

AUGUST 2021

CHURCH @ HOME

staying connected with God,
each other, and ourselves

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red deer lake
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hello friends,

How are you doing?! I hope and trust this finds you doing well.

I am back from a nice chunk of vacation full of . . . well, not doing much of anything, really: walking the dogs, baking one loaf of bread, and reading the most wonderful of books, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. (I think that'll be the book we read together this fall.) It was great to have the opportunity to just rest so thank you for that and thanks to everyone who helped keep the church moving and grooving while I was away.

Here at the church building we are focused on how we can come out of this pandemic safely and faithfully and phase back in some in-person services, programs, and events. Our first priority is your safety and well-being so we are choosing to be cautious and do this right and with love.

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While we don't quite know what that return to in-person services will look like yet, we are super excited to have set a target date. **September 19** will be our Homecoming Party, a chance to reconnect and celebrate that we are still here, and **September 26** will be our very first in-person Sunday service.

There will be, no doubt, some requirements and restrictions but it is a step in the right direction and I, for one, am excited to be physically together once again.

In the meantime though . . . this magazine is for you. This is yet another magazine full of prayers, sermons, and letters for you to remember you are not only loved by God, but also by your church community.

It's our way to keep connected with you, to continue to explore what it means to be human together, and remember we are all welcome, wanted, and accepted. My hope is that as you read this thing, however you do it, that you feel and know that.

Looking forward to seeing you soon and, as always, may grace and peace be with you.

n.



Dear Friends,

Recently I have been hearing from folks how time seems to be speeding by these days . . . and that means summertime! So I hope you are treasuring these warm summer days and able to have some enjoyment, despite the smoke in the air. We pray that the current fires will cease and the earth will be filled with moisture, peace and the lush green once again. There are many lessons to be learned from these times of uncertainty.

During times such as these, I was reminded by someone about the words of Psalm 121, “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.” This brings with it a sense of comfort and strength.

Thank you for your feedback and suggestions for Church@Home and for the care packages. This is *your* magazine for you to connect and share info and news with each other, in addition to growing and learning spiritually and in other ways. Please keep your contributions coming, we very much appreciate it and delight in

hearing from you. If there is a topic you would like included or explored, please do let us know.

Our thanks once more to all our contributors, volunteers and staff who continue to pour their love and care into this magazine and the packages. It is truly a labour of love and comes directly from the heart. For those of you who are facing tough challenges, we are holding you up in prayer and we are here to support you.

Below is the beautiful prayer of St. Columba which I would like to share with you:

Be, O Divine Spirit

A guiding star above me

A smooth path below me

A kindly shepherd behind me

A bright flame before me

This day, this night and forever.

Amen

We love and miss you and look forward to joining together in person very soon.

Vi

ANYWAY

by Mother Teresa

People are often unreasonable and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are honest, people will cheat you.

Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough.

Give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway.

Blessings of Courage to do it anyway,

Love Ann



LOVE ANYWAY

REV. NICK COATES

Let's start with a question I'm pretty sure I know the answer to already but is good to ask anyway: Anyone else feeling tired?

And by tired I don't just mean 'didn't get enough sleep last night.' I'm talking about *tired*—as in done, worn down, thin, cooked, and all the exhausteds—as in spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally empty. I'm talking existentially tired. I mean the weariness that makes it hard to exist, let alone live.

Anyone feeling this? I know I am. I know others are too. Who can blame us, really?

We've got all the anxiety, fear, and stress that comes with being in a pandemic. Everything about the past year and a half is different and new and scary. Anything that helped us cope is gone or just not the same as it was. We've been cut off from everything that feeds us, that gives us life, and from where we experience the Divine. Top all that off with the fact we're in the middle of another human rights movement and being asked to rumble with some huge questions around privilege and the kind of world we want to have, with how our world is literally on fire, and then add on everything else life throws at us . . . no wonder we're exhausted.

And I want to start off with naming all of that—you're welcome by the way—not just because we're all feeling it and it's good to name it, but because of what happens when we're in this space, because of what happens when we're feeling so thin and done:

It gets harder to love. Our capacity for love diminishes. We lose our ability to receive and offer love.

It's true, right? The more tired we get, the harder it is to love. Anyone ever experience this?

With everything going on, maybe you've found it hard to be patient and kind. Maybe you've struggled to be present. Maybe you've found it tough to show compassion. Maybe you've lost the desire to even try to be gracious. Maybe all you can do right now is muster the strength to look after you and your own.

Yeah, it is tough. Let's allow that. It's tough.

With all the division we're feeling, with all the violence and chaos, with all the uncertainty and fear, with all the things to rethink and learn, with all the vigilance and protocols, with all the stuff that leaves us done and exhausted, it's hard to do the loving thing.

It's hard to be decent when everything is just so indecent.

'Cause that's the thing about love. It's not just a feeling, it's a choice.

It's the choice to, despite the cost and risk, give ourselves to another and to embrace them for all that they aren't. It's the choice to move beyond ourselves for the well-being of the people and world around us. And that choice—that movement—oh man, even on the best of days, it's tough,

but to do it when we're feeling existentially exhausted? It not only feels impossible, but it can be the *last* thing we want to do.

Still with me on this? But here's the thing . . .

and get ready for this because this is one of those hard truths we don't want to hear. We'll resist it. We won't want to accept it. But it's one of those truths we must hear and accept if we want to find that life Jesus invites us into . . .

while that's totally understandable and while we need to make room for these feelings and know that's normal and a very human response when our world is falling apart, it's something we need to talk about because at the heart of our tradition, at the heart of everything Jesus is about, is this wisdom that says "it begins and ends with love."

Which is really this way of saying love is the way. It's the way to being human and that life Jesus invites us into—a life that hums with reverence, that's deep and full of wonder and joy, that's connected to God, each other, and ourselves, that's life as it's meant to be, this way to a life and world where everyone has enough and everyone has a place.

Love is the way because it's love that heals and bridges.

It's love that stands up and speaks out.

It's love that affirms and celebrates.

It's love that energizes and holds together,
that renews and restores.

It's not power.

It's not control.

It's not winning.

It's love.

It's love.

It's love.

It's love.

Love is the way. It begins and ends with love.

Now I don't know about you, but I think we need some love in our world right now.

With so much tearing us apart right now, with so much bringing us down, with so much fear in the air, the thing we need isn't more division, it's not more force, it's not more threats, it's love.

We need the thing that heals and bridges, that stands and speaks up, that affirms and celebrates, that energizes and holds together, that renews and restores, we need some love right now, for ourselves, for one another, for the world.

But here's the thing about that love we need right now. And get ready cause it's another one of those truths we don't want to hear and accept but, again, one we have to.

That love?

Where's it come from?

Not God. Oh man, we so want it to come from God. We SO want God to just snap her beautiful and colourful fingers and BAM: Love rains down on us. Oh, that'd be great but that's not how it happens. God may be in it, but that's not where the love comes from.

That love has gotta come from us.

Even when we're tired, it's gotta come from us.

It can only come from us.

So even though we're exhausted and thin and feeling done, we love anyway. We do it anyway. Even if we suck at it, we do it anyway. Even if it's a fraction of what we'd want it to be, we do it anyway. Even if we fail at it, we do it anyway. We love anyway and any way.

That's what it takes and that's what is needed. Love. From us. However we can give it.

So I'll leave you with this. It's a quote from someone somewhere. I don't know who it's from but it's so good I know it's not from me. It's something to remember as we remember the call of our faith to love anyway and do what we can to move ourselves and our world closer to that one which hums with reverence.

“Integrity isn't just walking the talk, it's the willingness to change when you see you're off.”

In this time of exhaustion, may we all take the time to rest and do what it takes to love anyway.

FACES AND BUTTS

REV. NICK COATES

God be with you!

Another sermon for you today and, as we usually do, this one is riffing off of a really weird and wonderful story. It's this old one you can find in the Bible and we're riffing off of it because it's a story that opens up some really good conversations we need to have.

Which is what we do. The thing we're doing here, this whole learning to be human thing, this whole becoming transformed people who transform the world thing, this whole thing we call church? It isn't so much about ending conversations as it is about starting conversations. It's not so much about finding the right answer as it is about finding the right question. It's not so much about being certain as it is about being curious.

Yeah, that's what we do here. That's why we gather. That's what Jesus is about. It's this ongoing journey of moving deeper and deeper into life.

So as we do that, we're gonna get into a few different things, and today we talk about:

the alternative to putting *those* people on an island and what to do when we see God's butt (which I know is something we've *all* wondered about).

So that story in the Bible . . .

It takes place during The Exodus which is that story of God liberating people out of slavery and leading them into freedom. And within that larger story there's this smaller story about what's known as "the golden calf incident." It's that time when Moses went up a mountain to get the ten commandments from God but the people he left behind felt he was taking too long so they built a golden statue of a baby cow to worship and threw a huge sex party to celebrate. Seriously. That's what the Bible says.



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But the thing is Moses and God found out about the party and Moses, well he ended up breaking the ten commandments out of anger and God decided to kill everyone and start over because, well: idolatry.

And then, well, this is where it gets kind of interesting . . . unless you count idolatrous sex parties as interesting . . . then Moses and God have this huge argument. God says: "Look at them all! They've lost their way. I'm gonna wipe 'em all out."

But Moses is all, "Woah, God you can't just kill them. You started this whole thing, remember? What about the whole 'I'll be your God and you'll be my people' thing?" And God is like, "Fine. But I'm gonna send a plague on them and be done with y'all. I'll send an angel to make sure you get to the Promised Land okay."

And still Moses pushed back, saying "No dice. You need to be with us. That's your thing. That is what makes you You! You're the freaking Living Presence for crying out loud!"

And finally after this long face-to-face argument, God changes God's mind and decides to go with the people and finish that liberating journey from slavery to freedom.

Now let's just pull over here because this is kind of amazing.

Did you pick up on what happened there?

God changes God's mind! Moses made God change Their mind!

Now as strange as that may sound, it's something we see all throughout the Bible. Throughout the scripture there's this really ancient conversation going on that challenges this pretty conventional way we think about God and the way that shapes how we live:

That God is unchanging and that God is always the same, forever and ever. Which of course shapes how we live, right? Well, if God is unchanging then all these beliefs about God shouldn't change and how we worship God shouldn't change. And if God doesn't change, well then why should we? What's the point in thinking differently? Change is bad.

But this ancient conversation would say something different:

It says that if God is love then God *must* change because that's what love does. Love bends. It flexes. It learns. It ebbs and flows. It changes because it's in relationship and relationships demand, necessitate, and cause change.

And we know that about love, don't we? We know how it requires us to change, adapt, move, and become something and someone different. We know that's what love does. I've officiated so many weddings where someone has said, "You make me a better person." That's because of love. It will always lead to change and movement.

And one of the really beautiful conversations we see in stories like this one is around how God isn't fixed and unchanging, but how God is able to change and grow and learn because God is love and that's what love does.

Yeah . . . huge, huge shift in how we think about what God is like and totally changes how we live.

But if that one needs to marinate for a bit more, we can move on to another point being made here in this part of the story.

Now I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that you, like me, were taught that arguing is a bad thing.

We were taught to keep our voices down, not get all riled up, to always be polite and not rock the boat, and to choose to keep the peace and be agreeable.

Anyone?

Yeah.

In some way, we've all received the narrative that to argue is bad. I certainly have. It's probably the biggest thing my partner will complain about: "You don't argue!" It's true. It was hard-wired into me not to argue.

And this is where that other point this story is making kicks in, this point that says something else about arguing, this point that's actually backed up by a whole boatload of scientific study:

It's this point that says to argue is holy. Read that again: to argue is holy. Holy. Holy! There is something holy about arguing.

And that something isn't just speaking our truths. It's not just being empowered and standing our ground. It's not just being vulnerable and courageous. It's not just passionately speaking up for things that matter . . . it's all those things but also something deeper than that.

What can make arguing holy is doing all of those things, while, at the very same time, remaining open to the possibility you may be wrong, respecting the humanity of the other, actually hearing what they are saying, and being willing to have their reality colour yours.

Yeah . . . that's what can make arguing holy.

That's what makes it creative and generative, something that can lead to new ideas, something that can draw together instead of push apart, something that's more than just yelling, "I'm right. No, I'm right."

Yeah . . . despite what we were told, arguing can be holy.

And so as people being invited to be holy, which really just means "being different than everyone else," one of the questions we have to ask is: "How do we do that? How do we practice the art of holy arguing?"

And sure, practice it with our friends, our partners, our kids, and our colleagues, our church community, absolutely. But let's get super real and go where it really counts:

How do we practice it with people we *know* are wrong?

How do we practice it with people who think BIPOC rights and lives don't matter?

Who think women shouldn't be believed?

Who say all Muslims are terrorists?

Who see our world as disposable?

Who think the poor can be exploited?

Yeah . . . how do we argue with *them*? How do we practice this with the people we want to put on some faraway island? How do we keep it holy with them?

Honestly?

I have no idea. I struggle to answer that one.

While there is something to the whole 'don't cast your pearls before swine' wisdom, there are some things we just can't stand down on, there are some things we need to hold people accountable to. There are some hills we need to die on. So here's what I know . . . no scratch that. Here's what I trust:

There's a power in this kind of arguing because there is a power in sharing our truths, telling our stories, and in standing up and speaking out, and because the alternative isn't an option—because we can't just put them on an island somewhere, because division isn't part of God's vision for the world, we persist. We keep arguing and trust it'll be enough.

And so God and Moses argue, and because they do, because they practice this, people's lives are saved and God ends up going with Moses and the people.

But the story doesn't end there. Feeling good about how things ended up and like he kind of saved the day, Moses asked God to "show me your glory." Which is really to ask to see the fullness of God—to see God in all of God's . . . glory. But instead of saying, "Sure man!" God says, "Ummm well you can't see my face because you'll die, but here's what we'll do: I'll put you behind this rock here, cover your eyes with my hand, walk by, and you can see me from behind." And so God did, and, as the story goes, God walked by and Moses saw God's back.

And again, we'll pull over here because well . . . I mean, we got some questions!

Why can't he see God's face?! He'll die if he does?! What's up with that?! Didn't he just see God's face? Why the change?!

All good questions. Some we can answer. Some we can just argue over. Some that'll just be a mystery. But instead of getting wrapped up in those, let's just skip to the truth I think this part of the story may be offering us:

Sometimes you see God's face and sometimes you see God's butt.

Yeah.

Sometimes you see the fullness of God, and sometimes you see the wake of God. Sometimes you'll be with God, and sometimes you'll be behind God.

That's the thing about this life we're here trying to make. That's the thing about being spiritual. Sometimes you'll see where God is, and other times you'll see where God was. Sometimes God is with you, and other times God's ahead of you. And here's the thing about those moments when you realize that God isn't with you but up ahead of you and when all you see is God's wake:

You can't stay there. You can't stay put. You have to follow. You have to catch up. And the thing about that? It means leaving things behind.

Yeah . . . to follow after the God Who Moves Ahead sometimes means leaving things behind.

Now that could be anything really . . .

Maybe for you it means leaving your work . . . maybe your work was once super life-giving and sacred but now you're feeling pulled somewhere else.

Or maybe you're realizing that the values you were raised with or the worldview you've created are being challenged by Jesus' teachings of love and justice and God is calling you into some new ideas.

Or maybe you find yourself in the middle of a pandemic and you can't worship the way you used to, or you can't socialize the way you used to, or you can't really do anything the way you used to, and God is calling you into some new ways of practicing your spirituality, being in community, and creating a meaningful life.

Whatever it is, the truth of it is that if we find ourselves looking out and seeing God's back, we can't stay put. We can't stay put. We need to do that hard but sacred work of moving forward and following God into new places, ideas, and practices, trusting that it's there that we can find our life.

Yeah . . . sometimes you see God's face and you can just soak up the fullness of it all, but other times you just see Her butt and you need to follow.

So those are just a couple of the conversations this story opens up for us. And so my friends, as we head into whatever is next . . .

May we each engage in the art of holy arguing, and may we see where God is calling us to go and do the hard but sacred work of leaving behind that which is comfortable, and move into the places, ideas, and practices God is calling us into.

May grace and peace be with you.

THE SERMON SHAD WROTE

REV. NICK COATES

So I'm calling this sermon, 'The Sermon that Shad wrote.' Shad, for those of you who don't know him, is a black Canadian hip hop artist, poet, and activist. You may know him from being the host of CBC's Q a few years back. This sermon is basically me riffing off of something he posted to Instagram this week.

Like a lot of us, as I get involved in the anti-racism protests and ask how we can create a more just world, I've been listening to and learning from black and Indigenous voices and something Shad said in that post picked up on some stuff I've been learning in an anti-racism class I'm taking, and it all kind of voltronned into what I'm about to share with you.

First though, a disclaimer (because who doesn't love a sermon that comes with a disclaimer?):

This might be a tough sermon to hear. It was a tough one to write. We're gonna look at a story that holds a truth we maybe, most definitely, do not want to hear. So before we get into it, let's muster up some courage, get vulnerable, and choose not to run away. Let's choose to be here because this is a truth I think we all need to hear—and not just because it's a part of our tradition, but because, according to Jesus, it's the key to finding the very kind of life we're here looking for.

So today we're gonna talk about a story we don't like, and then I'll leave you with the hardest question you'll ever have to answer. Did I do a good job getting you excited for this?

So there's a story in the Bible and the gist of it is that someone with a lot of wealth comes up to Jesus and asks a question. It's a question you'd expect a rabbi to get: "How can one get into the kingdom of God?" And long story short, Jesus says the way to get in is "to sell everything, give the money to the poor, and then come and follow me."

Go and do that, he says, because, as the line goes, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into God's kingdom.

Now you're already probably "annnnnd I'm out" because we don't like this story.

And the reason we don't like this story is because this story is our story. It's a story about us. If we were to place ourselves in it, we're the rich person coming up to ask Jesus how to get into God's kingdom. We're the one Jesus is telling to go and give away our wealth. We're the ones asking, "How do we get into the kingdom of God?"

Now as you begin to think, "Wait, I've never asked that," let's remember when we talk about "God's kingdom" or as some writers put it, "the kingdom of heaven," we're not talking about life *after* death, we're talking life *before* death. When we hear that phrase, we're talking about a life here and now that hums with reverence; a life here and now that's connected with God, each other, and ourselves; a life here and now that's caught up with what God is doing in the world, that's bent towards creating a world of justice, peace, and harmony amongst all living things.

To ask how to enter into the Kingdom is to ask: 'How do I enter into the fullness and wholeness of life? How do I enter into a world that is more like the one that was meant to be?'

Those are questions we've all asked, haven't we? They are questions about how to be human and alive in the world. They are deep and soulful questions about how to live fully, deeply, and well.

That's what the guy is asking about. He wants to know how he gets in on that. So he asks Jesus, "How can I experience that life and world now?"

And what Jesus tells him, and what he tells us, is: "In order to get *that*, you need to get rid of your wealth."

Yeah.

Right?!

That is not the answer we want is it?

I mean, get rid of our wealth?! No wonder we don't like this story. Just like the guy in the story, we leave saying, 'Ummm no thank you.' We conveniently forget about his teaching or try to rationalize it into meaning something else.

So remembering that courage we mustered, let's do the hard work here and dig into this. What's this story trying to tell us? What is it about wealth that stops us from entering into that life and world?

And as we do so, let's keep in mind that when we talk about wealth, it's not just money we're talking about here. There is all kinds of wealth.

There's financial wealth and material wealth, but we can also be wealthy in our health, our knowledge, and certainly, of course, in our privilege.

'Wealth' is a word we use to talk about the valuable things we have in abundance.

And the problem with those things isn't so much with having them (although that's certainly a conversation Jesus seems to want us to have) but with what that wealth will inevitably do.

'Cause what does wealth do?

Sure, it makes us comfy, provides stability and security, but let's be more honest, let's go deeper than that . . . let's zoom out a bit.

What's wealth do? What does having those valuable things in abundance do?

It separates.

Wealth separates.

Wealth inevitably separates us into the haves and have nots.

It splits us up into the homed and homeless, the fed and the hungry, the clothed and the naked, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged.

Wealth separates.

It creates space between us. It separates us from one another.

And the thing Jesus is pointing out here, the problem he sees with wealth, the tension he's getting at is what happens because of that space.

He's calling out wealth because that space and separation stops the haves from being able to see and understand the have nots; it stops us from being able to see and understand people's suffering; it stops us from being able to practice empathy and compassion; it stops us from being able to see and understand what is actually happening in the world; it stops us from being able to see and understand the reality of the world we live in; and in that, and here's Shad's point, it causes us—the wealthy—to live a lie.

It causes us to think that our reality is the only reality, that our problems are the only problems, that our normal is everyone's normal, and that how we see and understand the world is how everyone else sees and understands the world.

Wealth can make us live a lie because the space it creates causes us to have a life and world that's insulated from and ignorant of the lives and world around us.

That's what Jesus is getting at here and here's why that's a problem for him. Here's why he's saying it's such a huge issue we should just get rid of our wealth:

The life and world we're separated from is where we find the very thing we're looking for. The life and world we want is found only when we're connected with the lives and world around us.

'Cause remember what we're talking about when we talk about the Kingdom. We're talking about a life here and now that hums with reverence, a life here and now that's caught up with what God is doing in the world, a life here and now that's

connected with God, each other, and ourselves, a life here and now that's bent towards creating a world of justice, peace, and harmony amongst all living things.

That life just doesn't happen on its own. It's not something just given to us. It takes work. It takes movement. That life is only found by moving towards each other. It's only found by eliminating the space between us.

That life is only found by seeing and understanding, by exposing ourselves to the reality of others, by listening to and learning from the voices we never hear, by letting that reality shape our own, by letting their truth shape our truth.

That life is found in the work that leads us to do, in the community that creates, in the repentance and transformation that causes, it's found in the world that leads us to create.

That's where we find what it means to be human. That's where we find the answer to our question. It's there we find the life we're looking for.

This is why Jesus comes down so hard on wealth. This is why he tells us and that rich man to get rid of it. It's Jesus letting us in on something really huge:

We'll never find it until we put our wealth down and do the work of moving, listening, and learning. We'll never find it until we stop letting our wealth—whatever it is—get in the way of the truth.

And here's why this matters. Here's why we can't dismiss this story:

It's not just because we're all trying to find and have that life, but because as we continue to do the work of anti-racism, that movement, that stepping out, that giving up of our wealth, is EXACTLY what's required of us. That, as Shad said, is where allyship begins.

And until we are allies, until we do that work of listening, learning, and embracing truth, the world God wants us to have, the world that life leads to, that world of harmony and peace, is not going to happen.

Which brings us to that the hardest question we'll ever have to answer:

What will you do with your wealth? Will you put it down and eliminate the space and find the life and world you're looking for?

or

Will you walk away, holding on to the one thing that'll stop you from finding the very thing you're looking for?



TOMATO SAUCE, JESUS, AND 3 THINGS

REV. NICK COATES

To help pay my way through seminary I worked at this bar in Toronto. I secretly think the only reason I got the job was because I was going to be a United Church minister.

See, the bar was called “The Saint.” It was named after this United Church that had burned down. The church was nicknamed “the Saint of Ossington” because of all the good work it had done feeding people during the Depression.

One night I was talking with a regular who knew I was going to be a minister, and he said, “You know, I’ve been meaning to ask this for a long time . . . why a minister?! What is it about Jesus that made you want to do this?”

He wasn’t being mean. He was genuinely curious. I can't remember what I told him. I just remember his question because it’s such a good question.

Why Jesus?

I mean, out of all the ways to live out there, out of all the paths that can lead us deeper into the Divine, out of everything else we could be doing with our time and energy, why Jesus? Why do this?

Anyone ever wonder that before?

It's okay to admit it. There’s no shame there. Even Jesus was all, ‘Ummm, why am I doing this again?’ We should all ask it. It’s a healthy question to ask on the regular. Not so much because we *need* an answer to it, like it’ll be on the final exam kind of way, but because it reminds us just why we do things like church and why it all matters. Asking it helps us refocus and realign and find the energy to keep going, exploring, and moving deeper into this way of life Jesus opens up for us.

So, being a community that isn't afraid of asking big questions, that knows doubt and curiosity are holy, today we'll ask the big question: "Why? Why Jesus?"

And to help us get there, we'll talk about . . .

tomato sauce & the most important person you've never heard of; that story in the Bible; and then 3 answers to our question.

And hopefully, through it all, we can leave here feeling excited and energized, or maybe just with more questions, which sometimes is just as good.

If you go to your average big grocery store after church today and head to the pasta aisle, any guesses on how many different tomato sauces you'll find?

36

On average, you'll find 36 different varieties. There's traditional, there's chunky, there's extra chunky, there's garden, there's spicy, and then all kinds of different off-shoots of those. 36 different choices of what to bring home for dinner.

Now rewind 50 years ago to the 70s, and take a guess on how many kinds of tomato sauce there were.

1

Plain. One choice of what to bring home for dinner.

So what happened? How did we go from 1 to 36?

The answer is Howard Moskowitz and he is the most important person you've never heard of. Howard Moskowitz was an American psychophysicist and you can make the case, as Malcolm Gladwell does, that he's done more to make people happy in the last 50 years than anyone else. He did that through his radical and revolutionary idea that when it comes to human preferences, there are no universals. One thing doesn't work for everyone.

When it came to things like tomato sauce, for example, the dominant idea was that there was such a thing as the perfect sauce that everyone would enjoy. Companies

like Ragu and Prego built their entire companies around this. They each had one sauce that they each thought was perfect and that everyone would like, and they went head-to-head for everybody's money. Now in the 70s and 80s, Prego was the more popular product, but despite that, their sales were slumping so they hired Howard to tell them how to fix it.

And here's what Howard told them: **“There's no such thing as a perfect tomato sauce, only perfect tomato sauces.”** Prego didn't believe him. That just didn't jive with conventional wisdom. **“Not one perfect sauce?”** they said. **“No way! Look, millions of people buy our sauce.”** What Howard said back is brilliant and the engine of his revolutionary idea. He said, **“But that doesn't mean they like it.”**

So Howard went to work. He made 45 different kinds of tomato sauce, each one with a slightly different recipe, and he got 1000s of people to eat them and rate what they liked about them.

And here's why he is so brilliant:

Instead of giving Prego the recipe that the most people liked, essentially saying, “Here's the more perfect recipe. This one will be more universally liked,” Howard went a different direction. He analyzed all the data and he clustered it based on the patterns he saw.

What he saw was that people don't universally like one kind of sauce. People actually like three kinds of sauces: plain, spicy, and chunky. When it comes to tomato sauce, there isn't a perfect sauce, there are just perfect sauces.

Now this blew Prego's mind because that meant that despite what it looked like, one-third of Americans preferred chunky sauce over plain. They immediately started making it, and in 10 years they banked \$600 million off of chunky alone. 600 million! So seeing that there was that much money to be made, every other company hired Howard and followed suit. Soon there were four different kinds of



everything—mustards, pickles, olive oils, and vinegars, each one of them moving to people's specific tastes, instead of having the people move to them.

Howard Moskowitz is the most important person you've never heard of because he completely revolutionized not only how we think about human choice and preference, but also how we shop, what our grocery stores look like, and how companies market to us.

Why are there 36 kinds of tomato sauce? Because Howard Moskowitz changed the game.

So what do tomato sauce and Jesus have to do with each other?

Everything.

There's an ancient story in the Bible. You can find it in the Gospel according to Luke. The story takes place on the Sabbath, that holy day of the week when people would go to their synagogue or temple to rest, practice delight, and be in God's presence.

As the story begins, all kinds of people are gathering to do just that. Everyone is sitting up front in the nice and comfortable seats but there, way in the back, past the watered down coffee and dusty furniture that they can't get rid of because someone donated it, standing all alone in a dark dusty corner of the room, is a woman.

Now we don't know much about her other than that we're told how she's "bent over and crooked with pain." Some versions of the story say she's got a spirit within her, other's say she's got arthritis. So we don't really know what's going on with her. It could be mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical, or perhaps all of those things. It doesn't really matter. What matters is that she's been this way for 18 years. Eighteen years of pain, despair, and shame. Eighteen years of being defined and seen as her affliction. Eighteen years of being known as the 'The Bent and Crooked Woman.'

Now, nobody else in the room seems to notice her. They are all up front while she is hiding in the back, listening to Jesus talk. And as she listens, she feels the place begin to hum with reverence, she feels the air being rearranged, and suddenly she realizes he's stopped talking. The woman looks up and sees that Jesus is no longer up at the front with everyone else, but he's right in front of her, looking directly at her, touching her, saying just loud enough for everyone to hear: "Woman, you're free." Suddenly she feels something release within her. She feels the past 18 years wash off of her. She's able to straighten up and stand up tall and her whole life and world changes. No longer is she 'The Bent and Crooked Woman.' Freed from her corner, we're told how she began to give thanks to God for this miracle.

But the religious leaders watching all this go down, they freak out, yelling at people to settle down, telling the woman to stop, saying that this can't be from God because clearly that's not the kind of God we have. "It's the Sabbath," they say, "and nobody works on the Sabbath, not even God! This is breaking the rules."

But Jesus,

not having any of it, gets angry at the leaders: "Really?! *That's* what you think God is like?! *That's* how you think this works?! You frauds! If your cows or donkeys needed water on the Sabbath you'd untie them and lead them to water, wouldn't you? If God's okay with that, don't you think God would much rather I untie a woman, a human being, and lead her into new life on the Sabbath?" Then, pointing at the woman, he said, "*This* is the kind of God we have."

And watching all of this go down, we're told how all the people were delighted and started to cheer.

Just like Howard Moskowitz and tomato sauce, Jesus is doing something huge here, something that shows why he matters and why we do this:

He's completely changing the game. He's completely flipping upside down not only how we think about God, but how we think about faith and what it means to be human.

I think we can see this happening in three different places.

First . . .

Jesus changes the game by changing how we think about movement.

One of the things to pay attention to in these stories is the movement because more often than not, there's a whole lot of meaning there.

So what's the movement in this story?

Jesus moves *towards* the woman.

He goes from where everyone else is, where it's nice and comfortable, where everyone has it all together, and he *moves* to the back, *away* from them and *towards* that woman. And not just any woman, but a woman who would be considered sinful, to be avoided, someone who wasn't even worth having a name. This is scandalous. This is a big deal. This matters.

And it matters because not only does it tell us that we have a God who moves towards us—that the Universe, that Source, that Spirit is bent towards connection and relationship. It also, and perhaps even more importantly, reminds us of what our own movements need to look like.

So often we want to live our lives up front, don't we? We want to live in the centre. We want to be where everyone else is, where it's respectable, nice and comfortable.

That's where we want to call 'home.' We buy homes in the nice suburbs, we send kids to respectable schools, we go to the fancy restaurants, we play in the nice parks. Those are the places we go to find and have our lives.

But what Jesus' movement shows us here is that to find and have our lives, to find that sense of home and place, we can't do it from the centre. We do it through a movement towards the margins.

It means intentionally looking for who has been kicked out, pushed aside, and left behind, and instead of waiting for them to move to us, beginning the work of moving towards them, of being in relationship with them, of building our homes with them.

Jesus matters because he redefines what our world should look like by redefining where we call home. We can never be at home—we can never feel nice and comfortable—until we have moved to make sure everyone belongs.

So some questions for us to rumble with:

Who do you need to move toward?

Who's not allowed in your circle?

How can you learn to see those who have been kicked out?

Second . . .

Jesus matters because he completely changes how we think about faith.

What we see in this story is a pretty common understanding of faith: it's about believing certain things or doing certain things. To be faithful is to follow the rules. It's to believe certain things and to behave in certain ways.

I'm sure we've all, in some way, been taught that kind of faith. Sometimes it's pretty obvious like when you need to agree to a set of very specific doctrines, but other times it's more subtle, like when one idea of how to worship and connect with God is said to be the only way.

But what we see Jesus doing here is calling that out and offering us a totally different understanding of faith.

Faith, Jesus is saying, isn't about obedience. Faith, as the great Rabbi Ward-Lev puts it, is about dialogue.

'Cause here's the thing: if God is a God who moves, speaks, and touches, and faith is all about communing with this God, then faith can't be fixed, because once it's

fixed, what happens? It closes up. It boxes in. It shuts off. **And the problem with that is that it stops us from seeing, hearing, and feeling the one thing faith is meant to help us see, hear, and feel. That kind of faith takes us away from life, not into it.** What Jesus does here is change the game by offering us an ancient and beautiful understanding of what faith actually is:

It's openness. It's listening. It's dialogue.

Faith is this ever-widening posture of openness to the movements of the Divine around us.

So some questions for you . . .

Is your faith open?

What gets in the way of having that ever-widening posture?

What would happen if we actually listened to God?

And third . . .

Too often, way too often, just like in this story, God is used to threaten, hurt and control people.

Too often we get the impression that if we don't do this or that, if we don't believe this or act like that, well, God isn't going to like it and we'll be punished for it. So not wanting to risk that, we do this or do that by hiding who we are, saying things we don't believe, by putting up with abuse, and by remaining in unhealthy relationships and in toxic churches, because it's what God would want and who can argue with God?!

Anyone know what I'm talking about?

In some way, we've all been given that idea of God. I know pretty much everyone celebrating Pride this week has been given that idea of God. In some way, we all feel a lot like that woman, bent over and crooked under the weight of trying to do what we've been told God wants.

But here's the thing, here's why Jesus matters, here's the liberating truth he gives us about God:

If it doesn't lead you into life, if it doesn't free and release you, if it doesn't liberate and make, if it doesn't feel, taste, or smell like love: it. is. not. from. God.

Jesus matters because he gives us a new barometer to measure what's holy and of God. He matters because he reminds us that love is the way of the universe. That's why he freaks out at the religious elite, calling them frauds—they're not selling God, they're selling garbage.

So some questions for you . . .

With that in mind, what lies have you been told about God?

What beliefs, narratives, and labels do you need to be liberated from?

And let's flip that—what beliefs, narratives, and labels can you help others be liberated from?

So to wrap it all up . . .

Why does Jesus matter? Why do this? Why be here?

Because when it comes to being human, when it comes to connecting with God, when it comes to finding a life worth living, he completely changed the game. By showing us where to find our home, how to live a life of faith, and that God is a God of love, he changed everything. He totally rewrote the script. He changed everything.

No wonder the people cheered.



**HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY ALICE BRITTAIN
ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2021**

In June, Alice was very excited and honoured to meet her newest great-grandson, Sidney Christopher James Brittain.

Unfortunately there will be no big celebration as Alice is in hospice, but if you wish to congratulate this lovely lady, please send cards to:

Alice Brittain

c/o Red Deer Lake United Church
96187 Spruce Meadows Green SW
Foothills, Alberta T1S 2R9

PRAISE THE RAIN

by Joy Harjo

Praise the rain, the seagull dive
The curl of plant, the raven talk—
Praise the hurt, the house slack
The stand of trees, the dignity—
Praise the dark, the moon cradle
The sky fall, the bear sleep—
Praise the mist, the warrior name
The earth eclipse, the fired leap—
Praise the backwards, upward sky
The baby cry, the spirit food—
Praise canoe, the fish rush
The hole for frog, the upside-down—
Praise the day, the cloud cup
The mind flat, forget it all—

Praise crazy. Praise sad.
Praise the path on which we're led.
Praise the roads on earth and water.
Praise the eater and the eaten.
Praise beginnings; praise the end.
Praise the song and praise the singer.

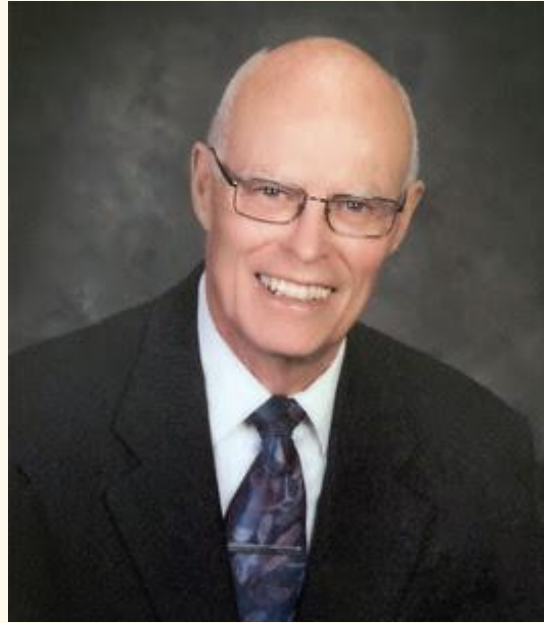
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.



We were blessed to have Patti, daughter of Irene and Ralph Carter, read this beautiful poem by Joy Harjo to mark National Indigenous Day during our online service on June 20.



RDLUC PASSAGES



ANGUS BRYAN MACDONALD

*Angus was born in Trail, B.C. on December 3, 1928
and passed away in Calgary on July 20, 2021.*

His family moved several times during his early years, settling in Calgary's North Hill near the beginning of the Second World War. Times were tough, so they lived in the garage while building the house fondly known as '840'. Angus and his brothers diligently worked alongside their father mixing and pouring concrete, shingling, and completing all the carpentry. A large garden in the lot next door became the boys' hockey rink in winter. Later, curling became the sport of choice and the four brothers entered many fun-filled bonspiels.

After summer jobs with Sterling Collieries near Edson, Angus joined the CPR as a locomotive fireman, then worked for the City of Calgary for 34 years, first as a bus driver and later as a dispatcher and supervisor at the Fire Department Alarm Room. Angus married Audrey Clark in 1956 and they created a loving home on Marsden Road, raising their four children in a life centred on family, church and community. Many special memories were created around the dining room table, where extended family and friends were always welcome, and also on camping trips with the tent trailer or longer road trips to visit relatives in B.C. and Oregon.

Upon retirement in 1993, Angus and Audrey moved to Didsbury, making new friends at curling, lawn bowling and church; staying busy with home improvement and gardening projects; and enjoying time with their five grandchildren. Audrey's journey with dementia brought about a move to Red Deer before their return to Calgary in 2010. Angus remained devoted to her until her passing in 2019.

Angus is deeply missed by his children Colleen (Vital) Ouellette, Jackie MacDonald (Lawrence Alexander), and Cameron (Wanda) MacDonald; his grandchildren Maryse Culham, Matthieu Ouellette (George Lavenski), Malcolm (Morgan) MacDonald and Evan Alexander; his great-grandchildren Annabelle, Catianna, Sébastien, Julia and Kieran; his sisters MJ (Ken) Samuelson and Kathy MacDonald; sisters-in-law Evelyn, Jane and Aileen; his nieces and nephews; and many members of the Clark family. He was predeceased by his wife Audrey, son Ian MacDonald, granddaughter Nadia Ouellette, parents Neil and Margaret MacDonald, siblings Florence (Bill) Owens, Norris, Malcolm, and Nelson, and nephews Brian and Glenn.

A memorial service for Angus will be held in the fall of 2021 (date to be announced). Memorial donations are gratefully accepted at Red Deer Lake United Church, where Angus was a cherished member for the past eleven years; and at Dulcina Hospice, where he received compassionate care during his last weeks.



This photograph was taken of Angus in hospice having a visit from a miniature pony. The prayer shawl on top of his bed was a gift from RDLUC Congregational Care and created by the Shawl and Quilt Team.

Angus's daughter Colleen has given us permission to share this with you, as Angus was so thrilled to receive his shawl and caring support from his church family.

Colleen says: "Dad absolutely loves his blanket, and I feel the hugs enveloping him every time we cozy him up with it. He would be pleased to let everyone know about this beautiful part of the pastoral care at RDLUC. I have been reading to Dad the many blessings in the prayer booklet gifted to him."

WALKING WITH GRIEF

The Mountain Poem

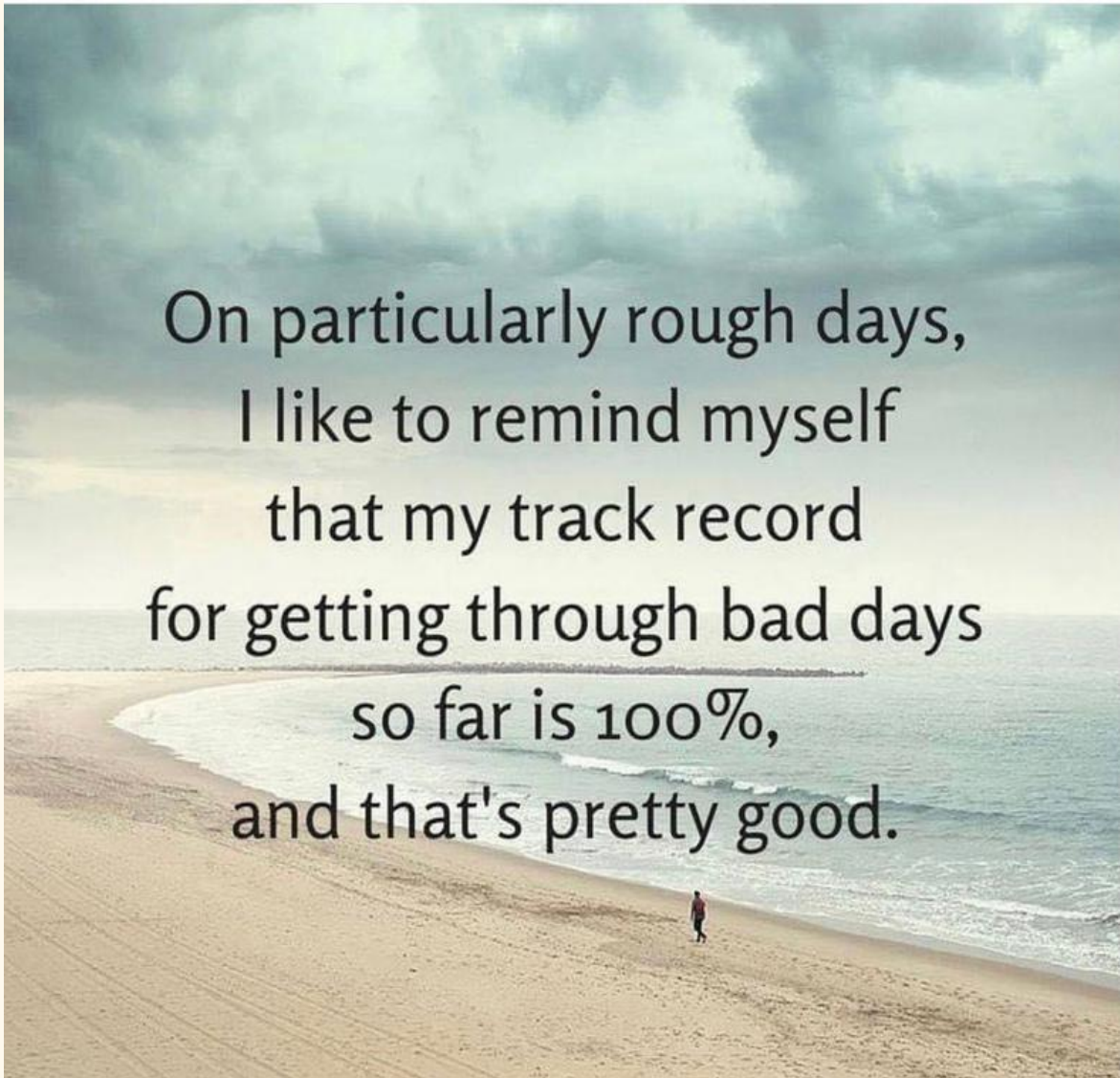
If the mountain seems too big today
then climb a hill instead
if the morning brings you sadness
it's okay to stay in bed
if the day ahead weighs heavy
and your plans feel like a curse
there's no shame in re-arranging
don't make yourself feel worse
if a shower stings like needles
and a bath feels like you'll drown
if you haven't washed your hair for days
don't throw away your crown
a day is not a lifetime
a rest is not defeat
don't think of it as failure
just a quiet, kind retreat
it's okay to take a moment
from an anxious, fractured mind
the world will not stop turning
while you get realigned
the mountain will still be there
when you want to try again
so climb it in your own time
and love yourself til then

by Laura Ding-Edwards

submitted by Jackie Walters

WALKING WITH GRIEF

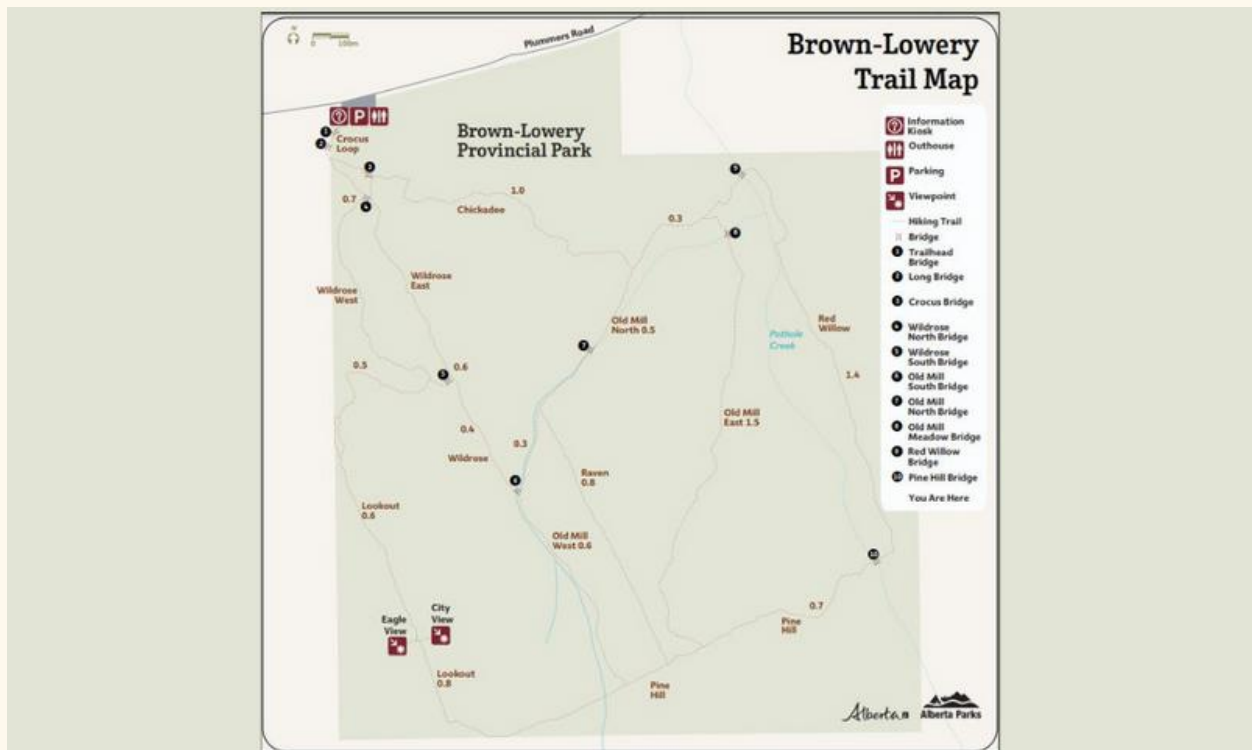
On particularly rough days,
I like to remind myself
that my track record
for getting through bad days
so far is 100%,
and that's pretty good.



FOOTHILLS EXCURSIONS: BROWN-LOWERY PROVINCIAL PARK BY KATHERINE MATIKO

As a new resident of Priddis Greens, I am exploring Alberta's foothills with new eyes and new purpose. This beautiful area west of Calgary is now my home.

I like to start my wanderings at the Millarville General Store, where I can stock up on provisions, grab a coffee and chat with owner Tim Babey and his friendly staff. In fact, I often turn to Tim, a long-time resident of the Millarville area, for ideas about where to explore next. He suggested that I start with Brown-Lowery Provincial Park, a mere twelve-minute drive northwest of the store on Plummers Road. (The park is about 52 kilometres southwest of Calgary.)



I chose the Wildrose Loop on the west side of this day-use area, a four-kilometre trek. Hard to believe it took me over two hours to complete, but then, I like to stop and smell the roses – and the fleabane, cow parsnip, wood lilies, buttercups, bergamot, paintbrush, harebell, vetch, fireweed, sticky purple geraniums . . . well, you get the idea.

In my mind, cow parsnip is king of the valley, despite its commoner's name. The trail is dotted with these glorious, person-high flowers and their fan-like leaves cover the forest floor, emitting a wonderful spicy scent. Don't touch one though – the plant can cause a nasty rash. Just give them a regal nod as you stroll past.



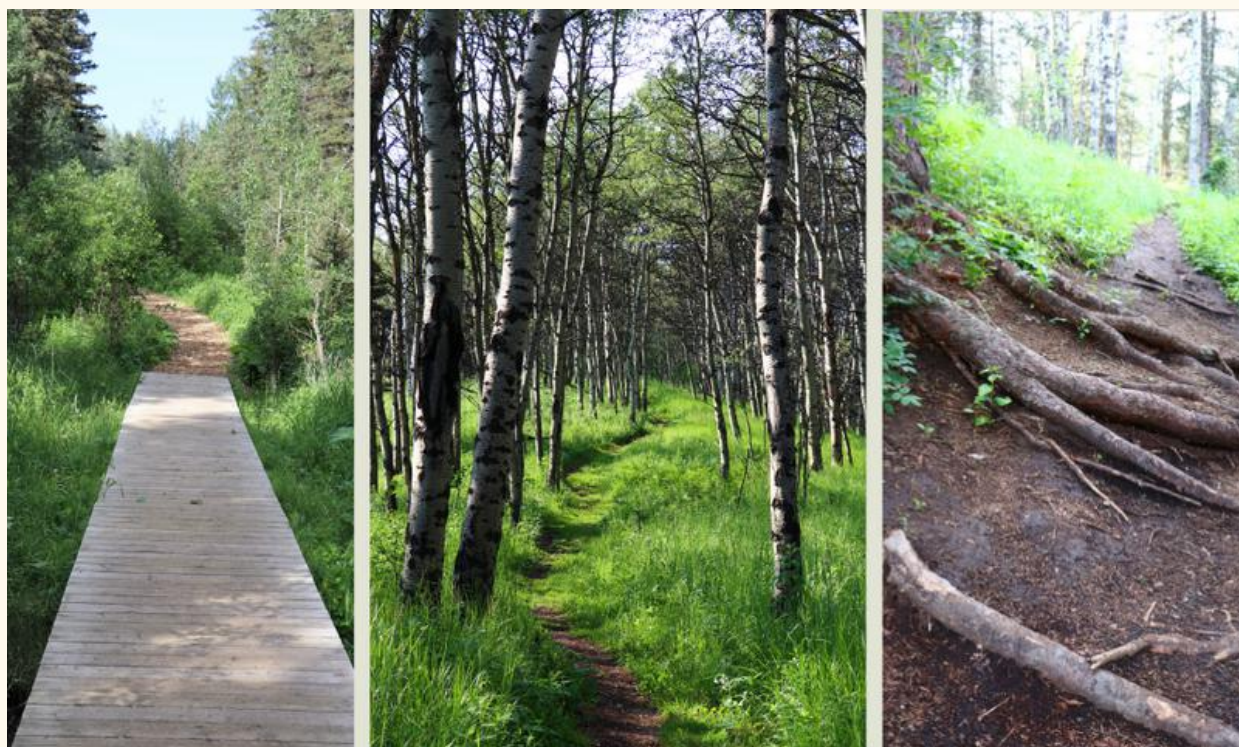
With all the wonders of this shady trail, I almost missed this little beauty, one of only two wood lilies I spotted during my early July visit.



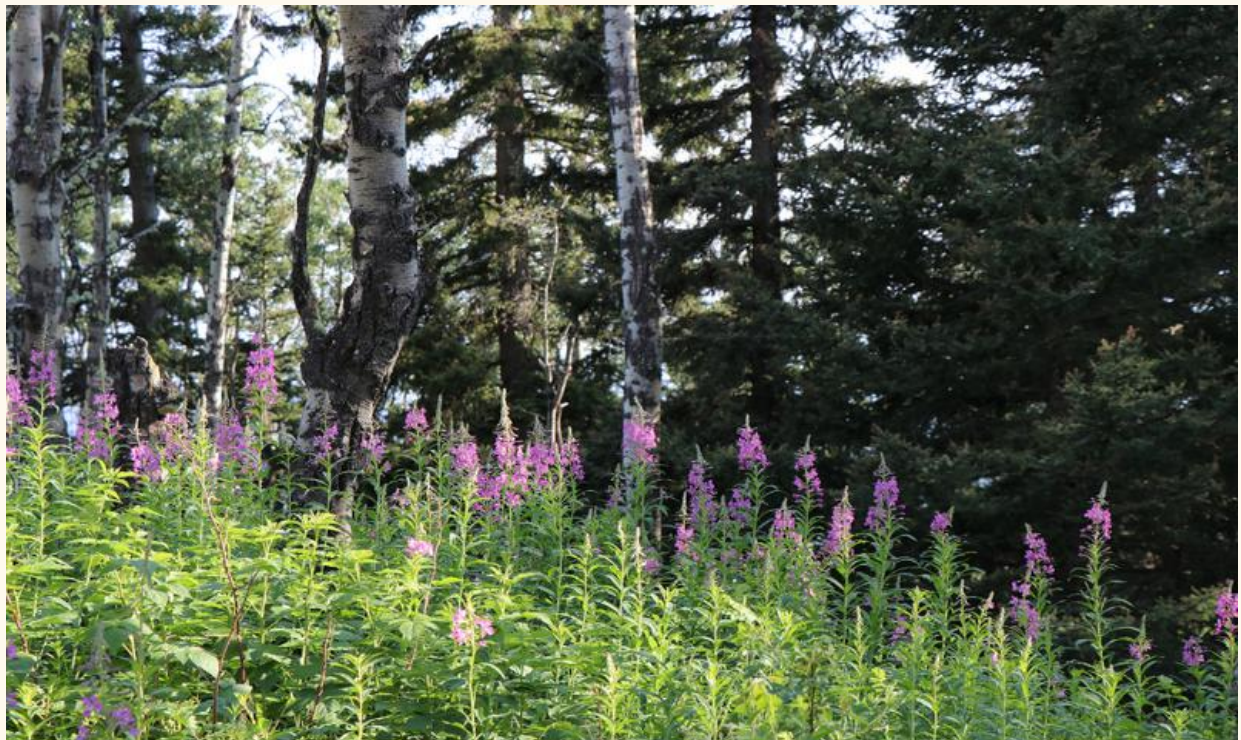
Here are some of the other wildflowers that caught my camera's eye.



The trails throughout the park are lovingly maintained by volunteers and the numerous bridges are sturdy. However, you will want to be well shod if you visit because tree roots are just waiting to trip you up while you gaze into the depths of the surrounding forest. The trail I explored was like a secret path winding deeper and deeper into a medieval wood. Bring the kids and let their imaginations run wild.



After a short incline along a fence line heading west, I came upon a meadow simply bursting with purple fireweed cheerfully sharing space with a large stand of aspen. Named for its reliable presence shortly after a forest fire, this beautiful plant does not seem aptly called a weed (perhaps it would be in another setting). Here, in Brown-Lowery Provincial Park, it is a glory.



It wasn't the best time of the day for photos of a western vista, but I thought this one did justice to the amazing Eagle View at the top of the hill. On the east side of the escarpment, you can see the Calgary skyline in the distance, although I didn't attempt a photo due to haze on the horizon. Pick a bench here where you can enjoy lunch or a rest before heading back to the parking lot.



After my contemplative hike, I headed back to Millarville General Store for an ice cream and a welcome cool-down after exploring this out-of-the-way, peaceful and well-worth-visiting provincial park in Alberta's foothills.

Until next time,
Katherine



SWEET INNOCENCE

If these don't make you smile, your 'smiler' may be broken . . .

Submitted by Anne Welsh-Baskett





CHURCH HUMOUR



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Do you have a story to share?

A memory? A poem? A photograph?

We would love to publish 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 September 1, 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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