

## **Carol's Reflection – February 20, 2022**

Did you see the story from the Olympics the other day? It was the story of the cross-country skier from Finland who won the gold medal – coming first in the 15 KM race, who stood at the finish line and waited while every other competitor finished. Over 17 minutes later he congratulated the skier from Colombia on completing the race, and then he was willing to move on to his own celebration. He embraced the last competitor and celebrated life. In a small way, he symbolized the motto Faster, Higher, Stronger, Together.

Occasionally we see glimpses of people acting in community in our world. We see people acting as if everyone else matters too. We see the glimpses of those who buy coffee for a stranger in the line behind them at the drive-through.

We see people who stop by to visit the confused person in the Care Home who will not remember the visit a few moments later.

We see people volunteering at the Food Bank, at 1JustCity, at Gifts of Grace Street Mission and more.

We see people shopping for groceries for shut ins. We see friends running errands for others – library books being fetched, rides to medical appointments.

We see people who advocate for an end to poverty, a living wage, equal access to schooling, and health care, and, and, and...

We might even be those people.

Or we might be the people whose experiences are different.

We might be acutely aware of the unfairness of life.

We might be the people who are left out – or lonely even in the presence of others.

We might be the people who are so busy that we do not make time for friendships to grow.

We might be the people who are so aware that we are 'too' something that we feel unloved. Maybe we see ourselves as too old, too thin, too fat, too unintelligent, too uneducated, too, too, too...

Today, whether we connect with the 'and' or the 'too', there is something in the Gospel for us.

It is a call to reflect on the verb – love. Love is a skill that is cultivated; it is active, and dynamic and intentional.

Love is a verb filled with intention and responsibility.

And, it is God's call to us, to live love for others.

And love builds community.

Love invites us to live a Jesus shaped life. And to live that life by being intentional about our attitudes. We are invited to live a life where we know what it is to belong – and that everyone else belongs too. We are to remember that God loves people – in fact, God loves all people. And, to emulate that love – to live a sliver of that love, takes work. It means that we must shape ourselves to care even when it is not convenient. Love is a responsibility of our discipleship of Jesus.

Keith Regehr, part of the L3 Group talking about 'thriving congregations' says:

'Historically, we thought that people had a God shaped hole and the church's job was to fill it.

Now, we live in a world in which people no longer have a God shaped hole.'

So how do we live the Gospel, how do we live love and community in this pandemic and post-pandemic world? What is our intention and what is our responsibility?

Beth Barnett, part of the leadership the Intergenerational Church movement in Australia, talks about different kinds of communities and churches. There are those that are really mono-generational, where everyone has a common generational experience. There are cross-generational communities, where two generations come together, and share experiences. There are multigenerational communities where everyone comes together – quite by accident. And then there are Intergenerational Communities where everyone is involved and included in serving, sharing, learning and leading together.

The Jesus shaped life has components of all those things in it. We cannot be intergenerational all the time, nor should we be. And, we cannot be mono-generational all the time, nor should we be. And so on...

In order to be the church – and to live the Jesus shaped life – to live the message that Jesus is offering to us in Luke's Sermon on the Plain – everything from the Beatitudes and Woes, to this part about loving and forgiving, we need to remember that Jesus was not preaching to the leaders of the day. This word he offers is to the ordinary people gathered together. And, the instruction he gives them is to live as if everyone is already living in God's Realm. Live grace. Live forgiveness. Live belonging. Live community. Live love. That is both our intention and our responsibility.

Live as if the one who comes last matters as much as the one who comes first – because they do.

Live as if the child or the great aged elder are as important as the adult, because they are.

Brian McLaren says that there will be a time for Jesus to declare who he is, but he begins by declaring who we are –

And who are we? We are the ones called to make the world different. We are the ones loved for who we are – foibles and follies included. We are the ones called to recognize that community matters. We are the ones to share God's light. We are the ones to share God's love.

Let's be the change we want to see.

Let's make a difference. All we need is love.

Amen, and Amen.