

Late one afternoon in early fall in the mid-1960s, as Dad was driving me home from school after a soccer practice, he turned and looked at me, sitting beside him in the front passenger seat of our 1961 Ford Comet, and he said, "We're different. We're not like the other people in Lumby."

I'm not sure what prompted his statement to me on that day ... but I have never forgotten it.

Lumby was originally a quiet ranching and farming community. Settlers of European descent had first come into the area in the last decades of the 19th century. By the middle of the 20th century the village and its rural community had been transformed by the forestry. In that era the community may have had more chain saws, logging trucks, sawmills, and beehive burners per capita than any other community in BC's southern interior.

Lumby had also gained the reputation of a rough town. Many of the jobs were for men who had strong backs, hard muscles, and a willingness to undertake vocational risks. Some lived hard lives. The fathers of many of my friends at school worked in the forestry. Their stories about family life often included industrial accidents; job layoffs because of spring break-up or hazardously dry conditions in the forest; or just the daily routine of rising at 5:00 am and returning home at 7:00 in the evening.

Well, my father was right: we *were* different. We were dairy farmers. Our lives were connected to cleared and cultivated land and to the life it would support. Our routines were shaped not by the seasons of the forest, nor by the whistles at the mills, but by dairy cattle and all the planning, provisions, and work that relate to them.

But I think what my Dad was really getting at is what we might call *spiritual* differences.

We were Lutherans in a town where the largest church was the Roman Catholic, serving the people of French and Irish and First Nations heritage; followed by the Anglican and United churches, serving people mostly of English and Scottish heritage. There wasn't even a Lutheran church in Lumby (although there had been a preaching point near Mabel Lake in the first half of the 20th century). Every Sunday, our family drove 20 miles to Peace Lutheran Church in Vernon.

I think it was important to my father that we maintained these differences between ourselves and other people. Among the things my Dad inherited and passed on to me and my sisters was this sense that we were in some ways "strangers in a strange land." I guess that went along with our ancestors' departure from German soil around 1800 to the shores of the Black Sea, where they lived for several generations in colonies that were exclusively German Lutheran.

But it was also one of my father's ways of passing on to us the Christian faith which he and his forbears had embraced. He and our mother were always concerned for us

kids and our faith. In many ways, they were practical, down-to-earth people; but because of their faith they wanted to make sure that we understood that *we were in the world, but not of it.*

Prayer of the Day

Gracious and glorious God, you have chosen us as your own, and by the powerful name of Christ you protect us from evil. By your Spirit transform us and your beloved world, that we may find our joy in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

In the long prayer that is part of his farewell speech to his disciples, Jesus asks his Heavenly Father to preserve the church's distinct identity *apart* from the world. And at the same time Jesus prays that his Father would send the church *into* the world.

Jesus prays: "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

According to Jesus, we are **not of** the world, but we are necessarily **in** the world.

There are many ways in which, left to our nature, we could show ourselves to be **of** the world. For example, we may be persuaded by advertising that appeals to our desire to fit in with the majority. *Is everybody buying it? Ah, then it's the product for me!* We like to go along with the crowd, because there's something comforting about fitting in, whether it involves fashion, entertainment, political ideas ... or even religion (or as it's called now, *spirituality*).

But just doing what everybody else is doing is not freedom.

Neither is freedom simply *opposing* what the world is doing. As long as you're merely reacting to something, you're not free. Rather, your life is run by the thing you dislike or disagree with. It's all too easy to have our agendas and our lives dictated by the things we oppose.

God sends the only beloved son, Jesus Christ, into the world so that we might be truly free of the grip of the world. This is not a put-down of the created order. It's not an attempt to be anything less than profoundly *in-the-world* creatures of the earth. But what we are claiming together with God-in-Christ is that we need some way of assessing the true value or worth of things, other than by worldly standards.

Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we now see the truth. We now understand with the knowledge of God. No longer are we caught by the deathly ways of this world. No longer do we merely react to what we see and experience.

Rather, we are alive in God, because in Christ God has taken upon the divine self the deathly woe of this world, and has sent us the Holy Spirit to give us new birth and new life.

And what's it all for? God frees us from this world precisely so that we can *engage* the world. We are not *of* the world, but we are *for* the world. We are committed to the well-being of the world that God has created. We want good health and justice for our neighbour, good relationships in the school and in the workplace, homes for the homeless, enough food for everyone, and peace among the nations.

Above all we want all people to know God and to trust God with their entire beings. We are alive for the world.

We attend to the world around us with eyes and ears opened by faith. Because we now have the heart and mind of God, we act in love. God calls us to live right in the midst of the world, because God dearly loves the world.

That is why we have congregations. That is why we persist every week with the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Wearied and worn by the world – or worse yet, caught up once again in its ways – we hear the call of God's Spirit. By the means of grace, God renews and refreshes us, and re-inscribes the cross of Jesus Christ, first placed upon our brow at our rebirth in Holy Baptism. For we belong to God through Jesus Christ.

God makes us alive once again so that we can once again engage the world with confidence and joy. God restores our faith and our vision. For God knows that we are necessarily *in* the world. And until God recreates the heavens and the earth, that's precisely where God wants us.

God is *for* the world. And because you and I belong to God through Jesus Christ, you and I likewise are *for* the world. We are alive for the world!

God grant us divine grace so that we may live this new life: rejoicing in Christ's victory over the grave; loving as he loved us; and yearning for that day when God will be all in all.

Peace be with you all.