we are. And we truly consider one another to be God's beloved.

In God We Trust? Most definitely.

Thanks be to God.

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Reading – Matthew 22.15-22  
18 October 2020 – World Food Day