

Carol's reflection – April 25

What a week this has been. It is difficult to know where to begin.

Within the week we have had Derek Chauvin convicted of murdering George Floyd, something that happened in Minneapolis but which has global implications for Black Lives Matter and beyond; worry about the variants of COVID 19 and the vaccine rollout, which led to extended debates in Parliament, additional restrictions in Manitoba, and the closing of the borders of Ontario to both Manitoba and Quebec; Earth Day on April 22 which brought great announcements of intentions to limit emissions, a mask recycling program to Assiniboine Park, and neighbourhood litter collection.

To preach is to hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Oh my, we have a lot to consider this week!

Let's begin with the Bible. We are reading in John's Gospel, words of Jesus: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

This passage is one of a collection of 'I am' sayings in John's Gospel. I am the Bread of Life, I am the Light of the World, I am the Door, I am the Resurrection and the Life, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, I am the Vine, and today's I am the Good Shepherd.

There is significance in all of this – 7 sayings – something that is complete (seven days of creation – etc...) Does John want us to know that God is completely present in Jesus?

For in John, Jesus uses the reference to God who is called I am. Think about the encounter between Moses and the burning bush. (Exodus 3) Moses asks God how to answer the people when the people ask what is God's name. God replies, "I am who I am", adding, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'

In this passage we have an image of God, and the image of the shepherd. The role of the shepherd is to take care of all the sheep. No single or lost sheep is left behind. In the same way, no one person is left behind.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd is lived out in all his teachings and ministry. Jesus is about the least and the lost. Jesus is about loving the self-despised and those shunned by the community. Jesus is about breaking bread and lifting a cup for all. All people matter. All are loved by God.

And that's where the Bible meets the newspaper. The stories this week have a common theme. The news is about a sliver of hope for justice for all.

It is a sliver of hope that we can find a path to peace and an end to racialized violence. Oppression based on ancestry and skin colour has no place in God's kingdom. We are kin with one another. We are all invited to the same table and the same meal is offered to each of us. And when we recognize that, and when we work to make that a reality, then we all can breathe.

It is a sliver of hope in the midst of the pandemic. It is about our Parliament wrestling

with all the issues that surround restrictions and vaccines, and how we all know that there are some living and working in situations that make them very vulnerable and they need our help. And it is the sliver of hope that comes when people comply with all the 'strongly recommends' not because it is the rule but because it is the right thing to do to keep everybody safe. We care not just for some but for all. The whole idea of Hands/Face/Space is not just for me, but for the whole community.

And the sliver of hope for Earth Day. Earth Day, a call to action day for our hurting planet. A call to care day. The TMUC Thursday ZOOM conversation named aloud bits of nature that we love. Animals, birds, lake scenes, forest treks, canyon walks, tiny flowers, giant skies, glowing sunsets, twinkling stars. Can you imagine a world without these things? And where is the sliver of hope? It is in the animated discussion in families about saving a tree or clearing some space. It is in the story of the kids collecting litter and vowing that they will never litter. It is in the intentional actions of supporting local produce at the market, or on the store shelves. The sliver of hope is found in each one of us when we care about what we do.

And those slivers of hope for justice for all – that's the I am. And as God's love lives in each one of us, now is the time to nurture our inner shepherds. Now is the time for us to take action. Now is the time to let the I am find a voice in our voices. Let us breathe together. Let us live in care and compassion for each other and our world.

I am -- a sliver of hope and hopefulness.

Thanks be to God.