

Reflection – June 21, 2020

A Gift

I am going to show you a gift I received in 1984 – it was a gift for my ordination as a minister in The United Church of Canada.

I believe this gift was made by an artist of the Six Nations of Grand River in South-western Ontario.

It is a beautiful carving of a campfire – logs at the bottom, flames reaching upwards, flames that seem alive with their sense of movement and solidness, when I look on the back of the carving the flames could be flames or they could be grasses, leaves, flowers blooming.

Within the flames – a face, an expression of spirit present in the flames, reminiscent for me of the spirit of God speaking to Moses from a burning bush.

Every time I look at this carving, it evokes different thoughts and feelings:

- A reminder that this world of which we are part is a living world, and we as human beings impact the well-being of the rest of this creation. We have seen, during COVID, that air pollution levels have dropped, there is a resurgence of various animals and creatures reappearing as less human activity has created a healthier environment – air, water, soil.

This carving reminds me that this is God's creation – that all of creation is in God and that God is in all creation – in each person and every tree and bird – Jesus said that God is aware of every sparrow, that each sparrow is precious to God.

So let me suggest, that this summer, we try to be aware of God's precious sparrows and trees and flowers and rocks and lakes – be aware that God is with us and amongst us wherever we are, remember that God speaks to us in many ways, including through the wonder and diversity of creation.

Thanks be to God, AMEN

KEEP THE BRUSH MOVING

Last week I received an email from one of my cousins. She told me that she was enrolled in an online art course called 'Keep the Brush Moving'. Then she told me about one of her experiences in creating a work of art. I asked her permission to share her story in a reflection. She replied that she would be honoured if I did so, especially since 10 years ago, when she was diagnosed with cancer, Transcona Memorial was one of the faith communities that prayed for her. She wrote: "it's a privilege to help your wonderful church community for keeping me in their prayers...their prayers got me through and I felt so loved."

My cousin told me about doing some poured painting – a technique by which you mix acrylic paints with a pouring medium, then 'pour' it onto a canvas – the paint colours flow over the canvas.

My cousin had done a number of poured paintings, but there was one she wasn't satisfied with, so, in her words:

"I took more paint to throw on it, then used scrapers and palette knives to move the paint around into shapes, and suddenly I stepped back and for the first time ever, knew it was finished and I liked it."

When I read her account, I thought it offered a wonderful perspective on God's acts of creation. In the book of Genesis we read that God created – sun and moon, and stars and water and earth and vegetation and birds and fish and animals and human beings – but then we read in the books of the prophets, long after the beginning, that God is still doing a new thing – God is still creating – as if God poured out God's love and creativity and spirit onto a cosmic canvas and then decided to move some of the colours around, try different combinations and relationships, open human hearts to deeper love, deeper wonder, deeper appreciation for all the diversity and miracle of God's creation.

In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus seems to be preparing his disciples for the shock of his execution and crucifixion, preparing them to have hope to trust that God's creation is still being finished. Jesus says that disciples are not greater than their teachers – perhaps a rather indirect way of saying, "When I am killed you will be stunned – you will think this can't happen to Jesus, to God's special ambassador who is supposed to save and change the world – violently killed when violence is one of the things he was supposed to save us from. You may think that as my disciples God will give you special privileges, will protect you from any harm, inconvenience, will make all your efforts shining examples of success – but, as for the teacher so for the disciple. If God does not wrap me in a protective bubble, then you should not expect to avoid life's pains.

"Don't fear those things that kill the body but do not kill the soul" – the soul, the image of God within each of us, our true nature as human expressions and hosts of God's spirit, God's presence, God's love.

God knows us so well that God knows how many hairs adorn our scalps; God notices when a sparrow falls to the ground – God cares about all of creation – if God loves the sparrow, so God must love each human being.

Part of the creative invitation for each of us is to find our soul, our God-image, our identity in God. Part of our faith is to acknowledge and trust that each of us is still a creation in process, God is still moving around and shaping and reshaping our attitudes, our understandings, our values and our dreams, until we will one day step back and say, “that’s it, that’s who I am, a loved child of God...that’s who everyone else is also.”

The past weeks have seen the spirit of God being poured out into and through creation – poured out through peaceful proclamations that black lives matter, that indigenous lives matter, that transgender lives matter, that the health of the world’s climate matters.

We have seen the toppling of statues honouring those who in the past carried the banners of colonial and racial oppression.

We have experienced a period of separation even from those whom we most love.

We have experienced a time when our canvas seems chaotic, disconnected, unfamiliar.

The Bible tells stories of such times – times when a way of life is ending but no one knows what new reality will emerge – wilderness times between what has been and what yet may be.

I suggest that what we are called to do in this time is to keep our brush moving – keep praying for the healing of all creation, keep speaking and walking and taking a stand against the dehumanizing, soul-shrivelling attitudes and actions that feed racism and so many forms of hatred; keep opening our hearts and minds to be transformed by God’s out-poured spirit, so that we might, not only as societies, but as individuals, be healed of prejudices and fears that we do not even realize lurk within us.

Let us keep on moving with God who is massaging, shaping, and sweeping across creation continuing the work of creation, of blending the many colours and gifts and cultures of our world, so that we may one day, suddenly, see that a new world of compassion and peace has been forming from the seemingly chaotic mix, and we are part of God’s new creation.

Let us keep our brushes moving – trusting that our love and hope move to the creative shaping of God’s love and in God’s grace, we will move ever closer to living as children of God in the creation of God, rediscovering our identity as God’s beloved human creatures. AMEN