

## *The banquet is set and we have been invited, will you RSVP?*

*Exodus 32: 1-14; Matthew 22: 1-14*

In the most recent statement of faith of The United Church of Canada, it begins by acknowledging that “God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description. Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship.” It is easier to worship something that we know, see, and can touch. We are no different than the Israelites who in this prolonged time of wandering to the Promised Land. They lost hope, and turned away from God, to the allure of their own desires. They failed to listen to Moses and the 10 commandments, and God was upset. They were described as Stiff Necked – stubborn, rigid in their thinking, not yielding. On this day of thanksgiving, we should say thanks to God for Moses. Thank God, God sent Moses to lead the people. Thank God, Moses held strong to his calling and implored God on behalf of the people to forgive, to show compassion.

In reading some commentaries on the scriptures this week, I had to laugh when I read in one that most preachers avoid this scripture and instead turn to the gospel of Luke whose account is framed in a more positive manner. Matthew’s version continues the theme of judgment that were found in the previous parables over the past few weeks. This may be explained by the simple fact that sometimes as humans we will not change our ways until it really matters, until there is an urgency, until we find ourselves, like the Israelites in a moment of time when we have failed to live up to our calling, or failed to live in accordance with the ethics that God has provided us through Jesus.

The Good News is, that no matter how stiff necked we become, God chooses compassion. God sends leaders to remind the people and in the case of Moses to remind God of our purpose. The parable reminds us that we too fail to accept or flatly refuse to accept the invitation from God in one way or another.

I wonder how many people, have failed to RSVP to an event, a party, or a gathering. I am positive that there were reasons, and some very valid reasons for doing this. For those of you on Facebook, how many of you have been invited to an event, and you have either replied, maybe...allowing yourself an out if you don’t feel like it, or how many of you have replied Yes with no real intention of attending, but wanting to show your support? I’m not saying that this is what happens all the time, but I bet there is some truth to this...it is much easier to do this online, then in person. And sometimes, people have the best intentions, but are dealing with social anxiety, and depression which foils our best intentions.

I believe that God has invited us all into this liminal time and space, AND Jesus has provided us with unconditional love and acceptance. God and Jesus reminds us over and over again to not be afraid, for

they go before us always. We are reminded that God will not abandon us, no matter what we do. Look at what the Israelites did! We lose sight of this when we forget what we have been called to do, this can easily happen when we are grieving, feeling lost, and frustrated.

I hope that over the past month and a half, that the story of Exodus and the journey of the Israelites from slavery to the Promised land has provided you with a framework for this liminal time we are living in. I hope that this story of God's compassion and Moses leadership has helped to reframe this time, in a positive way. I hope that the failure of the people, the struggle of the people, the whining of the people has provided each of us with a space to lament what we have lost, to recognize what we still have and reminded us to give thanks for all that we have received.

This liminal time is a sacred time, a time when we have been brought closer to God. It is a time when we have reached out to God and to each other in a deeper way than we have before. This is a time where we hold space for the Spirit to work on us, not for us to work on the Spirit. This is a time to experiment, to take risks, to wonder, and to discern. I echo the words of Paul to the Philippians today from Chapter 4, when he writes:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

I rejoice that this community of faith continues to find ways to live out the statement of welcome and inclusion. People who struggle with public settings are now able to worship in this sanctuary from the safety of their home.

There is so much to be thankful for:

People's willingness to help – through picking up groceries for others, holding people in their prayers, preparing meals for people who live on their own, colouring pictures and sending letters and cards to cheer people of all ages up. People calling each other regularly to check in.

People's willingness to ask for help – we all want to help each other out and live out the call to care for one another. It is not easy to ask for help, because we don't want to bother people or be a burden on others. And yet, we all struggle to find ways to help others that we love and care for.

People's honesty – do not feel bad when you decline an invitation, for it offers someone else an opportunity, they may not have had before. We are all struggling right now. We don't want to disappoint people, and yet we also need to do what we think is best for our health and safety and for our spirit.

Change – the opportunity to let go of something we have done for a long time, in order to enter a new spiritual realm. To reset! COVID has provided many people with the space to re-evaluate what they have time and energy for, to listen to their hearts, bodies and minds for what is life giving.

This is a creative time, where we are taking the opportunity to try things in a different way – most recently how we are a food depot. How we meet, how we worship, how we pray and how we live out our mission in the community. I'm so grateful for lawn ministry, and the ability to meet with people from the community on the lawn.

I am grateful for the trust people have shown, trust in God. People are listening in a deeper way, and are finding new ways to articulate their faith, and share their faith stories. I have loved the questions that emerge after worship, and at meetings that seek to understand what God is saying to us today. I am grateful for the dialogue that ensues with passion as we seek to understand each other.

There is much joy to be found at R-W. It is said that, "Joy is not an escape from the pain of life; it is a reconsideration and reinvestment in life from a different, liberating perspective...Joy always takes root amid adversity, there is no other soil for it to grow in."<sup>1</sup>. In other words, Joy is not complete unless it is shared.

On this day of thanksgiving may the scripture remind us not to lose hope, and to trust in God. Trust that even though we do not know what is to come, God is guiding us. On this day of thanksgiving may we find joy! Joy in what we have received and heard, joy in the promise that God will guard our hearts and minds. Joy that God is near and always with us for we are not alone! Let us remember that seemingly ordinary acts bear extraordinary gifts of God's love.

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Eddy, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, p. 161, 163.