

Reflection for June 19, 2022

John 1: 1-18

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

The gospel reading today comes from the book of John. As you may have noticed, John is quite different from the other three gospels, the so-called “synoptic” gospels. John doesn’t give an account of Jesus’ birth or anything about his childhood or preparation for ministry. It does not contain the parables like the Prodigal Son, the Mustard Seed, the Good Samaritan or any of the other parables that the other writers of the gospel use to communicate truths. Rather, it jumps right in to Jesus coming to earth as the Word and then goes on to his ministry beginning at the wedding at Cana. John has his own way of teaching us about who Jesus was and is, and what his purpose was in coming to earth.

The Gospel of John was written about 100AD – several decades after the 3 synoptic gospels, and about 67 years after Jesus had died. Just as the modern world has changed in the last 30 years, (think back to Winnipeg in 1990; cell phones, easy internet access, and online shopping that weren’t widespread at that time), the world when this gospel was written had also changed since Jesus’ time. The good news was pushing against the boundaries of the area around Palestine, and was reaching people beyond those Jesus had ministered to with the Jewish people and his home culture. It had begun taking on great strength in the much larger Greek and Roman world as well.

This is the world to which John addressed his gospel. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) presented the events that made up the life and teachings Jesus and stories he had used to illustrate these teachings. These were particularly helpful to the Jewish people who were familiar with the same culture and traditions as Jesus.

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, presents these truths in a more philosophical manner. The Greeks were known as the deep thinkers of the ancient world – think of Plato and Aristotle who both lived several centuries before Jesus. Their ways of seeing the world and understanding truths about God, were viewed from a different perspective. And yet the good news was for them also. The Bible says the love of God is for all people.



There are still many people in the world who don't understand the love God has for them. People who live with a sense of anger and power, believing their way is the best, or the only way to reach God. Wars have been initiated and many lives lost when Christians take on the goal of "forcing" the other people believe as "we do." Think of the Crusades. Think of slavery which kept Blacks and other people of colour in bondage for generations, or the Indian Act and residential schools in Canada. We should not forget these tragedies, and so today, is Juneteenth - the celebration of the end of slavery, mainly in the US, and after our service today, our parish Outreach Ministry Team will be presenting a short talk on building relationships with Indigenous people. These tragedies were often perpetrated in the name of God, and misconceptions about God are still pervasive in our society.

Many people live in fear of as though God is watching and waiting to strike us down if we break one of the Ten Commandments. It breaks my heart sometimes when people share their beliefs that God is punishing them when something bad happens to them. If only they hadn't disrespected their parents when they were young, or if only they had been better parents, perhaps God would have spared them from this cancer diagnosis.

Some people are stuck in a sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness, caught up in addiction, selfishness, and resentment. This may be the most pervasive misunderstanding and disregard of God's love for us in our day and time. This is the one I struggle with the most as I battle what I consider an addiction to food, and I suspect there are several people in our midst who look for solace and relief in ways that bring no sense of peace or hope or joy. God's love is bigger than all of these things, and God wants us to know and understand this. Jesus came to show us this way, and came to show this to the world, that all might have this gift of salvation.



John's Gospel was written in a way that the larger world could understand God's love. John speaks about Jesus being the Word, in Greek, Logos, which is also translated to reason, or logic, or meaning. This Word is an inherent part of God, and was there at the beginning – before the creation of the world.

Jesus came to help people understand God. Jesus came to shine a light on the darkness that keeps people from seeing God's love in the world. Jesus came from and continues to be a part of God the Creator, full of grace and truth. Although no one has seen the Creator with their own eyes, Jesus exemplified the love of our Creator in a most effective way and John was one who saw and walked with God. His role was then to keep calm and carry on with all he had learned, to spread this good news to as many as wanted to receive it – even outside of Judea, where Jesus had lived.

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So, how have you come to know God? Many of us have learned about God by attending Sunday School and church for most of our lives. Many of us have been shown the love of God through loving families. Many of us have spent time reading and reflecting on the Bible and other texts full of wisdom.

These have all been a part of my life, but when I think of times when I have been in awe of God, and really understood my Creator at a deeper level, I think of times like watching an amazing prairie sunset, when the sky is painted with every shade of pink and orange and purple. I think of the time when I held a grandchild for the first time, and the God-given love I felt toward them. Sensing their total vulnerability and trust that all would be well, evokes a love of the deepest kind. I call these God-moments, and I expect you have had your own moments like this.

There is a story from my life I have shared with clients who are hesitant to have a visit with a Spiritual Care Practitioner, fearing they will be encouraged to follow a specific religion. I'd like to share it with you as one way I have experienced God in my life.

For several years in my 40s, I would go on canoe trips with a few friends. We would usually put in at one of Manitoba's beautiful lakes, and paddle for several hours before setting up camp to stay overnight for a day or two.

On one of these trips, I awoke early and no one was stirring in the other tent. It was one of those perfect mornings with no wind, and no mosquitoes! The sun was just coming over the treetops and as it did so, a mist was gently rising from the lake in the small bay where we were camping. I couldn't resist getting out on the water, so I carefully slid the canoe into the water. It was really hard to be quiet with an aluminum canoe, but once I pushed off and started paddling, it was magical. I stayed close to shore both for safety reasons and because I thought I might see a deer or some other wildlife.

Well, I didn't see a deer, but as I rounded a corner, I saw an eagle sitting on the tip of a fallen tree, presumably looking for fish to catch. I probably should have left it alone, but my curiosity got the better of me, and I kept paddling closer to the tree. I got to within 10 feet of it (maybe it was 20, but my memory now tells me it was closer than that), and still the eagle sat on that branch. I tried to be very gentle with my paddle, but wasn't quiet enough. Suddenly the eagle took off.

At first it swooped down, trying to get a little momentum, and then it lifted high into the sky, beyond the mist. I'm sure my memory has elaborated the story over the years, but I can almost feel the breeze from those powerful wings as the eagle flew by.

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A number of years back, when I was training at Riverview Health Centre to become a Spiritual Care Practitioner, I visited a young Indigenous man who had a trach tube inserted in his throat so he couldn't speak. He was very good at forming words with his lips though, and using gestures with his hands to communicate what he needed. He spent long days in his bed and had lots of time to think. He had a very deep spirituality and we often spoke about what was important to him, and how he experienced God. I shared this story with him, and he asked me to repeat it more than once.

He followed traditional Indigenous beliefs, and to him the eagle held special meaning. The eagle is often thought of as sacred because it flies closest to the Creator, and therefore symbolizes courage, strength and honour – all characteristics that he desperately wanted to be given.

His grandmother was the only family support he had, and she visited him regularly. She had been brought up in a Residential School and sadly had been taught that Indigenous beliefs were wrong. She wanted her grandson to turn away from his Indigenous beliefs and follow Christianity as she had done.

This presented a bit of a conundrum to me, when the young man was nervous about an upcoming surgery, and wanted me to pray with him. I would normally pray using the symbolism that gave him strength and courage, like the eagle on the poster on his wall, but I also wanted to be careful not to offend the grandmother, and to provide support for her. The passage from Isaiah that was read this morning came to mind, and was a good start to a prayer that reached them both. “The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” I believe God reminded me of this passage at just the right time, and used me to provide support for two people who needed to know that God was there for them.

God reaches people in so many wonderful ways and in various traditions, but there are still many people who do not know that God loves them. That was the task John took on in writing the Gospel under his name. Through it, many people have found that peace that surpasses all understanding. I encourage you to spend some time this week reflecting on how you have experienced God, and then share it with someone. You might just see God in a deeper way through doing this.

May it be so.