



Taste and See...



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Not Seeking Normal _____ *Allison Lynn*

“I can’t wait for things to return to Normal.”

We’ve all said it. In some moment of frustration, in the last few months, as the world has turned upside-down, we’ve all said it: “I just need things to be Normal.”

It’s an understandable phrase. Everything has changed. From the very simple, like buying groceries, to the very complex, like visiting the hospital - nothing has

been unaffected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Normal makes sense. Normal makes us feel balanced and safe. In recent days, here in Ontario, we’re getting some signs of that return. Businesses are starting to reopen, you can sit on a patio, and you can even form a “social circle” with close family and friends. You can sense a new excitement about these changes.

But what about those of us who can’t return to Normal? What if your Normal no longer exists?

As music artists, we make our living touring the country and

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performing in front of large groups of people. We cross borders, stay in Airbnbs, billet in homes, and pack the pews with as many people as possible. No social distancing. Lots of hugging. Hours of singing and breathing the same air.

As I write this, literally none of these things are allowed. None of them. The very mechanics of how we make our living is banned for now and into the foreseeable future.

There are practical ramifications to this, but it's more than that. Creating live music and sharing it with communities is what we do! It's what we're built for, how we move through this world. It's our language for sharing God's light and love.

Yes, we can do some things online, and we're grateful for that, but we all know, it's just not the same.

At this point, the arts industry in general isn't anticipating a return to Normal any time in the near future. When touring and live performances do return, we have no idea how they will look or what changes we may all need to make.

I'm sure we're not the only group who can't see a pathway back to Normal yet.

Let's be honest, even if you are able to return to your job, does it really look or feel like it used to?

Many years ago, I lost someone I loved to suicide. Steve's death completely turned my world upside-down and inside-out. All I wanted was for life to return to Normal - to laugh and joke with and hug the man I loved. But as I swam through the waves of grief, I came to the realization that a return to Normal was never possible. Normal, as I had known it, no longer existed.

From that day on, I realized that I needed to discover a new vision for the future. I was completely unclear as to what that would look like. It took months, even years, for it to fully take shape, but letting go of my former view of Normal was the first step. Only then could I start to open my heart to this next chapter that God had prepared for me.

I've thought about that journey a lot during this pandemic season. Maybe you've been through a similar journey yourself. Normal, as we once knew it, no longer exists. And trying to hold this past in our hands is as futile as grabbing sand in the wind.

So, I'm not seeking Normal anymore. Instead, with a deep breath, I'm trying to open myself to God's next chapter.

As a planner, I've found this season to be incredibly tough. And yet, more times than I can count, I've found my anxiety washed away by a peace I can't fully explain; a peace that passes all human understanding.

I can't see the path forward at all. I have no idea what the future looks like. The fear and not-knowing can be overwhelming. But I've stumbled down the steps of uncertainty before, only to discover sure footing awaiting me.

So now, more than anything, I choose to trust the One who created the path.

I trust that He has plans to prosper, and not harm, me. I trust His steps are a firm foundation. And I know that nothing, *nothing*, can separate me from His love.

I'm not seeking Normal. Instead, I'm lifting this prayer. I invite you to join me...

*Loving God,
I have no idea what you have prepared for me.
But I know you are the source of all goodness and love.
Prepare my heart, mind, and talents for this next chapter.
If you can't show me the whole path, just show me the next step.
And if that step is to simply rest, please give me the strength to stay still.
Amen.*

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Taste and See...

From the Editor

Alison Stortz

As I prepared the previous issue, COVID-19 was newly arrived on our doorstep, and we were all making big adjustments to our lives. Now, four months later, those adjustments have become, if not more comfortable, at least more commonplace. And we are beginning to come to terms with the idea that things are not going to “go back to normal” anytime soon, if ever.

However, some things have not changed, even from Biblical times. We are called to protect the vulnerable, and be good stewards of our environment. God has not changed. He continues to heal and guide His people today, as he always has, and always will.

The day will come when we can congregate more freely in places of work and worship, but that doesn't mean that everything will be the same as it was. And that's a good thing. I am encouraged, and even a little excited by the verse I was given recently: “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” (Isa. 43:19)

Jesus, who made a way for us from sin to salvation, will continue to show us the way forward, step by step, today, tomorrow, and forever.

I hope that you will find in this issue some comfort and encouragement in these difficult times. I look forward to hearing from you.

Alison ☺

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The Fifth Gospel: Caesarea Maritima

Rev. Canon Vicars Hodge

St. Jerome calls the Holy Land the 5th Gospel because visiting often profoundly changes pilgrims. This is my story - my life and faith journey have been shaped by seven visits to this land over the course of some 30 years. Biblical places hold meaning and at many of them I find myself in awe-struck silence, reflecting on what God has done. One spiritually powerful place is Caesarea Maritima, on the Mediterranean sea-coast of Israel.

The natural beauty is what first seizes a visitor's attention: sunlight dances on gentle waves as the azure blue sea breaks upon the sandy beach. Its architecture and history are also captivating. King Herod-the-Great built a magnificent Roman City here, complete with stadium, hippodrome, aqueduct and the largest artificial harbour in the ancient world. Later, this strategic place

became capital of the Roman Province of Judaea - headquarters for the infamous Pontius Pilate. What sets this place apart from so many other beautiful and historic places is what God the Holy Spirit accomplished here.

At Caesarea Maritima, Cornelius and his household, the first non-Jewish believers came to faith, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized into Christ's fellowship. Read the story in Acts 10 and 11. It was here that God taught the church that the ancient division between Jew and Gentile was no longer helpful or needed. This makes Caesarea Maritima a sort of ancestral home-town for all Christians who are not of Jewish lineage.

The ancient division between Jew and Gentile was deep and longstanding, forming an almost insurmountable gulf. Paul called it a

"wall of hostility" that only Jesus Christ could bring down (Gal. 2:14). Gentiles found Jews anti-social because they would not share meals or join in many of the (pagan) celebrations of the ancient world. Jews, following God's law, knew themselves to be a holy people, set apart and commanded to be distinct from the other nations. Kosher food regulations and circumcision underlined this divinely mandated separation. The law forbade Jews from sharing table fellowship with Gentiles, and from even entering their homes.

The separation of Jew and Gentile was God's idea - for a time - until the coming of Messiah. Forgotten by most was Israel's calling to be "a light to the nations" (Isa. 49:6), bringing God's salvation to the whole human family (Isa. 60-62). Now, in light of Messiah Jesus' finished work on the cross, all the world was invited into God's family. The separation, which was God's direction for a particular time and purpose, was no longer needed.

Biblical Scholar N.T. Wright explains it this way: *"Imagine a mother seeing her child at the other side of the street, about to cross a busy road. 'Stand still!' she shouts urgently. Then, a minute later, seeing that the traffic has come to a stop at the light, she shouts again, 'Walk across!' She hasn't contradicted herself. The*

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initial command was the right one for the time. Indeed, it is because she wanted the child to walk across in the end that she told him to stand still for the moment. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have made it across at all." (Acts for Everyone: Part 1, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008, p163)

Despite Jesus' clear teaching (i.e. Mat. 28:19), it never occurred to the early Jewish Christians that someone could become a follower of Jesus without first becoming Jewish. They expected all who joined them in following Jesus would fully take on Jewish ways, including circumcision and all the food laws. Caesarea Maritima is the place where God brought about this epoch change in understanding. The drama unfolds in four scenes.

Scene 1: We begin with Cornelius, a Roman Centurion stationed in Caesarea. He is a seasoned professional soldier described as a generous, devout, God-fearing Gentile. Though not

a Jew, he is attracted to the One God of Israel. I imagine Cornelius on tiptoes, looking over his back fence at a joyful family gathering and longing to be included. On this particular day, while he was engaged in his 3 p.m. prayers, God gives Cornelius a vision: an angel tells him to invite someone named Simon Peter to come to his home and speak. Peter is 50 km away, in Joppa at the home of Simon the Tanner, who lives near the sea. Cornelius immediately sends servants to fetch Peter.

It seems to me, if all God had in mind was to bring Cornelius to faith, the Angel could easily have delivered the Gospel message then and there. However, the Angel tells Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter. God has in mind a message for Peter and for the Church as well salvation for Cornelius and his household.

Scene 2: The next day, while Cornelius' servants are still en-route, Simon Peter is on the roof praying the noonday prayers and

feeling hungry. Peter also has a God-given vision: animals, birds, and reptiles of all kinds are lowered in a sheet from heaven and a voice says "kill and eat." Peter recoils, saying "No way! I have always strictly followed the Law. I only eat Kosher!" The Holy Spirit says to Peter: "What I declare Clean is Clean." This vision is repeated three times, underlining the importance of the message (by now, triple repetition is becoming a pattern for Peter). Cornelius' servants then arrive, summoning Peter. Just in case he fails to connect the dots, the Holy Spirit speaks plainly to Peter: "I sent these men - go with them!" The next day, Simon Peter and six companions in the faith set off for Caesarea Maritima.

Scene 3: On arrival in Caesarea Maritima the following morning, they are received warmly by Cornelius. The house is filled with Cornelius' friends and relatives. Peter explains the Jewish law forbidding Jews to associate with Gentiles and then adds that God had shown him that this law is now set aside. Never again was he to regard anyone as "common or unclean." Cornelius tells of his own vision and asks Peter to share what he has been "commanded by the Lord." Peter testifies to all that God has done through Jesus the Messiah. The proclaimed word of God, powerful and effective, brings Cornelius and his friends to faith in Jesus.

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GOSPEL, continued

God the Holy Spirit, who is directing this whole drama, knows that more than this miracle of faith will be needed to change the minds of Peter and the rest of the Church. Before Peter finishes his sermon, even before Cornelius and his friends get a chance to say “we believe,” the Holy Spirit falls upon the gathering. The new believers receive the gift of tongues in the same way the Apostles had on the Day of Pentecost. In this, God declared these uncircumcised believers to be fit vessels for God’s Holy Spirit. Peter’s reservations are swept away by the Holy Spirit’s bold and powerful action – and he baptizes all who have received Jesus as their saviour.

Scene 4: Soon after, word reached the church in Jerusalem of what Peter has done – sharing table fellowship with Gentiles and even, God forbid, baptising them. Peter is summoned to explain himself to the Apostolic leader-

ship. In Acts 11 we read Peter’s defense: He had only been doing what the Spirit directed. If God has given the Gentiles his Holy Spirit, without requiring obedience of the Jewish Law, how can the church refuse them baptism? To do so would be tantamount to the church ignoring God himself.

My heart sings when I visit Caesarea Maritima. This place is breathtakingly beautiful, but far more attractive to me is the wonder of what our God achieved in this place. In gratitude and awe I thank God that all who love Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike, are now included in God’s family.

Rev. Canon Vicars Hodge is Canon Missioner of the Diocese of Huron. Vicars continues to bring groups of pilgrims to the Holy Land: Next pilgrimage April 9-21, 2021. <http://www.trinitytour.org>



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From the ARM Chair

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

Jesus and the people around him experienced and practised some “distancing” for various reasons in his day. Physical distancing pops up in the Bible every now and then, especially around Jesus. When it does, it is not necessarily harmful.

Fisherman Peter, for example, confronted with boats too full of fish to float, cried out to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk 5:7-8). Whole cities implored Jesus to leave their region (Mt 8:34). Jesus sometimes distanced himself for prayer (Lk 4:42). Finally, of course, Jesus distanced himself from his disciples to their advantage, so the Holy Spirit, the Helper, could come to them (Jn 16:7). Jesus’ physical distancing made room for the Holy Spirit’s close, comforting, helpful and equipping presence in our lives.

As the coronavirus pandemic runs its course, it could be easy to feel isolated, alone and vulnerable. One might also feel that we are separated spiritually from The LORD and one another. Not so.

That we can’t right now see one another up close and face to face, embrace, receive communion, lay hands on one another in prayer, and worship in song, does not negatively impact the reality of our community and communion in the Body of Christ, our Church, or our communion with God. That close, warm, communion in

the power of the Holy Spirit continues – no distancing or isolation – whether we feel it or not, for “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,” nor pandemic nor plague, “nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). Guaranteed. Here and now. For ever and ever. Amen.

In the meantime, make the most of what we don’t have to be distanced from: the Bible, for example. Read it. There are plenty of reading plans online. Pray into the verses and ideas that the Holy Spirit will light up for you as you read. Use the Prayer Books. Visit online worship.

Just as a thousand years is as nothing to The LORD (2Pet. 3:8), so is a thousand – or twelve thousand – kilometers! In 1988, my mother was healed of arthritis. It happened when I, a relatively new Christian and Anglican at the time, wrote a letter to my father, a Presbyterian, suggesting that he have the Anglican Vicar in the town in which Mum’s hospital was, go and pray for her. Not long afterwards I received a letter from my mother:

...the Vicar of Rotorua came the Friday before Good Friday about tea time on what had been one of my worst days. That morning I hadn’t been able to move without

assistance – something I had feared, so I was at an absolute low. He came and wheeled me down to our quiet room and in that lovely peaceful place he anointed me and had a short and moving little service with me reading the responses. I can’t describe the wonderful feeling of certainty and peace and knowing God’s presence. That feeling stayed with me for days – I slept that night as I hadn’t done for ages and the next morning I woke feeling so much better. Since then I have had a steady improvement – so much so that I go home this Friday. I still have difficulty walking and will need a wheelchair for a while but I do better every day – and “I FEEL GOOD” – praise God. The aches and pains are under control – I’m so happy.

My mother was not an Anglican. The “little service” would have been strange to her. She was not healed completely, some pain and mobility issues continued, but she was healed enough so that she was soon playing the organ again at church and was able to dance at my brother’s wedding in 1989. That healing happened across a physical distance of twelve thousand kilometers, by snail-mail and using people, some of whom didn’t even know each other.

Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus. Nothing.

Love in Jesus,
Gene+

For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control. (2 Tim. 1:7)

I have read, but not counted myself, that it says *fear not* or do *not be afraid* 365 time in scripture. This is indeed the time when we need to grab hold of these verses (however many there are), and keep our eyes focused on Him.

Peace is our ultimate weapon against the fear that is circulating right now. Whenever the Lord says “fear not,” it is because there are challenges, a correction, or change of direction at hand. Fear not, little flock, it is the Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In prayer just lately I have been seeing the blueprints for Canada on a table in heaven, and my prayer is that what God has ordained and planned for our nation will be established on the earth. When we keep our mind stayed on Him and His promises, we will have peace no matter what is swirling around us.

Philippians 4:6 is our mandate for this time of turbulence: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” I am the Alberta divisional director for the Canadian Firewall, a team of

prayer intercessors across Canada who have been called together for such a time as this. It was a vision given to a pastor/prophet in BC to set up 24/7 prayer for Canada’s 153rd year. We launched on July 1, 2020, with 168 prayer teams covering all the hours in a week.

On this Firewall there are teams from every province and territory, praying in unity for restoration of righteousness and the return to the original intent: “May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!” (Ps. 72:8). Prayer is bringing the nation together as we agree for His will to be done on earth as it is already established in Heaven for this nation of Canada. You can find out more at www.canadianfirewall.ca, and join us online in prayer at any time.

Our nation needs prayer, not just because of COVID-19, but because of decisions made that don’t bring glory to God. As I visit all the Alberta teams online, the word I get is *synergy*, “the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.” Whatever time you connect with the Firewall, you will find dedicated intercessors standing in the gap for this nation. Jesus said, “I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will

do it for you” (Matt. 18:19). Intercessors walk in the power of agreement according to His will.

I had a vision several years ago which I think relates to Rozanne Leystra’s painting called, “The Healing,” that is pictured in this magazine. I saw the Lord sewing the provinces together with a gold thread and it looked like a patchwork quilt. When He had finished, He picked up the ‘quilt’ and began to dance across the nation, waving it over His head. I began to see pieces fly off the quilt and to the nations, and when I looked they were maple leaves. Revelation 22:2 came to my mind, “The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations,” which is one of the prophetic words for our nation.

When fear tries to invade our thoughts, when we listen to the news and hear bad reports, when other are running to hide, we need to remember 2 Timothy 1:7, that “God did not give us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and of a sound mind.” I am not saying that we shouldn’t be cautious. There is vast difference between faith and foolishness, which is usually generated by pride!

Our church buildings have been closed, but the enemy cannot shut down the voice of prophetic prayer, or praise and worship in

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“The Healing”: a Vision for Canada

Rozanne Leystra

The vision of this painting burned in my spirit for many years. When the painting was finished in



early 2013, I felt a strong impression in my soul that this message was also for the leadership of Canada. I took the “leap of faith” and took two prints of this painting to our local MP, Pat Davidson, who graciously accepted the gift of one and promised to give the other to PM Stephen Harper personally. I was elated that she received it so well and it gave me encouragement and confidence that the journey was divinely inspired. In July 2013, I received a warm thank-you note from Stephen Harper.

The moral fabric of our country is torn and faded. Our country is

straying further and further from our Christian heritage. Our anthem’s phrase, “God keep our land,” has never been more important to me. I believe Jesus and His gospel is the healer of our nation; therefore, in the painting I wanted to represent his crucified hands and intimate touch in sewing up the tattered flag, using red thread signifying His blood. I believe this painting was given to me by God, and that God loves Canada and wants to bring healing to the broken and spiritually-bankrupt population.

Rozanne Leystra is an artist residing in Sarnia, ON.

FEAR NOT, continued

our homes and on the streets. In the midst of every situation, my declaration is “BUT GOD.” Nothing is impossible with Him and a church, which is the people, that understands Ephesians 1:19-21: “and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” This is resurrection power for us, and through us to others.

In this time of physical distancing, God is drawing His people nearer to Him, teaching us to trust Him in all circumstances. I hear people say they can’t wait for things to get back to how they were, but life will not be the same as it was, and we need to embrace the new thing that God is doing. This is a time of transformation, recalibration, and renewing of the church as we know it. I believe if we don’t embrace what God is doing right now, we will miss the boat. We can’t mourn for what was, but celebrate what is now.

Now is not a time for fear, but for trust and earnest prayer. Unity in Christ released our destiny; it is

Psalm 133, the place of commanded blessing. May we as a nation come in the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14, so that our land will be healed and our prophetic destiny fulfilled.

Let us hear the voice of the Lord saying to us in this hour, “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you. Don’t be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (Isa. 41:10). He is faithful and He will.

Jane Jones is the ARM Prayer Coordinator. She attends St. Peter’s Anglican Church in Okotoks, AB.

Every Cloud has a Silver Lining

William Dupley

There seems to be no end of negative news. Each day I stream the news I get bombarded with updates on this horrendous virus and the impact it is having on the world. However, even in the face of this terrible reality, some positive results are coming to the surface. I discussed this with some friends the other night and did some research, and came up with the following list of positive impacts the coronavirus is having on the globe.

1. Lower pollution

Transport makes up 23% of global carbon emissions. For the first time in years, Venice's canals are clear. In China, due to the shut-down of the factories over the last two months, the sky is almost completely clear.

2. Nature is recovering

Thanks to the lockdown in India, the beaches were empty of people and over 475,000 endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles have come ashore to dig their nests and laid 60 million eggs.

3. Reduced consumption

Because people are working from home more, we are using less plastic, we print less, we travel less, and we shop less. People are becoming more creative, and less wasteful.

4. Reflection

Parks and open spaces seem to be bringing joy to many more people. People are praying more.

5. Choosing nutrition and exercise

There's been a rediscovery of the recipe book. Families are now cooking together that historically just ordered in, or relied on fast food for meals.



6. Gratitude

It's striking how many people are now taking better care of their property, and becoming grateful for the things they have. In the Western world, few have ever experienced empty shelves. Now when we see full shelves, we feel gratitude for the stores and the supply chains in our country.

7. Neighborhoods become neighborhoods

With so many people out walking,

neighbors are talking to each other again, and many are reaching out to isolated neighbors to ensure that they have enough food/supplies, and they are okay. The use of social media has facilitated relationship building. The other day Sue and I celebrated the 65th birthday of a friend of ours online. She was in Alberta, and we were in Ontario.

8. Desire to help local businesses

Instead of going to several big-box stores to try to get the best deal, there is an increased awareness of the value of local businesses.

9. Education is changing

This crisis has shown that online education is possible. This may have a substantial change in the conven-

tional thought of how to educate at all levels.

10. Work at home

I worked at home for years and found that my productivity was much higher than it was in the office. People will have a much better work-life balance because they no longer spend hours every day commuting. These changes will have a positive impact on the cost of business, the environment, and traffic.

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11. Opportunity to end long-standing conflicts

Countries are helping each other. Even historical rivals, such as the United Arab Emirates and Iran, are sharing medical equipment and personnel to help each other.

12. Churches are changing

Most churches are doing ministry over the Internet and, as a result, touching more people than they ever would inside their churches. Many pastors have had more contact with their flock because they are connecting with them personally.

13. The emergence of new hobbies and passions

People are painting, playing a musical instrument, dusting off hobbies, and rekindling passions for these wonderful pastimes that they let go dormant. Others are learning new skills, taking courses online, and reading more.

14. Public display for the support of first-line workers

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) and nursing staff have historically been ignored. Society is now recognizing their value and publicly declaring it.

A few years ago I read a remarkable book about change, Who moved my cheese?, by Dr. Spencer Johnson (Putnam Adult, 1998). It is a story about two men (Hem and Haw) and two mice (Sniff and Scurry) that live in a maze and go to the same place every day to get their cheese. Then, one day, the cheese is

gone. The two men refuse to change, expecting that the cheese will come back. The two mice scurry away and find new cheese. Eventually, Haw overcomes his fears and begins to look for new cheese. Along the way, he writes messages on the wall to encourage others who may come along. Some of his wisdom includes:

- **Change Happens** (They keep moving the cheese)
- **Anticipate Change** (Get ready for the cheese to move)
- **Monitor Change** (Smell the cheese often so you know when it's getting old)
- **Adapt To Change Quickly** (The quicker you let go of old cheese, the sooner you can enjoy new cheese)
- **Change** (Move with the cheese)
- **Enjoy Change!** (Savor the adventure and enjoy the taste of new cheese!)
- **Be Ready To Change Quickly And Enjoy It Again** (They keep moving the cheese)

Change is hard. As humans, we tend to thrive in the consistency and security of routine. But the truth is that the cheese has moved, and the quicker we let go of the old cheese, the sooner we can enjoy the new cheese.

Once I had a tough manager. He was so frustrating that I decided to apply for another job in my company. To my surprise, I got a new job, and it was a promotion. It also led me into a world that em-

braced the latest technology. I enormously enjoyed that job and the friends I made in my new role. It was a great move.

During the trial with the old manager, I wondered: why is this happening? What good can come of this? I felt the Lord speak to me about this entire situation afterward. I thought He said, "Son, you had become indifferent, not demanding new things of yourself. I need you to accomplish more. I have more for you to do. I gave you that manager to motivate you to change." These words gave me new perspective on a challenging time in my life.

This virus has challenged all of us to consider how we will respond once things go back to normal. The reality is that the world may not go back to normal. I expect the world will be changed permanently as a result of this virus.

The virus has been a terrible experience for all of us, but even these storm clouds have a silver lining. I encourage you to remember all the positive things that have happened as well, and not go back to the way things were before.

I like talking to my neighbors.

Bill and Sue Dupley worship at Catch the Fire in Toronto, ON. You can read more on their website: www.theseecretplace.ca.

Making War with Peace

Very Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond

I was raised in a military family, a home in which “duty, honor and country” were robustly emphasized. We were often awakened by military songs, attended military taps, and were pointed toward military training and service. Being Irish furthered and deepened this orientation. I have often said that the Irish put “ire” into the “land.” We do, or at least I do.

I am a warrior, a Christian warrior, *and so are you*. Blessed be the Lord our God who trains our hands for war, and our fingers to fight. So says the Psalmist!

As a Christian warrior, raised and educated as I was, I needed to wrestle with how I could use my warring disposition in a manner that is God honoring and people affirming. It was not easy. It still is not easy. Any time I see or experience injustice, or read an imprecatory Psalm, my fighting juices begin to, once again, flood my head, heart and hands. Last night’s meditation, from Psalm 76, once again sounded like a call to arms. I cannot deny that, at the end of the reading, my heart prayed, “so may it be for all the enemies of God.” May it, indeed, be!

All of these things said, and not repenting my militant stance, I must also ask and answer a few questions: How is the Christian to wage war? How are we to engage in a battle in which, although acted-upon by evil people, we find

the origin of evil in a fallen world inhabited by “principalities and powers?”

Saint Paul urges us to “put on the whole armor of God” – a spiritual war must be fought on a spiritual battlefield, with spiritual equipment. Although politics, prejudice, discrimination and marginalization occur within the context of our daily temporal lives, and increasingly so, war must be waged according to the priorities of eternity. War must be waged in terms of the Cross of Jesus Christ, entirely dependent upon the Spirit of resurrection. We must use God’s armor to make war through peace. Spiritual warfare requires Spirit principles and power.

Although Paul emphasizes the importance of the “whole armor,” which is essential, my focus is upon one particular piece: the **preparation of the gospel of peace**. We are told to “shod [our] feet” with the preparation of peace. Feet take us somewhere. Feet move us into battle. Within the context of making war with peace, I want to briefly outline how each piece of armor serves the “feet” of every gospel initiative.

Christians must understand and appreciate that we are ambassadors of reconciliation. Reconciliation, not retribution, is our responsibility. As representatives of Jesus Christ, we are called and

challenged to be peacemakers, reconcilers. This is an exceptionally difficult posture to take in a world that emphasizes “might makes right.” And, to be clear, *every culture* elevates and celebrates this priority. Christians are peacemakers whose immediate reward is, according to the Sermon on the Mount, persecution. Although people often “speak peace” we do not always want to “pursue peace.” Often the only “peace” we want is our own “piece of the pie.” But followers of Jesus are called to be different. We must “shod our feet with the preparation” of Christ’s good news of peace. Only the Paraclete and the precious blood of Christ can reconcile.

This requires that we put on the **helmet of salvation** that guards the mind from thoughts of violence and vengeance – even if these thoughts are only quietly spoken within the depths of our hearts. The helmet must guide our head, as well as our hearts and hands, into the ways and means of peace and reconciliation.

This requires that we put on the **breastplate of righteousness**, recognizing that reconciliation requires sacrifice. With Jesus, as reconcilers we will have our hearts penetrated by the world’s mockery, injustice and cruelty. And this will not just apply to us, the Church, but to every spiritual thief

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that hangs upon a cross of intolerance and injustice with us. We must prepare and protect the heart. Have the heart of peace offering the hand of peace.

This requires an attitude of seeking the **truth** of Jesus Christ in reconciliation, and not of seeking the truth that separates and segregates. We can be right about an idea, but entirely wrong about its application. We may be correct about so many things, but is our being correct filled with the *caritas* of Christ? Peace is not secured through delusion, deception and lies. But, importantly, **THE TRUTH** is exhibited in **THE WAY** which gives us **THE LIFE** as found in the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ. Truth is in a person, not always a philosophy - although all true philosophy, the love of wisdom, is in Jesus Christ and the path he continues to walk in, by, and through his Church.

This requires a shield. Christians, as well as our culture-at-large, are constantly assaulted by injustice and violence. Anger dominates every form of "conversation" we

experience today: media, technology, politics, etc. The Bible tells us to "be angry, but sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Given the state of the world, our culture, country, neighborhood and homes, being angry seems entirely reasonable. In some ways, it is. But we must be angry about the right things and exercise our anger in the right way. The **shield of faith** helps us.

It is hard to keep faith, to advance and advocate faith, when the world seems to be crumbling around our ears. The shield of faith recognizes these assaults *and* appreciates that *Jesus Christ is Lord*. Faith recognizes that the battle has been won. Faith appreciates that, while we must war with peace, the victory is ours, is God's in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Faith looks to Jesus as the King although, at this time, we do not always see all things subject to him. We need this shield. We need to daily take it up as ready warriors of Christ's cause and kingdom.

This requires that we wield, not yield, **the sword of the spirit**,

which is the word of God in, by and through praying always. The world today is biblically illiterate. Sadly, the Church is often biblically *indifferent*. The one, I believe, impacts the other. Warring with peace requires immersing ourselves in God's written word. Are we steeped in Scripture? Having God's mind about peace-making requires page-turning. We must hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what God exclaims in order to effectively do what God expects. Reconciliation requires reading God's word. Peace requires Paraclete and Page.

We are at war. We will continue to be at war. Unfortunately, and in the very near future, this war will intensify. What's a warrior to do? Pick up the whole armor of God, and put it on. "Onward Christian soldiers!"

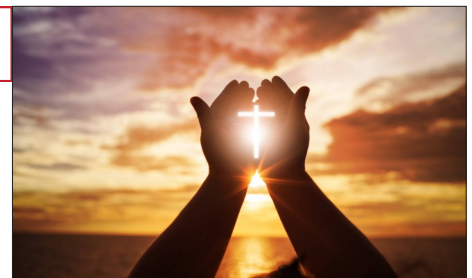
Donald P. Richmond, DD, a widely published author and illustrator, is a priest-oblate with the Order of Saint Benedict.

"We would see Jesus": a Meditation

We are in desperate need of good news, and the book of *Revelation* provides it. Highly contemporary and exceptionally relevant, *Revelation* repeatedly announces and celebrates the good news of Jesus Christ. Are we feeling persecuted? So was Saint John. Are we feeling isolated? So was Saint John. Are we seeking insight? So was Saint John. Are we, like all the saints

throughout history, needing to see Jesus?

Again and again, in the midst of hardship and horror, the book of *Revelation* reveals Jesus who understands, speaks, acts and orders all things according to his predetermined plan, purpose and power. Our Lord shows up, he reveals himself, when all the world



is dark and dangerous. Look for the series of meditations by Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond, "We Would See Jesus: *Revelation* as Revelation," this Advent.

For the Common Good: Exploring I Corinthians, Part 13

Rev. Canon Gene Packwood

There has been a lot of controversy and conflict to do with things charismatic, revival, gifts of the Holy Spirit and the like. If we're honest, we have to acknowledge that Christians have fought and divided over just about everything in the church—from whose widows were being neglected (Acts 6:1), and who to take with you on ministry trips (Acts 15:39), to music, marriage and baptism. One could almost say that conflict is one of the defining characteristics of a church. No conflict, no church.

With that in mind, READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

It's almost as if St. Paul knew that, in addition to the disputes he had already discussed in the first eleven chapters of 1 Corinthians (divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits, food offered to idols, idolatry, hair length, head coverings, and how to correctly celebrate the Lord's Supper), the charismatic Gifts of the Spirit were going to mean even more trouble. So, he included this passage to show us how to handle the resulting and inevitable conflict.

To summarize, we should all remember and embrace the following:

1. We are all members of one body (vv12-13)
2. We all were baptised in and drink of one Spirit (v13)
3. We are many (vv12&14)
4. We all have vitally important, but different, roles to play as parts of the one body (vv15-26)
5. God, the Father, himself arranged us and our roles just as he wants us (v18)
6. We are interdependent (vv21-26)

This is the context within which we are to be The Church, receive, exercise and enjoy the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and within which we are to deal with conflict.

“Conflict and tension lie at the very heart of life,” wrote Bishop Michael Marshall in [The Church at the Crossroads](#), (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1988), “and there will always be plenty of it at the heart of a living and lively church” (p64). Conflict can be a bad thing if not handled properly, but it can also help us to sort important matters out – to discern what is true and what is not, what is good and what is evil. The trick is to handle it in the Spirit, by paying attention to St. Paul's wisdom in this letter to The Church.

After all, “We are not here to avoid conflict, but to redeem it,” said Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1980-1991,

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because “at the heart of our faith is a cross and not, as in some religions, an eternal calm.”

FOR REFLECTION

- How has your experience of conflict and disagreement in the Church affected your faith?
- What has been your experience of “one Spirit” in your congregation and your Christian life?
- What is your sense of the member/part God arranged you to be in the body?
- Who are your fellow members of which you are tempted to “have no need”? What is the Holy Spirit calling you to do about that?
- What are you being called to suffer or rejoice in solidarity with fellow members of the body?
- If you were being called to honour a fellow member, who might that be and why?

READ 1 Corinthians 12:27-31.

As you see, God has here made some *appointments*. Note there is no “who is feeling called to...?” or, “I need someone to volunteer for...” or, “I have the right to be...” These appointments are as God sovereignly arranges and chooses, just as he apportions and wills the Manifestation Gifts earlier in the chapter (1Cor. 12:11).

There is controversy about this list of gifts, too. Some say first, second, third, etc, designate an hierarchy – an order of importance. Others think not. I’m inclined to think that an appointed apostle would have more kingdom significance than being able to give voice to various kinds of tongues, but then if using such a *tongue* is to speak to God himself, uttering mysteries in the Spirit which will build up the church (1Cor. 14:2-3), I’m not sure I’m qualified to make that call.

If there is, indeed, an order of importance, it is not for the appointee to wield so as to gain advantage, attract attention or admiration. It would be for The Father to use as he sees fit for the common good and to build up his church.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is terribly holy, terribly loving, terribly generous, terribly merciful and terribly demanding all at once. The LORD does not see as we see (1Sam. 16:7). He will choose who he will choose, and he will appoint who he will appoint. Blessed be The Name of The LORD!

So, are all apostles or prophets? No. Do all speak in tongues? No. But the higher gifts are to be earnestly desired. *Earnestly* – the Greek word has the sense of being jealous of, making much of, enviously. We’re invited to *want* them badly.

The still more excellent way will have to wait until next time. In the meantime...

FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

- Which of these gifts do you see being exercised in your church? In your own life?
- What are the higher gifts to which you aspire?
- Pray for The LORD to make any divine appointments you may have missed clear.
- Pray that The LORD will reveal the apostles, prophets, teachers he has appointed in your community.
- Pray for miracles, gifts of healing, helping, administering, and tongues to be released in the church.

Gene Packwood blogs at GENERALities www.kiwirev.blogspot.ca and can be found on Facebook and Twitter (@kiwirev).

Look for more of this series in upcoming issues of *Taste and See...*

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To offer times of refreshing so God's people may be empowered by the Holy Spirit through teaching, equipping and fellowship in the love of Jesus. (Acts 3:19-21)

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