



APRIL 2021

CHURCH @ HOME

staying connected with God,
each other, and ourselves

INSIDE:

MESSAGES FROM
NICK AND VI

SERMONS

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SUBMISSIONS FROM
OUR COMMUNITY

HUMOUR

I hope this finds you well, safe, and as spring appears, feeling a bit more alive and full of hope.

It's amazing what the change of season will do, isn't it? As RDLUC heads into the spring, we're feeling that hope. Hope for longer days. Hope for gardens and being outside. Hope for new routines and new beginnings. Hope for vaccines. Hope for the pandemic to begin to begin to come to an end. Hope for whatever is after all of this to appear on the horizon.

While we are beginning to plan what that hope means for us as a church community, we aren't ready yet to return to any physical services or programs. As numbers continue to rise, it is still our duty to practice our faith and do what we can to keep everyone safe. We are, though, hard at work trying to figure out what the eventual return to physical services and programs looks like in the new world we're entering into.

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It's exciting work for us to reimagine just what church is and how we can adapt to the changed landscape and world we'll be in.

Until then, we will do our best to keep everyone connected with God and one another. Whether it's through the online services and programs, our prayer teams, drive-through communion, or these care packages, we are proud of the ways we've been able to be the church.

We are so incredibly thankful for everyone who helped make it all happen, and for you too – for everyone who has adapted, bent, flexed, and rolled with these changes to how we can be a community of faith. I hold onto the truth that the Spirit does move through them and if we all pay attention, we'll find her in the new practices and rhythms.

Know that we miss you. Know that we love you. And know that, if you need anything, we're here for you. Just call or write, and we'll be there.

I hope this book of sermons, poetry and stories helps you feel connected to us.

grace & peace,

n.



Spring Greetings!

The renewed spring sunshine and warmth fills those dark crevasses left over by a long winter pandemic and warms our spirits with hope . . . and it is my hope that for most of you and your families, you are still keeping safe and well, and managing through these times.

For those of you facing tougher challenges and life transitions at present, your church family at RDLUC is holding you in our hearts and prayers. We are here for you, so please do let us know how we can help and support you or someone you feel concerned about.

My deepest gratitude and thanks go to those folks who are dedicated and work tirelessly to pour their love into these care packages for you once again. Please continue to send in your suggestions and contributions for this magazine too.

May you be showered by the love of our risen Christ and experience the vitality and renewal that comes along with this season of new growth and awakenings.

Vi



PEACE IN / PEACE OUT

(A SERMON ON JOHN 20:19-23)

So here's the thing that I think EVERY time I hear that story about Jesus showing up in that upper room:

They could have made this story SO MUCH BETTER.

'Cause out of ALL the things Jesus could say and do after coming back from the FREAKING DEAD, this is what we get?

I mean . . . Jesus just rose up from the dead. Something COSMIC literally just happened. The Universe just shifted. EVERYTHING changed. And not only that, but everyone in that room is FREAKING OUT. They have no idea what to think about all of this. They are feeling ALL kinds of things.

But out of all the things Jesus can say and do, out of all the things that need explaining, out of all the things he could do to comfort his friends, what he chooses to go with is:

"If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven."

It just feels like it could have been so. much. better.

Anyone else feeling the lack here? Maybe even feeling a bit of a letdown?

Yeah, me too. And that's okay. We're allowed to feel that. We don't have to like or even agree with these stories. We do though have to hear them. That is what Jesus said. That is what he decided to say in his big resurrection appearance.

So our question becomes. 'Why?' Why say that bit about forgiveness? Which is to ask: What's it mean? What's the wisdom here? What does this tell us about how to be human and alive in the world? What's in here for us as we look to create lives of meaning, depth, and purpose?

Those are always the questions we end up asking with these things. Asking those questions is the whole point of these stories.

So to answer that question, let's start by asking another:

What's Jesus all about? What's his goal, his purpose, his thing? What did he spend his lifetime teaching about and inviting people into?

Now there are ALL kinds of ways people have answered that question, but here at RDL, one of the ways we answer that is by looking to this thing Jesus called 'the kingdom,' or what other writers of the Bible called 'heaven on earth,' or what Paul, another guy who wrote the Bible, called 'a new humanity' – all of them different ways of talking about the same thing:

a new kind of life and a new kind of world.

Not a life and world **after** death, but a life and world **before** death. It's a way of talking about our lives and this world, the ones we're living and experiencing right now this very second but our lives and world transformed, expanded, deepened. It's a way of talking about a life and world that was always meant to be: lives connected with God, each other, and ourselves, and a world where everyone has enough and everyone has a place.

That's what Jesus is about.

And out of all the words used to describe that life and world, the one that keeps being used again and again and again, the one that people seem to be saying – THIS is the heartbeat of it all, THIS is the defining characteristic of it, THIS is where it begins and ends, THIS is the engine of it all – is this Hebrew word SHALOM.

It means peace.

And when we talk about THIS peace, we're not just talking about any peace. We're talking about a robust, deep, soulful harmony, this peace that exists in and between EVERYTHING and EVERYONE;

we're talking about wholeness, this sense of being at peace with ourselves and all our parts and all our stories;

we're talking about assurance or trust, this peace that grounds and reassures even in the MIDST of conflict;

we're talking about a peace that, all at once, both allows and sustains that kind of life and world.

That's the peace we're talking about.

We're talking about that feeling of acceptance when we tell our truths and have them received with love and grace.

We're talking about what happens within us when we stop being ashamed of our stories and start owning them.

We're talking about what happens when we choose diversity over uniformity.

We're talking about the life that gets created when we choose to stop being angry, resentful, and bitter.

We're talking about that sensation we feel when we believe, no matter what anyone else says, that we are enough and loved.

We're talking about the thing that gets made when we listen and learn from people who are different from us.

That's shalom. That's the heartbeat of it all. That's the thing at the centre of that life and world Jesus invites us into.

And if you know those things . . . if you just went, "Ohhh, I know that feeling, I've felt that before, I know that groundedness, liberation, healing, and hope" – well, you know what it takes to get there. You know what it takes to create and get that peace:

Forgiveness.

It takes forgiveness.

Now we've spent a lot of time talking about forgiveness together. We've talked about how it's this liberating thing we do for ourselves, how it's a difficult but essential process, how it's different from reconciliation, and how it's often a lifelong process. Now all of that is good and true, but here's the thing we always need to remember, and the reason, I think, behind why Jesus said what he said:

While forgiveness does a lot of things, what forgiveness does is free up the space between us.

Forgiveness is the hard, essential, and usually never-ending process of freeing up the space between us.

And often – and I may be going out on a limb here but roll with me on this – when we think about forgiveness, especially for those of us who have been shaped and formed by the church, and even for those of us who have just by cultural osmosis received a very particular idea of who and what God is like, more often than not we tend to think about forgiveness between us and God.

The more I talk to folks and hear their stories, and the more I look at the kind of stuff we do together in church, the more and more I see how SO much of our time and energy goes towards clearing up the space between us and God. Whether it's through our hymns, our liturgies, or even just this haunting anxiety in the back of our heads, when it comes to forgiveness, so much of our time and effort goes towards making sure we're good with God.

Maybe you know what I'm talking about. I think most of us do. Most of us, maybe even all of us, regardless of our theology and values, regardless of whatever we think happens after death, operate that way. There's this sense baked into us that we always need to be looking to God for forgiveness.

Now I don't want to belittle that concern. To be one with the universe, to be synced up with that source of life and ground of being, that's huge, essential, and a good thing to do . . . BUT . . . here's the thing we need to remember in all of that:

if our tradition says anything about us and God, it says we're good.

lemme say that again:

if our tradition says anything about us and God, it says we're good.

The whole reason we call our faith and spirituality "good news" is because it tells us that God isn't angry, that God isn't something we need to win over, that God isn't for us one day and against us the next, that God isn't keeping tabs on everything we've done wrong.

The good news of our tradition is that God and us are good, we were ALWAYS good because when it comes to God, it begins and ends with grace. That's why we say God is love. It begins and ends with that elimination of the space between.

This is what the wonderful theologian Serene Jones was getting at when she said:

"Grace is more original [than sin], because grace wins. Our sinfulness is not the final word about who we are. And that means . . . that the love of God, the love of the universe, spirit, however you describe it, is stronger and more powerful and persistent, larger, greater, more eternal, than anything we do. That's grace. And that's the grace that changes how we experience everything."

Right? RIGHT?

Just sit with that for a sec. Go back and read it again.

When it comes to God, we don't need to always be worrying about forgiveness because we are good. We've always been good. There is no space between us. We don't need to spend all that time and energy there. That peace has been made.

Instead . . . and this is where we catch up to Jesus . . . when it comes to that life and world Jesus is inviting us to have, the forgiveness we should be focusing on, the forgiveness we should be worried about and spending all our time and energy on, is with us.

The space we need to be freeing up is the space between us and each other, us and creation, us and ourselves.

It's all the stuff that fills up the space between us,

the anger,

the bitterness,

the resentment,

the arrogance,

the exploitation,

the selfishness,

the judgment,

the dehumanization,

the superiority,

the violence,

that's the stuff blocking our way to that life and world of shalom, that's what's holding us back, that's what Jesus is turning our attention towards.

Free up that space, he's saying, and then and only then can we experience just how deep, full, and amazing our lives and world can be.

Which is SO hard, right? It's risky, vulnerable, confrontational, and scary. No wonder we'd rather focus on God – it's WAY easier.

Which is why I think Jesus said what he said here. I think this is why, out of all the things he could have gone with, he went with this reminder to be people of forgiveness: people who live to free up the space between. People who do the work of creating peace – peace with one another, peace with creation, and peace with ourselves.

Jesus seemed to know that this is the work we'd struggle with the most. He knew this is the choice we'd struggle to make.

‘Cause it is a choice, isn't it? Freeing up that space to create peace is up to us. It's something we're in control of. It's a choice we have to make – day in and day out, moment by moment, it's a choice we make.

And so knowing the struggle of that choice but knowing it's a choice we must make if we want to experience a new life and a new world, Jesus gave us some help:

He did that thing where he breathed into the disciples and said "Peace. Receive the Holy Spirit."

I wonder if we can see in that Jesus showing us where to start whenever we need to forgive and work to free up that space.

I wonder if he's showing us where to begin when we need to make that choice:

With a breath.

With Spirit.

With Peace.

We start with breathing peace in so we can breathe peace out.

Which I love because it's just so simple. So often we freak ourselves out of even trying to forgive because it just feels so daunting and overwhelming but here's Jesus giving us a place to begin: with a breath. Not a huge apology, not an analysis of what went down, not a confrontation, but just a breath.

It begins with a breath . . . and then another . . . and then another . . . and then another . . . peace in / peace out . . . peace in / peace out . . . peace in / peace out . . . and we just keep breathing it in and breathing it out until we find that space freed up.

So to you looking to enter into that life and world, for those of you looking for that peace, for those of you with some forgiveness to do, begin there, with a breath.

May you breathe deep, may you struggle well, and may you find the peace you're looking for.



It's quite the story, isn't it?

It's intriguing, violent, and scandalous. But it's also super rich and deep. It can be read in ALL KINDS of amazing ways and can take us ALL sorts of places.

We could talk about holy mischief and the spiritual roots of civil disobedience. We could talk about how our passions, the stuff we're on fire about, will always necessitate suffering. We could talk about religion which is so often and so easily a source of control and oppression. We could go all kinds of places with this one story. That's how you know it's a good one. There's a reason why John begins his Gospel with this story.

And for today's work, we let this story take us into two places. Today we talk about:

the rhythm at the heart of what it means to be human

and

the wildly hard but unavoidable question this story asks us.

So to help us get into those two things and to help us get a read on just what's going down in that story, let's first talk about

FORM and SPIRIT.

Now when we talk about SPIRIT in our tradition, what we're usually talking about is the Divine. We're talking about that Sacred Mystery, that Something Bigger Than Ourselves, that Source of Life, that Ground of Being, that Living and Holy Presence, that thing, regardless of what we've called it as humanity has grown and evolved, that since the very beginning, we've felt driven and moved to be connected with, almost as if we're designed for it, almost as if we're from it, 'cause it's when we are connected, when we are caught up in it, it's then we discover a deeper and fuller existence, it's then that we experience transformation, it's then we find out what it truly means to be human and alive in this world. That's what we talk about when we talk about Spirit.

But here's the thing about SPIRIT: because it is Something Bigger and Beyond Ourselves, because it is fundamentally Mystery, in order to connect with it and in order to talk about it and understand it, in order to orient our lives in and around it, we need FORM. We need language, we need ritual, we need tradition, we need practices, we need these FORMS to not only help make that connection happen, but also more importantly, we need FORM to help that change and transformation happen, to help us move into that experience Spirit brings.

FORM and SPIRIT always go together. Wherever there's SPIRIT we need to have FORM because FORM is how we come to engage with Mystery.

This isn't anything new. We can see it once we know what to look for. We can see this relationship with the stuff we do together as a church – it's our hymns, our sacraments, our stories, our language, our rituals. We can see it in our own lives – it's our prayers, our spiritual practices, our questions. And we can see this in the story we heard earlier:

3000 years ago (and this is still true today in a lot of ways) there was this idea that Spirit needed a place to live in order for us to access it. So we built these things called temples, just like the one this story takes place within, these places where Spirit, where God, would literally live and be so we could go and connect with It.

And around this idea of temple and Spirit, all these other kinds of forms developed and began to evolve:

This home had to be big and beautiful to reflect who lived inside so the Temple was massive, beautiful, and ornate. It had to show just how big and wondrous Spirit is.

This practice soon arose where you had to bring God a gift, usually an animal you'd sacrifice. So within the Temple people began to sell animals to sacrifice to God. Doves tended to be the cheapest thing and cattle were the most expensive. If you were from out of town, no worries, you could exchange your money right there. This whole marketplace was geared towards making that connection happen.

Because it was such a reverent place, you had to look your best in order to get in. Over time various dress codes and washing rituals were developed, all of them geared towards making you presentable before God.

In order to connect with Spirit, in order to find life that's deep and meaningful, in order to be human and get in on what God is doing, this is how you did it. These were some of the forms: you had to go to God, which means going into the Temple, wash and dress in the right way, buy something from one of the tables, something that fit the nature of your request and need, and you give it to God.

Now we could say what we want about all of this, but it's how it was, it's how the spirituality worked. In a lot of ways ours functions in a very similar way:

In order to find and experience and connect with God, we go into a church, we put on certain clothes and behave a certain way, we sing special songs and do certain activities, all of it geared towards fostering that connection, all of it geared towards finding that meaning and life.

It's one thing, for example, to be told God is gracious and loving, but it's quite another to take communion and feel it.

It's one thing to hear we are all loved and enough, it's quite another to pass the peace and experience it.

It's one thing to be told to love our enemies, it's quite another to actively pray for them.

Yeah . . . form and spirit. Spirit and form. Form and Spirit always go together.

So when our story starts off, that's what Jesus would have seen that day when he entered into the Temple. It's basically the same thing that had been taking place there for generations.

So our question then becomes: "What did he see that made him react the way he did? What made him go and make a freaking whip and turn over all those tables and drive out all those people? What made him go and tear the whole thing down?"

‘Cause that's what he did. Let's be clear about that. Let's not dress it up or water it down. He tore the whole thing down.

It's not like Jesus went in and tried to democratize the place by driving out only the tables selling expensive stuff or by only driving out the money changers. It's not like he went in and said, "Cows are exclusive. From now on, only doves!" or "Don't have the right kind of money? Pay with whatever you got!"

That's not what he does. He doesn't just throw out a part of it – he doesn't single out just one form, he brings the whole. thing. down.

By throwing OUT all those forms, he brought the entire system, the entire way people approached and understood Spirit AND THEREFORE how people approached and understood being human, to a grinding halt.

I don't think we can say enough about just how big a deal this was. This is an overturning of the very way people connected with that which is holy.

So again . . . why? What was going on in there that made Jesus bring the whole thing down?

Now this has been answered in many different compelling ways, but here's one way to look at it, here's one reason why Jesus tore the whole thing down:

The forms weren't honouring the spirit.

The forms were fostering the wrong kind of life and the wrong kind of world.

The forms were causing the wrong kind of transformation.

‘Cause what happens when our forms insist that The Spirit exists only in a certain place?

The world gets divided. There is holy space and there is common space. There are places where God is and there are places where God is not.

Which means what?

God is only accessible here, but not out there. How we behave in here is different from how we need to behave out there. Who matters in here is different from who matters out there. What can happen in here is different from what can happen there. Suddenly the world gets divided, it gets split up into who and what is holy, into who and what is good and bad, into who and what belongs and doesn't. And who gets to decide, who gets to determine who and what is in and who is out, or good and bad? It's up to those who control the space.

And what happens when our forms insist that we need to dress up for God and earn God's favour?

We get divided. Parts of us are loved and parts of us aren't. Parts of us are hidden and parts of us are seen. We're never really sure where exactly we stand with God, with our neighbours, and even with ourselves.

No wonder Jesus got mad. No wonder he threw the whole thing out. The truth is:

Forms that lead to a divided self and a divided world can't honour a spirit of peace and wholeness.

They can't lead to a life and world of justice, harmony, and love.

They can't cause the kind of transformation the Spirit is after.

They actually do the opposite. They create a different kind of life and world. They don't lead us towards spirit, they lead us away from it.

I think that's why Jesus did what he did.

He looked at what was happening, saw what it was all creating, could see where it was all going, could see how it was shaping how people saw themselves and one another, he could feel the anxiety and shame in the air, and in an act of holy mischief, of righteous anger, of sacred protest, he tore it all down, he drove it all out, all of it this act that said:

"This stuff isn't doing what it's supposed to.

You think it's getting somewhere but you're only getting further away.

That SPIRIT you're after?

That LIFE AND WORLD you're wanting?

You won't find it here.

You won't find it like this.

All of this has to go."

‘Cause that's the thing about form and spirit, that's the thing about all these practices and words we use to connect with God, that's the thing about these things we do to ground, empower, and centre ourselves:

if it doesn't lead us into Spirit, it needs to go.

Which is to say,

if it doesn't lead to more love,

if it doesn't lead to more transformation,

**if it doesn't lead us to more questions,
if it doesn't lead us into movement,
if it doesn't lead us into God,
it needs to go.**

As comfortable, as familiar, as beloved, and even as life-giving and formative as it once was,

if it no longer moves us,

if it no longer speaks to us,

if it hurts and excludes others,

if it leads to a divided world and divided selves,

if it's just something we do,

and most importantly,

if it's out of date with who we now understand God to be and what God is about,

if it's pulling us away instead of into life,

it needs to go,

it needs to be torn down,

it needs to be flipped over.

While form and spirit always go together, not all forms do. Not everything will work and nothing will work all the time for all time. Our forms will need to change as we do and as we grow in our understanding of who that Spirit is and what She's all about.

And this is where we get to that essential rhythm of being human, this paradoxical, counterintuitive, but foundational rhythm for being truly and fully alive:

dying and rising.

At the heart of our faith is this idea, this rhythm really, this rhythm we can practice to help us stay within life as it was meant to be:

dying and rising.

It's this rhythm that knows it's only through death that life begins. It's through letting things go, throwing them out, leaving them behind, and letting it all die, that room gets made for something new.

It's this rhythm that trusts and knows that even when it all comes down, even after it's all thrown out, we aren't left with nothing but God's still there, Spirit still remains, and because that's what's left, because the centre still remains, we can rise up to begin again.

Dying and rising. It's the essential rhythm of life. It's how growth happens. It's how the whole thing works.

So one of the questions this whole story leaves us with is what forms need to die? What are the ways we use to connect with God and experience transformation that just don't work anymore? What do we do that is having the wrong effect? What needs to go? What's getting in the way of that life? What's getting in the way of that world? What tables need to be flipped over?

That's the wildly hard but unavoidable question this story asks us:

what tables need to be flipped over? what forms need to be torn down?

And here's why that's wildly hard:

When we ask that question, we're not just talking about the dusty tables in the back . . . those forms we know about but don't really do anymore. When we ask that question, we're asking about the tables we're still sitting at, the ones that still treat us good, the ones that make us feel comfortable and safe, the ones we just know so well, the ones we've been doing forever,

but . . .

the ones that hurt others . . .

the ones that exclude others . . .

the ones that honour where the Spirit once was but not where the Spirit is now . . .

the ones that keep us divided from others . . .

the ones that because they do those things will never take us fully into Spirit.

That's what makes this question hard but also what makes this question essential.

And because it is hard, here's where we remember that truth and rhythm.

As life-giving, as comfortable, and as important as they may be, they aren't Spirit, they are just forms, just things, just practices, and when we do let them go, the Spirit will still be there.

Amen



SUFFERING HAPPENS

(A SERMON)

friends!

Time for another sermon and this one is a doozy.

Yes. Doozy. That's a theological word meaning "buckle up."

But not "buckle up" because I think this one is a particularly good one or because it's a long one and I want you stuck here, but because today we are gonna begin to explore something, a truth at the very heart at the very heart of our tradition.

And now I know I've said that before. There are a lot of truths at the heart of our tradition, these things that everything else flows out of, the things that help everything else fall into place, these things that provide the heartbeat of the life we're here seeking after . . . but the one we're going after today? This is at the heart of the heart of the heart of things. This one is core.

But that's not what makes it a doozy. What makes it a doozy, what makes us need to buckle up, is that this truth is reallllly freaking tough, like almost offensive. We're not going to like it. We're not going to want to trust and embrace it. We're gonna want to say "nope" and disengage.



Hard truths do that, don't they? They make us want to shut down because to trust and embrace them is too hard, too costly, too risky.

And so I tell ya all this because I want us to be prepared for that reaction, especially as we sit with it after we're all finished here, because the thing is, if we want to find life as it's meant to be, if we want to get in on the wisdom of our tradition, if we want to join in on what God is doing in the world, these truths are essential, these are critical, these are foundational, these are ones we **must** learn to trust and embrace.

Yeah, like I said, a doozy.

So we're gonna do that thing you do whenever you go to a lake to swim but the water is a bit too cold: let's just take a breath and we're just gonna jump in.

So the story we are rumbling with today is the one we just heard. It's found in the Gospel of Mark and the whole thing centres around a conversation between Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus and the disciples are coming into this new town; by this time they've worked their way up to Northern Palestine, Jesus has been healing, restoring, renewing, he's rearranging the air, showing people a whole new way to live and how we can have a whole new kind of world, and as people experience all of that, as the wonder and awe go to work, they, of course, start talking. They start wondering who this guy is and what he's all about.

So Jesus asks the disciples what's the buzz and they answer him, passing on what they've heard people say, and then Jesus turns the question on them, saying, "Well, what about you guys? Who do you say that I am?" And one of them, Peter, he answers: "You are the Christ. You're the Messiah."

And this is where things take a turn. This is where we really need to start paying attention.

Hearing Peter's answer, Jesus tells him not to say that to anyone, proceeds to tell them how he is going to suffer and die, which is news to the disciples, and then Peter, hearing that, he grabs Jesus by the shoulders, reprimands him for saying something like that and that he'd never let that happen, and Jesus turns to Peter and says:

"Get behind me Satan."

Yeah.

"Get behind me Satan."

Now let's pull over here and unpack this because this is where those truths I mentioned begin to emerge.

Now, one thing we need to know and one question we have to ask:

That thing Peter called Jesus – **Messiah** – it's a political word.

It was the title for the person who would one day come from God and overthrow the Roman Empire, turning those oppressors into the oppressed, turning the tables, and coming to establish Israel, the Jewish people, as the people in charge, changing them from the least of these to the greatest.

THAT's what Peter was talking about. He saw Jesus as the person who'd do that – who came to win, be in charge, be their guy at the top, and show the oppressors who's the boss.

So we can understand a bit why Peter was so freaked out when Jesus said he had to suffer and die: it meant that he wouldn't and couldn't be the Messiah; to suffer and die meant he'd lose; it meant he wouldn't win. So of course he objects. Of course he's like, 'We won't let that happen!'

Which of course takes us to the question we have to ask: Why does that make Jesus react the way he does? Why such a STRONG reaction? Why the sick BURN? Why put Peter in cahoots with Satan?

I wonder if he reacts the way he does NOT just because Peter's whole understanding of what the Messiah is is wrong, but because Peter's objection, his refusal to let Jesus go down the road he's on, his pledge to stop what's going to happen, pushes back against an essential, core, foundational, and universal truth.

This truth which says:

we cannot avoid suffering.

At the heart of our tradition and at the heart of our human experience is the truth that says to be human and alive in the world means we will suffer.

Suffering is part of the package. It's baked into our existence. It's a mandatory part of being alive.

we cannot avoid suffering.

Which is hard to hear, isn't it?

We don't want that to be true. Nobody wants to suffer. We don't want that to be true – for us OR our loved ones. I mean, no wonder Peter did what he did. Suffering hurts. It's hard. It sucks.

And while we would love to do anything to stop or avoid it, this story names a universal truth, a hard but essential truth:

we cannot avoid suffering. to suffer is to be human. to be human is to suffer.

And while there are all kinds of places we can go with this, all kinds of conversations we can and should have, today let's stick with this, a question this truth makes me ask.

if we can't avoid suffering, how do we suffer well?

If this is a story that shows us that suffering is something we must move into and through and not around, how do we suffer well?

What can we hold onto as we enter into the painful, difficult, and hard parts of our existence? Whether it's chosen suffering or unchosen suffering, whether it's because of something thrust upon us or whether it's because of a choice we've made, how do we suffer well?

Now there are all kinds of wonderful and beautiful and powerful answers to this, but here's one that's stuck with me.

When we enter into our suffering, chosen or unchosen, there is a question we **MUST** ask if we want to suffer well:

"how will this shape me?"

The truth is suffering will shape us, it'll leave a mark, it's going to impact us. What asking this question does is decide what kind of mark it'll leave. It asks *how* that suffering will shape us:

Will this make me hard and bitter,
or will this open me up?

Will this break me apart
or will this break me open?

Will I enter into this and let it kill me
or will I trust that a Sunday is coming?

That is the choice we have with all suffering: how will we let it shape us?

It's a powerful question not just because it can help dictate how we'll respond to our suffering, but also because it reminds us that how we are marked by our suffering is up to us. It's a choice that we get to make.

While we don't get to choose whether or not we will suffer . . . we do get the choice of how to respond to it.

Amen

FOOTPRINTS ON THE EARTH - BARBARA LUNDBLAD

(A SERMON ON ACTS 1:6-11)

Joseph is in love with Maria. I know this sounds strangely close to a Bible story, but it isn't one. These two young people live in a story told by Mary Gordon in her book *Temporary Shelter*.

Joseph has loved Maria ever since the two of them were children, since the day his mother went to work for Maria's father. Joseph, a Catholic boy, is drawn to Maria's Jewish roots, even though Maria and her father had left their tradition long ago. And Maria is drawn ever more deeply into the world of the Roman Catholic convent near her home. Oh, she loves the pure singing of the nuns, the voices of angels. Joseph could see that he was losing her. He saw it clearly one day when they sneaked into the balcony of the convent chapel:

That day in the convent she was far away from him, and knew it, and looked down at him from the lit mountain on whose top she stood, and kept him from the women's voices, rising by themselves into the air, so weightless . . . rising, rising without effort above everything that made up life. You never saw the faces of the women who made these sounds that rose up. You saw only the light that struck the floor, shot through the blue glass and the red glass of the windows, slowed down, thickened, landing finally as oblong jewels on the wooden floor. He saw Maria rise up on the breaths of the faceless nuns, rise up and leave him, leave the body she loved that did always what she told it, that could dance and climb or run behind him and put cool hands over his eyes and say, "Guess who?" as if it could be someone different. But in the chapel she rose up and wanted to leave the body life that she had loved. Leave him and all their life together.

Maria wanted to rise up, up, and up . . . to leave the body life she had loved. Oh, she was not the first one or the last. The Greek philosophers longed to get beyond the weight of matter and live in the ideal realm of pure spirit. Many religions claim

that life with God can only be attained by being freed from the bonds of earth, from the pull of gravity, from the body. To be with God is to be in another place.

Jesus did what that young girl longed to do. He rose up, up, up – away from the pull of gravity. He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight. Even after Jesus had disappeared, they kept gazing up toward heaven, until suddenly two men in white robes appeared and asked them, "You, Galileans, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" Now, that seems a silly question. Wouldn't you stand looking up toward heaven if you had seen Jesus rising up? Maybe you remember another time when two men appeared, two men in dazzling clothes who stood beside the women who had come to the tomb on Easter morning. Those men, too, had asked a question. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" It must have seemed an absurd question to the sorrowful women for they had NOT come to the tomb looking for the living.



Jesus doesn't seem to be where he's supposed to be. He was not in the tomb, but risen and gone to Galilee. Then, later, Jesus was no longer on earth, but risen beyond the clouds, beyond human sight. So it does seem that to be with Jesus means to be somewhere other than where we are now. Even if we don't believe heaven is up there, we still find ourselves looking up beyond the pull of gravity. We who dance and climb and run, we who lie on the grass or sit watching the late-night news, we are waiting to be surprised by Jesus' hands over our eyes and a voice saying, "Guess who?" But don't we have to rise above the grass, above the living room chair, above this tired and tempting body? How can we enter the pure life of the Spirit to be with Jesus where he is?

Suddenly, two men in white robes turn to us with their question. "Why do you stand looking up? This Jesus, who has been taken up into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." We start to argue. "If Jesus is coming again from heaven, why shouldn't we keep looking up? Why should we look to earth where things have turned bad and we are forever tempted to do wrong?"

The men in white robes do not respond to our protests or our questions. But Jesus did! After the resurrection, Jesus spent time with his disciples in Jerusalem. For forty days he spoke with them about the kingdom of God. Then they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know the times or the periods that God has set by divine authority, but" – oh, this is one of the biggest little words in the Bible – "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth," which surely includes where you are right now. That is, the promise of the Spirit is a promise for this earth, this place, this time. Jesus will be forever messed up with this earthly life in the power of the Spirit.



Not long ago I saw a wonderful picture of Jesus' ascension. It was a black and white woodcut print finely etched. In the picture Jesus is rising up as the disciples watch him disappear into the clouds. If you look closely at the picture, not in the clouds, but on the ground, you can see footprints on the earth. The artist has carefully etched Jesus' footprints down on the level where the disciples are standing with their mouths open. Perhaps the artist was simply imagining a homey detail that isn't in the text. Or, perhaps, the artist is pressing us

with the old question, "Why do you stand looking up into heaven? Look at these footprints here on the earth." Jesus' muddy footprints are all over the pages of the gospels.

* Can you see Jesus' footprints in the wilderness? Each time he was tempted to claim earthly power and glory, he reached up and touched the words of Torah. One does not live by bread alone. Worship the Lord your God and serve only God.

* Can you see Jesus walking on the wrong side of the street with the wrong people?

* Can you see Jesus walking up to a sycamore tree, then looking up at Zachaeus, the tax collector, perched in the branches? "Come down, Zachaeus," Jesus said, "let's walk over to your house for dinner."

* Can you see Jesus walking, then riding, into Jerusalem?

* Can you see him stumbling toward Golgotha, loving us to the very end?

The Holy Spirit moved Jesus in certain directions, not others. He had said it would be so in his first sermon when he read from the scroll of Isaiah. "The Spirit has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of God's jubilee." When Jesus finished that reading, he said, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This is my road map. This is how I will walk on the earth. Come, follow me.

The Spirit that anointed Jesus now anoints you and me. That's what Jesus tried to tell his disciples before he left them. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses." On this earth where I left my footprints.

Centuries later Dietrich Bonhoeffer kept the message going. "The body of Christ takes up space on the earth," he said. That is, the Body of Christ makes footprints. Bonhoeffer goes on, "A truth, a doctrine, or a religion need no space for themselves. They are disembodied entities, that is all. But the incarnate Christ needs not only ears or hearts, but living people who will follow him."

"Why do you stand looking up into heaven?" Sometimes it's still easier to look for a pure world up there or out there, especially if we think of the church as the body of Christ. We see so many blemishes, so many things wrong. Perhaps you've said, "Show me a church where ministers aren't self-serving, where people aren't hypocritical, where love is genuine, and then I'll become a member." Well, we'll wait a long time, for such a church takes up no space on this earth. Or perhaps such a church lives only in our memories, a time when disciples believed, when faith could move mountains, when motives were pure.

Annie Dillard writes about such longings in her book *Holy the Firm*:

“A blur of romance clings to our notion of these people in the Bible, as though of course God should come to these simple folks, these Sunday School watercolor

figures, who are so purely themselves, while we now are complex and full at heart. We are busy. So, I see now, were they. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? There is no one but us. There is no one to send nor a pure heart on the face of the earth, but only us, a generation comforting ourselves with the notion that we have come at an awkward time. But there is no one but us. There never has been. There are generations which remembered, and generations which forgot; there has never been a generation of whole men and women who lived well for even one day."

There is no one but us, not in this time and space. We can stand looking up into heaven or we can believe the promise of Jesus: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses." You will make footprints in and through ordinary, imperfect communities of faith that seldom get it right. Ascension Day is not a call to look up. It is to trust that Christ's promise is down and in and around us. We are not alone – you and I who dance and climb, who run and get knocked down, we who lie on the grass or sit watching the late-night news. We are not alone. The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, surprises us at every turn, saying, "Guess who?"

Let us pray.

Come, Holy Spirit, come to us in this time and place. Come to us when we sit in silence and when we are moving too fast. Surprise us, revive us, and shape us into the Body of Christ.

Amen

JUST A LITTLE

by Rev. Edward Longmire, 1887-1982

(Grandfather to Dave Churchill)

Just a little thanksgiving with the dawn of day,
Just a little more music to cheer us on our way.

Just a little thoughtfulness in what we do and say,
Just a kindly good morning and smile to others pay.

Just a little sharing with others that are in need,
Just a little practice of the Golden Rule to heed.

Just a little greeting of strangers with a smile,
Just to show we really care and go the second mile,

Just a little more interest in the community round about,
Just a little more zeal in meaningfully helping out.

Just a little more smiles and interest in our own children pay,
Just a little less grouching when they shout and roughly play.

Just a little more anxiety for the youth who go astray,
Just a little more interest and endeavour for their welfare pay.

Just a wider vision of our favoured far-flung land,
Just some real courage for right and truth to stand.

Just put some real meaning in the prayer "Thy Kingdom Come,"
Just some real effort that "His will on earth be done."

Just put some definite interest in the world Christ died to save,
And commitment to the work for which His life He gave.

That through-out the world in every language known,
The good seed of God's love and saving grace be sown.



THE BIG THINGS IN ALBERTA (IN -25 DEGREE WEATHER!)

By Joyce Duncan

Thanks Joyce for inviting us along on your big adventures this winter!

Smoky Lake, Alberta is recognized as the Pumpkin Capital of Alberta and the home of the annual Great White North Pumpkin Fair. Smoky Lake Pumpkin Park features seven large concrete pumpkins. Many consider the Smoky Lake Pumpkin Park as the launch point of their Iron Horse Trail adventure. The large parking area gives you a convenient place to leave your truck and trailer. During summer months riders can visit the CN Museum or take a few photos of the family exploring the giant pumpkins. Your trip down the Iron Horse Trail will be one to remember.

Vilna, Alberta: The sculpture of the tricholoma uspale mushroom is a replica of mushrooms commonly found in the area. The giant fungi weights over 18,000 lbs and is 20 feet high with a 15 foot diameter. The three caps balance delicately on stems made of 18” steel pipe held in place by a steel reinforced concrete base. The faux mushrooms were constructed and designed by local artists and tradesmen at a cost of about \$28,000 when they were erected in 1993.



Glendon, Alberta unveiled its roadside tribute to the perogy in 1993. The town's Giant Perogy, complete with fork, stands 27 feet tall, weighs approximately 6,000 pounds, and is considered one of the "Giants of the Prairies," a collection of massive sculptures that can be found across this geographic region of North America.



Bonnyville, Alberta: Angus Shaw was a Scotsman employed as a fur trader in Canada in the 1700s by the North West Company. A seven-meter-high statue of Angus Shaw stands for posterity's sake as a reminder of Shaw's contribution to the fur trade in Western Canada.



Elk Point, Alberta: This statue, named after Peter Fidler, a Hudson Bay fur trader and surveyor, commemorates the bi-centennial of Elk Point in 1992 and the history of fur trading posts in the region. As the 19th century dawned, no other Hudson Bay employee had as much experience in the way of the people of the plains and woodlands as Peter Fidler. He could shoot buffalo from horseback and knew how to live on fish and roots. Dressed in buckskin and carrying a flintlock, Peter Fidler was a combination of cultured Englishman and versatile frontiersman. His Cree wife, Mary, was his lifelong companion who travelled with him during his explorations. He supported his many children and provided amply for them in his will.



St. Paul, Alberta: Built as part of Canada's centennial celebration in 1967, St. Paul has an official UFO landing welcome site. The large flat concrete structure contains a time capsule to be opened on the 100-year anniversary of the pad's opening in 2067. A large map of Canada made from stones from each of the provinces adorns the rear of the pad. In the 1990s, a rounded, saucer-shaped tourist information center was opened on the site containing a museum of UFO memorabilia including photographs of alleged landing sites, mysterious cattle mutilations, and crop circles.



Andrew, Alberta is home to the world's largest mallard duck. The majestic duck was erected in 1992 as a commemorative honk to duck breeding grounds in the local wetlands. When we visited, the mallard was wearing a face mask over his beak.



Mundare, Alberta is the home of the world's largest Ukrainian sausage. This 12.8 m (42 feet) statue is a tribute to Stawnichy's Meat Processing, a sausage factory famous for its kobasa. This immense Ukrainian sausage is the tallest piece of meat anywhere in the world. The locals say it looks like a giant turd from the side, but from the front . . . well, you decide.





I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

- *William Wordsworth,*
submitted by Vi Sharpe

passages

JOYCE MARLENE POLLOCK

January 5, 1946 – Herbert, Saskatchewan

March 20, 2021 – Calgary, Alberta



Joyce Pollock, beloved wife of Al Pollock of Calgary, passed away on Saturday, March 20, 2021 at the age of 75 years.

Joyce was born in Herbert Saskatchewan in 1946 to Dorothy and Leonard Shaw. She, along with brothers Ken and Larry, was raised on a farm south of Morse, Saskatchewan.

In 1964 her first child Jackie was born in Herbert, Sask. During the early years of marriage, Joyce and Al moved throughout Saskatchewan focusing on family and Al's career. In Outlook, Sask., their family was completed with Melanie's birth (1969) and Trevor's (1971).

In 1974 the family moved to Tofield, Alberta where Joyce was a devoted homemaker and mother. In these years she taught Sunday school, was a Girl Guide Leader, and later played fastball, curled, skied, golfed and played bridge, which became a life-long joy and passion.

In 1977 she was able to pursue her own education, excelling in academic achievements at NAIT, where she obtained the Queen Elizabeth Award for academic achievement and the Louise McKinney Scholarship. She then furthered her education with a BEd from University of Alberta in 1984. Her first teaching position was at Bev Facey Composite High School where she taught Beauty Culture.

Moving to Strathmore in 1986 opened another chapter in her life, where again she formed many amazing friendships through work, curling, golf, church and again her beloved bridge. Her teaching career continued in 1986 at Strathmore's Young

Offender Centre. She then moved to Samuel Crowther Middle School in 1989 teaching Grade 7. In 1995 she completed her Diploma in Educational Psychology with a specialization in Guidance. Prior to retiring in 2000, she was the Guidance Counsellor at Samuel Crowther Middle School.

Joyce was fortunate to have had good health for the first twelve years of retirement and some of the best years of her life. Designing and building their cabin at Lake Windermere became her next passion and soon became a place for family and friends to visit. Joyce excelled at creating a welcoming environment. During these years, Joyce and Al traveled extensively in Hawaii, Mexico and the Caribbean, often with their close friends and family, something that Joyce had always wanted to do. Most importantly, she devoted a great deal of time to her relationships with her grandchildren, each of whom has his/her own very special and unique relationship with their beloved Gramma!

As Joyce's world became smaller during the last few years, the joy in her life came from bridge, church, friendships and family. She had many bridge friends and was an executive member of the South Calgary Bridge Club, Calgary's oldest club. She read extensively on the art of the game and was always consulted as to 'correct conventions' when playing with friends. Her last and loyal opponent was Al who always did his best to set her!

The friendships she cultivated over the years were true and strong until the end. In these last years, these friends were supportive, encouraging and inspiring. Their regular communication, outings, flowers, dinners and get togethers were always so appreciated. To the end, her family came first as she watched her grandkids play ball, hockey, ringette, soccer, and basketball. She relished hosting family dinners with her extended family. And, to her joy, her puppy Bear joined the family and was her loving and loyal friend to the end.

Finally, in Joyce's own words from a memoir she was working on prior to passing, "I have come to realize that we all have a choice about how we perceive things. No one has a perfect life; I have had lots of highs and lows, good times and bad. I also have regrets. But I choose to remember the good times and forgive myself and others for the times that were not so good. I choose to accept my fate and try to live my life with kindness, love and acceptance. I try to count my blessings and be grateful for the storied life I have lived."

Left to mourn her death are her husband Al Pollock, daughter Melanie Golder (Kevin), son Trevor (Kelli); four grandchildren, Katie Golder, Aimee Golder; Shayla Pollock and Jayce Pollock; brothers Ken (Merle), Larry (Teresa); sister-in-law Marg (Leonard), brother-in-law Bob and several nieces and nephews. Joyce was predeceased by parents Leonard and Dorothy in 1965, and her eldest daughter, Jacqueline (1986).

If friends so desire, memorial tributes may be made directly to the Calgary Branch of the Myeloma Society: www.southernalbertamyeloma.ca/donate

On behalf of Joyce's family, we would like to sincerely thank Red Deer Lake United Church for its unwavering support, as well as the staff from Tom Baker Cancer Centre and Foothills Medical Centre for their kindness, caring and attention to the many needs of our family.



passages

JOAN LESLIE (HAMMOND) MOORE

March 25, 1943 - April 6, 2021



Joan Moore of Calgary passed away on April 6, 2021 at the age of 78 years. Joan is survived by her daughter Heather (Rick) Donkers and grandchildren Mitchell and Sydney Donkers as well as her extended family Brian (Wilma) Moore and Jim (Sherill) Moore and their children Ian Moore, Erin (Ryan) Schram & family, Tara (Chris) Moore and Katrina Moore and family.

Joan is also survived by her three siblings: Celia (Ken) Svoboda of Lethbridge, Bruce (Susan) Laycock of Edmonton, and Brenda Laycock of Powell River. Joan was predeceased by her husband John Hodgins Moore, her father David Hammond and her mother Georgina (Hammond) Laycock.

Joan Leslie Hammond was born to Georgina and David Hammond on March 25, 1943 in Calgary, Alberta. For the first part of Joan's life, she was raised by her mother and grandmother after losing her father at the age of 11 months. Her mother remarried in 1950 to Doug Laycock and soon became big sister to Celia, Bruce and Brenda. She loved reading to her siblings, creating paper dolls and sharing her love for music with Celia, Bruce and Brenda. She lived briefly in Edmonton and finished up her high school years in Saskatoon. Joan was the first of her family to pursue a post-secondary education – a B.Sc (H.Ec.) from the University of Saskatchewan. She is credited with inspiring her siblings to pursue higher education. As part of her university experience, she joined the Greystone Singers which was the first of many choirs she was involved with throughout her life, including the Mirror Reflection Singers, Armstrong Singers in Medicine Hat and the High Country Chorale.

In 1967, Joan moved back to Alberta to start her career as a District Home Economist in Stettler. She also developed a discipline to grow her artist talents and started to sell her paintings. Joan had a keen eye to appreciate the fine details the world has to offer and it was reflected in her artistic ability. She married a widowed rancher from the Alix area in 1973 and had her only child in 1974. Exposure to rural life gained her a deep appreciation for nature and wildlife, which was often reflected in her early artwork. She also volunteered in the community where she organized new locations for the Mirror and Alix libraries so that others could enjoy the benefits of reading.

In 1988, Joan and John retired to Medicine Hat where she became a founding member of the Mad 'atters Art Club. She owned the Prairie Art & Drafting Supplies art shop and cared for John until he passed away in 2001.

As part of Joan's retirement plan, she moved to Okotoks in 2003 to be closer to her grandchildren and to the mountains which she loved deeply. She again established new friendships by volunteering at the Okotoks Library, sharing her artistic knowledge with others in various art clubs and becoming a part of the Red Deer Lake United Church community. She produced tons of artwork which is now in many personal and commercial collections. Joan's health started to decline in the last decade. At first everyone thought it was due to a cancer scare in 2012, however by early 2015 it was confirmed that she suffered from Parkinson's disease as well as Parkinson's dementia.

Joan will be remembered as a gracious, loyal and kind neighbour, friend, aunt, sister, grandmother, wife and mother. She will be deeply missed by those who knew and loved her.

SPRINGTIME PRAYER

O Dancer of Creation,
the earth awakens to an urgent call to grow.
In the hidden recesses of my wintered spirit
I, too, hear the humming of your voice,
calling me, wooing my deadness back to life.

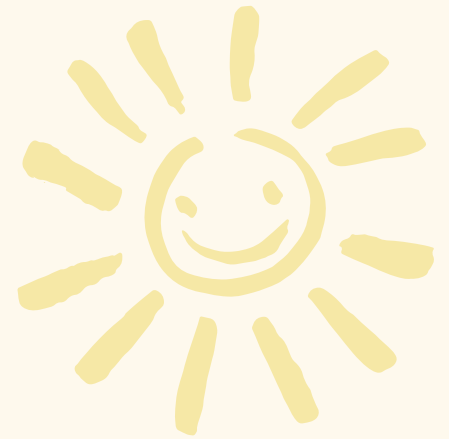
My soul yawns, stretches, quickens,
as the energy of Spring revives my weariness.
I sit with wonder, observing the steady activity
of downy woodpeckers and newly yellowed finch.
I do so wait with the avid attention of a child's first look,
savoring the colors and shapes of earth's loveliness.

As the filtering patterns of early sunlight
lift the shades of green in every growing thing,
I enter into spring's unlettered words of life.
For a while my doubts, anxieties, and worries
become like chapters in some ancient book
whose text no longer claims my full attention.
I am content to sit, watching Spring
turn the pages of this animated publication,
eager to discover the invigorating story
reflected in my own springtime revelation.

Tell me, Wise Awakener,
why is it easier to believe in a stem of new grass,
or the opening bud of a fresh purple crocus,
than it is to believe in the greening of me?

by Joyce Rupp, submitted by Vi Sharpe





submitted by Cathy Thomsen

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

A memory? A poem?
A photograph? A pandemic story?
We would love to share it
in the next issue of this magazine.

Please send your submission to info@reddeerlakeuc.com
or call us at (403) 256-3181.

The next submission deadline is May 3, 2021.



**We are
Red Deer Lake United Church.**

We are an inclusive and affirming community of faith – people of all ages, perspectives, and stories, who gather to connect with God, each other, and ourselves, and find in Jesus a new way of being human and alive in the world.

**you're welcome, wanted, and accepted.
join us on the journey.**

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Wednesday 9am - noon

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