

April 28, 2020

Trinity Musings #10: Rev Brian Goodings (self-isolating and a bit preachy in my office at Trinity United Church: Collingwood)

In answer to the many questions I received after my last Musings, I have no idea what happened to the woozy racoon we encountered on the side of the gravel road. We left it wobbling-in-place, obviously not well, but continued with our lives and bicycling without doing anything for the animal.

Many of you (my reading audience) obviously stayed at the side of the road with the ill racoon. I was using the story to make a case for our natural tendencies to eschew illness and disease, but your responses also revealed that we have a strong tendency to care about animals. It did seem a bit uncaring for us to leave the racoon where it was, but we didn't really know what else to do. Since, the shouting-woman said we were forbidden from touching it, I guess we could have given it a whack on the head to, as we say, put it out of its misery. But frankly it didn't look all that miserable, just a bit drunk or wonky. Just for the record, I wouldn't want any of you to do that to me! I did go back a couple of days later to see if it was still there but there was no sign of it. Maybe, as unlikely as it sounds, it wandered off and recovered? Or died on its own?

Years ago, when I was about 12 years old I came upon a young groundhog that had been just clipped by a car. It was far from dead but obviously injured so I took my shirt off and threw it over the thrashing marmot. Then I carried the crazy-critter about two miles to a veterinarian's office. He took one quick look at the animal and said he would "put it down" without charging me. So much for my heroics and my torn up shirt.

Although we, of the religious ilk, might believe we have the same genesis as do our fellow non-human creatures, we often don't really treat them as neighbours. The other day on the Georgian Trail I came upon a group of young boys, excitedly chasing fish in one of the small creeks that runs beside the trail. Later that day, when I rode home, I found the body of a fairly recently killed fish laying on the path. Although I do not know for certain, I suspect it was the work of the young boys. Sadly, I admit it's not something I wouldn't have done when I was their age. Don't know why we did these cruel things but I do regret them now in my older age.

For the good of all creation, including us, we have to quit thinking about “all other them” as disposable or unworthy of our care and respect. When Jesus says that the single most important task we are given is to love our neighbours and God as we do ourselves, I believe he meant ALL our neighbours in creation.

This does pose some ethical questions about our food raising practices but I believe these have to also be addressed within a moral framework. I am still a strong part of the meat-consuming world but my unease is increasing with the knowledge of how my food is raised. A century from now our descendants might wonder how on earth we could have treated animals so callously.

We are coming to realize, hopefully not too late, that as go our neighbours, so go we. This truth is at the heart of many of the world religions and many of people in indigenous cultures have embraced and lived this truth too.

During this covid-19 time I’ve heard more than a few doctors and politicians using the term “herd immunity”. There are flocks of birds, schools of fish, swarms of insects and now herds of humans. I don’t dislike the term or reference because it acknowledges that we are animals too.

This pandemic has caused shock and bewilderment as well as illness and death but also new consciousness. The air in the world is cleaner, the birds and animals in our closed parks and wilderness areas are unmolested and free from our company. I would venture to guess they don’t miss us.

In the pause it has caused, I believe it has also brought many of us to a new awareness of how precarious and precious our lives and in fact all life is on this planet.

Maybe the racoon will tell its kids about the time it was left wounded and dizzy on the side of the road. Passers-by went on their way without helping. Hopefully, a Good Samaritan turned up after me. A better member of our herd.



