

Sunday March 22, 2020
5th Sunday of Lent

Welcome to a time of worship and reflection

The Prayers and scripture selections are from “Worship Design Studio.” This week is called “The First Dinner: Risking Rejection.” It is part of our worship series for Lent. But each week stands alone so you can easily follow if you missed previous weeks. The reflection is written by Rev. Julie Lebrun at Inlet United Church. InletUnited.ca

You can follow this paper here for everything you need.

Prayer

It is so hard to not be afraid.

Sometimes our fear makes us less compassionate,
and more judgmental.

We think we can ward off getting hurt by holding back,
unwilling to risk putting ourselves out there for the sake of love.

Forgive us, O God.

Encourage us to extravagant acts of love,
especially when we are frightened.

You entered our story through Jesus,
now help us to enter fully into the story
of your kin-dom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Assurance

Know this: There is no limit on love.

Love doesn't run out,
and you can start giving more of it anytime.

You are forgiven and freed,

encouraged and loved
by a God who wants you to live fully.
Let us enter the passion of Christ,
and take a moment to pray for peace, comfort and energy where it is
most needed....
May Peace be with you in each breath you take. Amen

Scripture Readings

Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still
waters;
³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you
are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you
anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I
shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Mark 14:1 - 9

¹It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened
Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest
Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, "Not during the festival, or
there may be a riot among the people."

³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at
the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment
of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his
head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why
was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have
been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to

the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Reflection

As I write this reflection, I hope and pray it will give you some comfort and perspective in the strange times we find ourselves. “Global pandemic” was not in my vocabulary up until a few weeks ago. Now it seems to occupy much of my mental energy and conversation.

As a minister it is very difficult to follow through with the decision to not hold public worship. Ministry, spirituality, church, is all about connection. As a mild extrovert I would vote for in person contact over email or phone any time. However, the decision is out of our hands as it is for all Faith Traditions in Canada and abroad.

As a minister I’m fortunate to get the job of reflecting on biblical text, our faith tradition and the context we live in. This week, I feel like I could have spun out of control without this practice of reflection and prayer. Now more than ever we all need the capacity to pause, pray, reflect, give thanks, and act kindly. We need to digest huge amounts of information of what a pandemic means and how it affects our daily living. We are changing our lives in order to “flatten the curve” which means everyone needs to participate.

In a culture that values individualism and the free choices that makes this possible, we find ourselves in uncharted waters. Like others I have

experienced disappointment and even anger at a cancelled trip. As the week has gone on, I moved to understand the much bigger perspective and realize there are implications we still can't fully understand.

In our scripture reading a woman pours expensive ointment over Jesus. The people watching become angry and say "why waste the ointment this way? It could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor."

"The Social Science commentary about this text points out that the concern for the poor would have been a deep moral concern. In ancient Palestine, people believed that there existed a set amount of 'goods'—material, honor, friendship, love, power.

To acquire something would imply that another has lost. 'An honorable man would thus be interested only in what was rightfully his and would have no desire to gain anything more, that is, to take what was another's'.

Because of this economic and moral understanding of the distribution of goods, there was no such thing as an honest rich man. If you have more than you need, you have used your power to take that which is not yours from someone weaker." (From Worship Design Studio Commentary)

In our North American culture that values individualism and making a good income this understanding can be a challenge. This week however I have gained new understanding about a set amount of goods and that there is enough for all.

We have witnessed both the best and worst of this. People buying up all the toilet paper and other supplies. Some of them are even selling it

to make money. Also we see the best of people shopping for neighbours and buying only what they need.

I appreciate Superstore and Shoppers Drug Mart (there may be other too) for putting limits on how much people can buy. I question continuing to shop at Cosco and stores that encourage over stocking on items. There is a set amount of goods-enough for all.

But what about this extravagance of the women “wasting” the precious expensive ointment all at once? The other dinner guests were angry and thought Jesus would support the sharing of goods and wealth equally with all people. Yet he does not. He supports the extravagance. Jesus says, ‘let her alone...she had done what she could and this is how she will be remembered.’

The bible does contradict itself at times. The overall message is one of abundance and enough for all, when shared justly. And yet we have this story about extravagant giving. Pouring the expensive ointment was an act of love and care, honoring Jesus. She knew he would die soon. This is what she could do at the time.

In this case, it is good according to Jesus for the women to be remembered for her extravagant giving.

So my question this week is how do we reconcile the first verse of Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Another translation says, “I lack nothing” instead of “I shall not want.”

WITH

The extravagance of the women in Mark 14:1-9

I think we are called to do 2 things:

Firstly, I think we are called to meditate on the words

“I shall not want, I lack nothing”

Read – say –think these words

Just try it...and see what happens...

Secondly, I think we are called to be extravagant in what we can do at this time.

We are now experiencing everyday limitations of what we can do.

Traveling, going restaurants, gyms, bars, work places, buying groceries, gathering with people are all affected. Because of this we can feel a loss of agency or freedom from what we normally enjoy.

Because of this, I think we are called to extravagance in some important ways. It will be a bit different for each of us. But we are all called to be extravagant in our patience, caring for ourselves and others, practicing calmness during uncertainty. We are called to be extravagant in these ways. This is something we can do. I believe this will lead us to behave well and generously with each other. We are seeing it now.

I see it in the grocery store clerk continuing to serve customers.

I see this the calmness of distillery workers now making hand sanitizer instead of gin and whisky.

I see it in Dr. Bonnie Henry speaking each day.

I see it in neighbours picking up groceries for each other.

I see it in new connections on Facebook and people offering free concerts on the internet.

I shall not want, I need nothing.
Be extravagant in your patience, your calmness, your kindness.
This is how we shall be remembered
When we look back on this time.

May it be so, Amen.

Closing Prayer

O Sun behind all suns
O Soul within all souls
grant me the grace of the dawn's glory
grant me the strength of the sun's rays
that I may be well in my own soul
and part of the world's healing this day
that I may be well in my own soul
and part of the world's healing this day. Amen.
(from Celtic Benediction by J. Philip Newell)

Sending Forth

Go into this week
Ready to give and ready to receive
With extravagant Patience
With extravagant Love
With extravagant Kindness
Go in Peace, Amen.

I welcome your thoughts on this reflection by phone or
email...Blessings, Julie Lebrun