

## *Will you walk with me?*

*2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 7-20; John 8:1-12*

The spiritual that Erin sang is the inspiration for the service this day. In it, we hear the deep longing to be with Jesus. To walk with Jesus on a pilgrimage journey. The call to have Jesus walk with me in my trials when my heart is breaking. To walk with me when I am in trouble or am filled with sorrow. This is a longing that I'm sure all of us have experienced at some point in our lives. Nadia Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran pastor in the States, who before ministry was a comic and an alcoholic, was living proof that Jesus will answer this call and this longing writes, her "Christian faith is really about death and resurrection; it's about how God continues to reach into the graves we dig for ourselves and pulls us out, giving us new life in ways both dramatic and small."<sup>1</sup> In this statement, it is clear for Nadia that Jesus is walking with her through good times and bad, and because of this, she has been transformed. She has been, in her words, resurrected and lifted out of the grave that she dug for herself.

When we look at the passage from the Gospel of John today, we see the story of how Pharisees and the scribes present an adulteress woman to Jesus. Now for those of you who are wondering, what are the Pharisees? What are the scribes? Who were they? They were orthodox Jews. The Pharisees were a group of priests who strove to enforce the law, and supported the synagogues but were at odds with the people who ran the temples. The scribes were students of the law, sometimes referred to as lawyers, whose job it was to interpret the scriptures and pass on their knowledge. They sought to apply The Mosaic Law (the law of Moses) to everyday life. We know Jesus was Jewish, and he had been known to break the laws of Moses quite frequently. And so the Pharisees and scribes decided to test Jesus by presenting the adulteress women, and pointing out to him that really, by the law of Moses, they were commanded to stone this woman. They wanted to know what he thought, because he had already been known to have meals with unclean people, he had been performing miracles on the Sabbath...they really just wanted to catch him breaking the law. When they asked Jesus for his thoughts, Jesus took a moment and he knelt down. And after writing in the sand, Jesus said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to

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<sup>1</sup> Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint*, (New York: Worthy Publishing Company, 2013), p. 8 Kindle Version.

throw a stone at her.” And instead of confronting them and staring them down, Jesus turned away, bent down and wrote in the sand again. He didn’t get upset, and he didn’t play by their games and their rules. When Jesus eventually stood up and all the people were gone, we know that Jesus asked the woman where everyone was and she said, “There’s no one left, sir.” And that’s when Jesus said to her, “I also do not condemn you. Go on your way and from now on, do not sin again.”

In that moment, Jesus walked with the adulteress woman in her time of trial. And Jesus shows us what it means to walk by faith, not by sight. Jesus didn’t condemn her for her sins. He sets her free. Free from her own guilt; free from other people’s judgements. This was a transformative moment, a fresh start. To *walk by faith* is what we are being called to do today. When we walk by faith, we are walking with Christ. In “A Song of Faith”, which is the most recent creed from the United Church of Canada, it says,

“By becoming flesh in Jesus, God makes all things new. In Jesus’ life, teaching, and self-offering, God empowers us to live in love. In Jesus’ crucifixion, God bears the sin and grief and suffering of the world. And in Jesus’ resurrection, God overcomes death. Nothing separates us from the love of God. The risen Christ lives today, present in us. A source of our hope, and in response to who Jesus was and to all he did and taught, in his life, death and resurrection, and in his continuing presence in us through the Spirit, we celebrate him as the word made flesh. The one in whom God and humanity are perfectly joined. The transformation of our lives, the Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus joined together God and humanity through this action, by transforming lives. Meister Eckhart, who is a theologian and a mystic, suggests that the spiritual life, to walk by faith is not so much a process of addition as it is *subtraction*. It isn’t so much that we need to add things to our lives. I mean, many of us feel like we don’t do enough. But that is not what this is about. We need to instead discover what is weighing us down, what is keeping us from God – and we need to let those things go. We need to subtract those things from our lives. For example, how much anger do you harbour towards another? As people of faith, we are called to forgive and let go of the past. It’s about making room in our cluttered and often over programmed lives so that the Spirit has room to move live in us, and be at work through us, in us, and in this world. For God is to be at the center. We are called to walk with Jesus in faith, not sight.

I’ve mentioned before that often our faith is countercultural. Jesus flips our thinking and our practices on its head. Jesus, in my mind, was the first to create AI. This is kind of one of those trendy things in leadership this day. That says, AI stands for *Appreciative Inquiry*, and in this practice, people are invited to no longer see others as barriers or

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<sup>2</sup> A Song of Faith, The United Church of Canada, 2006.

problems, but to flip it and consider others as assets and resources and potential for new possibilities. Think about it in this way, and Cynthia Brays-Kiderage describes:

“The new spiritual knowing, knowing in a way different from a human point of view, is part of the ecstatic vision to which Paul refers. The remade creation is the image of a community of people transformed in Christ. Their relationships with one another, in the community of Christ’s body, are reshaped towards mutual concern grounded in confidence in God.”<sup>3</sup>

The argument continues and the transformation of relationships will be described with another word: reconciliation. Reconciliation with one another and with God.

I’ve always loved the image of God as a potter, because when the potter takes the clay it is not discarded, but simply remolded over and over. God, as the potter, works with the clay and at times it can become off-balance, and the potter then has to start again. And even in the end when it is finished, there are still imperfections. The creation itself is unique. It can’t be replicated exactly the same. God has created us all uniquely, with our own flaws and issues. And Paul claims that God has also created us so that we can be ambassadors in Christ. So that we can be reconciled to God, to do the work of reconciliation and turn our attention to how others need change. To think about what is really happening. And when I think about it, reconciliation isn’t so much about changing something for someone else, but it’s about ourselves being transformed and changed. And because of that, things shift.

The ministry of reconciliation is really about, as Nadia Bolz-Weber says, *death and resurrection*. Where God pulls us out of the graves we dig for ourselves and we are then the ones who are transformed. And I can’t help but hear the words of Bono from the U2 band saying, “Get out of your own way.” How often do we get in our own way? Where we are our worst enemy? How often do we get off course because we think we know best? Let’s be honest – it’s easier to be like the Pharisees and scribes and recite law. It’s much harder to discern what is the right thing to do. It’s much harder to be away from the body and be at home with the Lord. And it’s much harder to live for the common good than to ensure that our own personal needs are met. And most importantly, God knows we’re human. God knows that we are going to make mistakes. And God knows that we are going to be selfish and make choices that benefit only ourselves – and God forgives. God loves us unconditionally and helps us to reconcile with one another. *That’s* why God gave us Jesus, the word made flesh: to reconcile and make new.

I saw a meme recently that has stuck with me that said:

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<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 139

“The single biggest thing I’ve learned from an Indigenous elder of Cherokee descent, Stan Rushworth, who reminded me of the difference between a Western settler mindset of ‘I have rights’, and an Indigenous mindset of ‘I have obligations’. Instead of thinking I am born with rights, I choose to think that I am born with obligations to serve past, present and future generations and the planet itself.”

Our faith teaches us the importance of generous heart. The importance of serving others, and sharing of all we have for the good of all. We walk by faith, not sight. And we trust that we walk with Jesus. When we walk by faith, the old passes away and the things become new. When we walk by faith, we walk with others trusting in the promise that we love each other as we would be loved. And I hope that we will take this teaching to heart; I hope that we will be ambassadors of Christ, seeking reconciliation with one another, working to make things new. I hope that we will see how death and resurrection are about being transformed, where the world is transformed...because we are transformed. The world will be transformed when we stop passing judgement on others and understand our obligations to each other. It’s not an easy task. And asking for help to do this is *not* a selfish act. It’s quite the opposite. Asking for help, asking for Jesus to go with us, is an act of trust, hope, reconciliation. Asking for help brings us together, and it builds up the body of Christ. That is what we are called to do this day. Thanks be to God.