

"Seeking Jesus"

I begin this morning with an apology. The past few weeks have been chaotic, to say the least and I had high hopes for a well-crafted, brilliantly written sermon. This week was a bit of a blur...just back from Calgary where I had Lasik surgery on my right eye, while finishing packing, preparing to move, worshipping on Wednesday, realising that Wednesday was my 15th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood AND it was moving day as it was the 1st of March, St. David's Day.

Thursday I had two meetings, Friday I had two meetings and in between I unpacked, put away and sorted through my worldly possessions. I've been thinking a lot about how this Lent doesn't really feel like Lent. Do you know what I mean? In previous years I've prepared a Lenten challenge for us all to partake in. That has not happened this year.

We are embarking on a journey, or rather, continuing on a journey which began the first of September 2019, when we officially started our ecumenical shared ministry. When we first began the Worship times were changed for both congregations, which gave me enough time to lead worship, preach and celebrate at table, at Christ Church, then scoot over to Fernie Knox United Church to lead worship and preach, celebrating at table once a month. Through all of this we sought to deepen our relationship with each other, with Jesus and with the Divine.

Things were going swimmingly, then COVID happened. And we took our second brave step towards shared ministry...we changed our service times once again to 10:00 am and worshipped together, yet apart – worshipping online. We watched, we waited, we wore masks and listened to the news. Through all of this we seek to deepen our relationship with each other, with Jesus and with the Divine.

Things began to open up and we dared to come together, tentatively at first, then braver. We expanded our worship from online only to blended worship and that was another great learning curve. In fact, we are still learning.

In our Hebrew Scripture reading from the book of Genesis, God speaks to Abram and tells him to leave all he knows behind and go to a land that has been chosen for him. Abram, at this point in his life is an old man, and he is promised that he will be richly blessed. Through all of this Abram and his family seek to deepen their relationship with each other, and with the Divine.

The Psalmist speaks to us about God's love and unbridled protection. We shall not fear the sun by day, nor the moon by night for God will be with us always. What comforting words to hear in a time that is fraught with messages of racism, sexism, xenophobia, white supremacy and hatred. This message is needed just as much today, with all the strife and hatred in the world. Through all of this God's faithful seek to deepen their relationship with each other and with the Divine.

Our Regional Minister Kathy Davies will be with us in a couple of weeks. Our Beloved Archbishop is on leave to help her daughter Elizabeth and as such will not be joining us for the Workshop. I had a fabulous meeting with Kathy on Thursday and we are going to bring you a workshop filled with opportunities for learning from each other.

There will be work done on purposes and principles. What was important to us prior to our Ecumenical Shared Ministry? What was important to us prior to COVID? Are the same things still important as we learn to share a building and live in a state of endemic with COVID?

We will be discussing what it is to hear God's call and respond to our service in the community. We will be listening for our call as a Parish. There will be discussions on leading in a liminal time with resources from Susan Beaumont.

We will be discussing who we are and whose we are as we walk together in this liminal time.

Importantly, we will be tending to the soul of the Parish.

Through all of this we seek to deepen our relationship with each other, with Jesus and with the Divine.

Following Worship, during Coffee Hour we will be discussing, in greater detail the four new ministries of Visitation, Prayer, Hospitality and Joy! Specifically, what each of them mean, and how you can get involved, either in person or online. There will be a time of conversation, of asking questions, of speaking to the Team Leaders and perhaps you will receive a nudge from God about taking on a leadership role?

Kathy and I talked, at length, about how these new ministries can help us focus on who we are as we continue to bravely walk into Ecumenical Shared Ministry. Our Workshop will provide opportunities for storytelling, checking in, conversation and questions. It promises to be an excellent opportunity for all of us. I invite you to attend as you are able. Through all of this we seek to deepen our relationship with each other, with Jesus and with the Divine.

In our gospel reading today, Nicodemus, a leader in the community comes to see Jesus by cover of night. At first blush it seems strange that a well-respected man such as Nicodemus appears to be skulking around, not wanting anyone to know who is going to visit.

In fact, that is exactly what is happening. Jesus, back in the day, was an itinerant preacher. A nobody from nowhere whose reputation had reached Nicodemus. This was no ordinary travelling preacher. This was a man who was said to heal in miraculous ways. The blind could see, the lame could walk, and he spoke of a coming kingdom in a way that only one truly touched by the divine could do.

Nicodemus wanted to learn more from Jesus, yet because of his reputation he could not just walk up to Jesus on the street and introduce himself. Instead, he waits for the cover of night, then quietly approaches Jesus and tells him he's a fan.

He asks about the Kingdom of God. And bless him, Nicodemus takes what Jesus says literally...asking about being born and once again entering a mother's womb. I would not think there is a single mother who would think that a good idea! Instead, Jesus, in his usual charming fashion, speaks in metaphor and allegory.

Jesus gives Nicodemus a run for his money. As Nicodemus asks a question, Jesus turns the question around and asks the question back where it came from, which causes tremendous confusion and concern from Nicodemus. And just when it seems Jesus is giving up on the conversation, "If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

Jesus then says one of the most famous things ever quoted in scripture. John 3.16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Through all of this Nicodemus did seek to deepen his relationship with Jesus and with the Divine. Chances are, after his meeting, he went to his most trusted colleagues and told them what he had heard. Unfortunately, we do not hear again from Nicodemus until Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

And so my friends, as we have taken a journey from the Hebrew scriptures of Genesis, the Psalms and the Christian Scripture of John's Gospel it leads us into a place where we should always aspire to – a place where we seek to deepen our relationship with Jesus, with each other and with the Divine.

We have an amazing opportunity ahead of us to take our next brave steps together in this wonderful, organic, ecumenical shared ministry. Won't you be part of the conversation?

Let the Church say, Amen!

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Sermon for Lent 2, 5 March 2023
Genesis 12.1-4, Psalm 121, John 3.1-17