

## **Carol's Reflection – Feb 6**

It was to a backdrop of Beethoven's 5th symphony – the chorus we sometimes sing as Joyful, joyful we adore you – and to John Lennon's Imagine, all around the image of snowflakes that the Olympic games opened.

Tomas Bach, the International Olympic Committee President, spoke clearly about the purpose of the games – and addressed the political leaders of the world, imploring them to 'Give peace a chance'.

The modern Olympic games began in 1894. In a sermon during the London Games of 1908, the Bishop of Pennsylvania used the phrase faster, higher, stronger. A few years later, in 1924 that phrase, in Latin, became the official Olympic Motto.

It was this past year, perhaps as the world has been changed during this pandemic, that the motto had another word added. Together.

Faster, higher, stronger, together.

It is quite a journey that takes an athlete to an Olympic games. It involves passion and commitment. It involves training and competing. It involves achievements and setbacks.

And it does not matter if the athlete participates in an individual sport or event, or a team sport – even when some things are done alone, there is always a together component.

I do not think that is unique to sports. There are people around us in just about everything – whether they are the ones who launch us forward in family, or education or whether they mentor our political or social ideas, or whether they accidentally give us advice on food or travel, or just about anything. We are connected beings – and those around us can have an importance in shaping us to be the people that we are.

Have you ever thought about this in relation to faith? Faith invites us into community and caring for one another.

I mean, have you thought about what faith has meant to you at different points in your life? How did you come to know God's love?

What was faith like for you as a kid? Did you learn to pray at bedtime? Now I lay me down to sleep...

Or did you say grace before a meal...'Bless O Lord, these thy gifts...' or 'God is great, God is Good, let us thank God for our food'?

Was faith something that you inherited from your family? Or has it been introduced to you as a teen or an adult?

I wonder if we ever consider the faith journeys of the Disciples? How did they learn about God's love?

The Gospel of Luke is great in telling us the faith journey of Simon Peter.

It starts without much fanfare. In the story that comes before today's – Jesus is at the home of Simon – who very shortly will have his name changed to Peter. Simon's mother-in-law was sick, and Jesus healed her.

Following the healing, the next day, Jesus heads to a deserted place, and the crowds keep looking for him. He keeps teaching and preaching in the synagogues of Judea and then – at some point – and we are not told how much time passes – he comes to the Sea of Galilee (lake of Gennesaret) with a crowd wanting to hear him.

As Jesus looks around, he sees a couple of boats, one belonging to Simon. He gets into the boat, asks Simon to put out into the water a short way, and using the acoustics of the lake, preaches and teaches from the boat.

When he finishes speaking he asks Simon to put out into the deep water and lower the nets. Simon is tired after a long night of fishing -- and catching nothing. But his complaints will not be the last word – he does as he is asked and the catch is enormous! Help is needed, and now both boats are overflowing and begin to sink with the catch!

At this moment, Simon says – 'go away – I am not worthy'.

And that is how Simon Peter's faith journey begins. And like everything, his journey is filled with ups and downs, strengths and stumbles.

First, he must have met Jesus – perhaps in the synagogue where he was teaching as Jesus then goes – on the sabbath – to Simon's house, then Simon witnesses the miracle of the healing of his mother-in-law, then he hears Jesus teaching, then he experiences a catch of epic proportions, and he says, "Go away".

Simon believes in Jesus, and yet needs to push away something so intense.

Simon, who will become Peter – the rock.

Simon Peter will be one of the disciples closest to Jesus. Simon Peter who will be coached and nurtured by Jesus – and by the others around him will have questions and will have answers.

Simon Peter who will answer the question of 'Who do you say that I am?' with 'The Christ, the Messiah'.

Simon Peter who will pledge his allegiance – even to death – at the Last Supper.

That is the same Simon Peter who will deny Jesus—three times.

And, just as the ‘Go away, I am not worthy – Go away for I am a sinful man’ will not be the end of the journey, neither will denying Jesus three times.

Faith is not linear any more than life is linear and predictable.

Simon Peter will be one of the first to hear the news of the resurrection.

Simon Peter will see the Risen Christ.

And Simon Peter will become a leader in his own right, and the one whom we will know as one of the founders of the Church.

Simon Peter’s faith journey is about coming and going – drawing closer, and then running or pushing away. It is a journey filled with highs and lows. And, even though some of his faith is very personal – he grows in faith, and stumbles in faith, within a community.

Is that how life is for us? – is that how faith is for us? Even when we are alone, we are a part of a community. We are called to be together.

And always, with Jesus, with God, there is grace and abundance beyond our greatest imaginings. God always is present – giving us the opportunity to turn back, to be loved again, to be called again, to be faith-filled again.

Our God is the God of abundance.

And, this story is all about abundance.

It is about the abundance of faith that inspires those first called disciples to leave everything behind. It is about the abundance of fish that get left behind for others to share.

It is about the abundance of hope that the world can be different, that the world can be filled with peace and that people can live together.

As we think about our world this week, let’s think about the people who have nurtured us on our journeys of faith. Let’s remember that we are called to nurture others. We are able to make a difference in how we care for one another. We can inspire one another. We can share with one another. We are called to be a community – together.

We are not alone. We live in God’s world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.