

John 14:15-21

Peace & Grace to you, Dear Friends,

Well, here we are in the 9th week of COVID. It has finally warmed up! We all love the warmth & sunlight. At least, this COVID has been a good time for cooking, fixing things, cleaning, doing jigsaw puzzles, painting, knitting. Farmers work land & prepare equipment for planting. Some farmers have even planted some corn. We do hope it stays warm so things will grow. We have tiny, tiny radishes & lettuce shoots coming in the garden. Really it is amazing—all the things that we CAN do & take satisfaction in. We count our blessings!

In our family, we are going to Rondeau Provincial Park to check out the migratory birds. It's my gift for Mother's Day. I'm so glad that parks and conservation area are now open. We do need to get out in God's beautiful creation—for our mental & spiritual health. So long as we continue to keep our social distance & wash our hands. There is definitely less of the virus around in our community now. Praise the Lord!

Let us look at the scripture for today. I'm back following the assigned lectionary that is given by the World Council of Churches. This week, it is the gospel of John 14:15-21. So around the world, all Christians are reading this scripture from the assigned lectionary.

Jesus knows that his earthly life is coming to an end. And he doesn't want his friends/ disciples to be left feeling lost & abandoned. I thought that we, in COVID times could definitely relate to these feelings of aloneness & fear. In **the gospel of John (14:15–21)**, he discusses with them openly about the present situation. He wants to be sure that they have grasped the “core” ideas of radical love and inclusivity. God's love is generous—always welcoming to all people—even to enemies-- “Pray for those who persecute you” Jesus talks about the “abundant” life—but it is radical and may involve sacrifice and self-control. Yes, we know about that too. In COVID time, we know this all too well. Although, some would argue—it is nothing compared to living through WW2 or being in the heart of an ebola epidemic. Or for that matter struggling with heart disease, cancer, addictions. There are many challenging situations that we as humans must learn to live with. Life is not always smooth sailing! Jesus knows this and comes to bring us comfort and salvation.

There will be times when it will feel like we are walking through fire and carrying heavy burdens, and that we are doing so all by ourselves—alone.

When we worship our God, we cannot always have the path or outcome that we would like—but we will always, always have the advocate—the Friend—the Spirit that accompanies and “restores our soul”. John Wesley said, “the best of all is God is with us”. In life, in death and in the life to come, Jesus encourages us: “Do not be afraid.”

When I studied at the seminary—Emmanuel College—TST the Toronto School of Theology-- 4 years—it was good—lots of sharing & lots of learning. I felt God was calling me to be a pastor—in the United Church of Canada. We often discussed: “How do I know when it IS God's Spirit—this Spirit of Truth? Or is it just my own idea and what I prefer to think?”

3 things came out of our discussions.--And I bet you will have some ideas of your own --that you have experienced in your lifetime. Truly **everyone, is an expert** in encountering this advocate, the Spirit of Truth. 1. The first that was noted was **listening**—listening to friends & others. --particularly if they show the Fruits of the Spirit. Do they display kindness, patience, faithfulness (you can count on them). Do they tell the truth & are reliable. Are they peaceful, joyful? It is true often our friends know us better than we know ourselves. There was a quote in the Upper Room this week from proverbs: “as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)

When we listen to one another, we can be closer to this Spirit of Truth that Jesus talks about in this gospel of John. So, let us LISTEN .

2. The second way to encounter this Spirit of Truth is perhaps rather obvious: **scriptures**. “He restores my soul” I find when I walk—or drive if I am frustrated or uncertain, that can become my mantra—“He restores my soul”. I simply repeat it over & over—he restores my soul. It truly is amazing how God’s presence can come & subtly nudge me in the right Way. It is always God’s will to be present for us. God is always **with** us. And God is always **for** us. “Surely, goodness & mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life” The ancient scriptures have come to the aid of countless generations before us and we pass them on to future generations. I always remember my friend, Gladys. She was much older than I, but was the main soloist in our choir in Alvinston for many years. Later she was in the Senior’s home in Petrolia and I would visit. I showed her a photo one day of son Bill & husband Bill. The sunset was in the back ground. We were crossing the open waters (the Gulf Stream) from Miami to the Bahamas in Billy’s sailboat. The colours were spectacular –pink, orange, even green You could see on their faces the feeling of awe & wonder. Gladys immediately said, “yes, **the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork**”: (PS., 91)

That scripture captured it perfectly.

It is good to learn some scriptures by heart—even if it is just a phrase or a line that speaks to you. I have visited older people who can no longer see well enough to read—but they have scriptures in their hearts that can bring God’s Spirit alive to them.

So, let us read & recite the SCRIPTURES.

3. The third way to encounter this Spirit of Truth is through **prayer**. I like very much the writings of Tom Harpur. His writings about prayer are particularly insightful. His book entitled: **Prayer: the Hidden Power** is excellent. He dedicates his book to his mother Elizabeth Harpur who lived by prayer her whole life.

I liked the sub-title: -a practical and personal approach to a greater closeness with God. –To have conversations with God. –a relationship with God. The closer we are to this Spirit of Truth, the more wisdom we have. Jesus himself prays that God will be actually in all of us, just as God is in Jesus. In John, he says, "I pray for those who will believe—just as you are in me and I am in you. This unity with the Spirit- will give us peace—calm in our soul.

I enjoy listen to our young people when they pray. Generally, they are so less inhibited than older folk. I remember one day we discussed how to address God. How shall we begin the prayer? Suggestions ranged from: Holy One, Our Father, Dear God, Life-giving God, Ever-faithful . The kids especially liked God of Life & Awesome God.

Our God images are constantly expanding –but we realize that as mere humans—we are limited in our understanding. I like how Brian Wren expresses this in his hymn “Bring Many Names” “—Great living God, never fully known Far beyond our seeing—but closer than our breathing—joyful mystery, our ever-lasting home. Hail & Hosanna, Great living God.” (VU 268)

Prayer has been compared to electricity. I have a very inadequate picture in my mind of what electricity is and how it operates. This in no way affects my use and enjoyment of the benefits of it. Prayer, too, is this unseen force in my daily life. – It works – so let’s use it!

So—today, God calls us to embrace this Spirit of Truth, known to us through LISTENING, SCRIPTURE and PRAYER. (And probably several other ways too!)

This is God’s gift to us. We give thanks & praise to God for this great blessing! AMEN!

PRAYERS for healing, comfort & courage:

All persons on the front lines battling COVID- 19 We pray for ourselves too. Help us to be safe, take precautions & not be in constant fear.

In our faith community: Cheryl Fisher, Dorothy Vogt, Lisa (Downie) Power, Donna Jewett, Larry Saylor Shirley Bolton, Deb Griffith, Luis Pereira. Rev. Ross & Mary Williams in Strathmere Lodge, Strathroy.

PRAYERS for blessing, praise & celebration:

Birthdays for May—Kevin Burgess, Tilley Platt, Thelma Jacques (103 years young) Scott Liberty, Don Reid, Francois Verster, Daniel Kerr, Harold Elliott, John Nurse, Bruce Sinclair, Judy Winter, Susan Arrends, Sharrina Robertson, Ariel Patton, Shirley Robinson, Theresa Bell, Keith Imeson, Xander Herr, Doug Johnson, Bev Coleman.

If I have missed someone, let me know & I'll get them on our calendar.

For THE MERRY HEART

1) I still have my birth day suit. Only now it needs pressing.

2) Growing old is mandatory; dressing old, thinking old, and growing up are optional.

3) Stay connected to your family. Families are like fudge...mostly sweet, with a few nuts added for variety.

4) And...please DO NOT CALL THE POLICE IF THERE ARE SUSPICIOUS LOOKING PEOPLE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD....those are just your neighbours, without make-up and a hair cut!

If you would like to send a card to Rev. Ross & Mary:

Rev. Ross & Mary Williams

Strathmere Lodge, Hickory Woods,

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Have a good week. Stay safe!

Shalom, Annalee

