

Pentecost 14 C

Exodus 32:7-14

Psalm 51:1-10

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus who loves us.

I bring you greetings from some of our siblings in Christ at the Synod event yesterday in Red Deer, "God We Gather as Your People."

We met to sing from the new All Creations Sings hymnal, we explored liturgical art, shared the good, bad and ugly of online worship and Bishop Larry gave us a summary of his interviews with rostered ministers. And that is where I'd like to start today.

Early in 2022 Bishop Larry took time to have conversation with every rostered minister in our synod. He reached all but 2. He also had conversations with over 70 lay leaders across the synod. He wanted to know how people were doing, how their church was doing, what gave them hope for the future.

He only gave us a very brief synopsis yesterday and it will be interesting to hear more, generally it is a story of what was lost and what we've learned about ourselves. Which of course is related to Luke's gospel this morning.

In that story we hear of some pretty valuable items that have gone missing, a coin, a sheep. Items of sustenance, of security, items that were of such value that they couldn't be spared. When we lose items like this we grieve and despair, perhaps wondering what we will do with them. In our time, we're not so worried about sheep and a coin here or there, but we have endured significant change.

So, let's take some time to talk about that – what do you sense has been lost in the last 2 years, either in your faith life, your church, or even in your personal life? What has changed? What did you miss? What has disappeared? Take some time with those around you, or to write it down on the papers. For those online, you are welcome to use the comment section.

It's actually helpful to name these things and to hear from one another. It helps us to make space for understanding and to know that what we experienced and feel is perfectly valid. Thank you.

It's true we will never be the same as we were before. We've embarked on a new journey and that can be a little scary. It's not the first time the world around us has changed. The Bible is full of accounts of full stop changes!

Take Exodus's reading today. This comes after the Israelites had been freed from slavery in Egypt. As good as it was for the Israelites to be freed, they very quickly realized that it wasn't so easy to just step into unfamiliar territory, even if it meant that God was promising them a new land. That's why, when Moses goes up the mountain to pray and listen to God, we hear that those down below struggled with their new situation.

Moses was up the mountain praying, talking with God, but their meeting was cut short when God prompted Moses saying "you better get down there, something's going on." The people, had grown impatient waiting for some word from God and began to assume that God didn't actually exist. Which is weird, because God had already done so much for them. He led them out of Egypt where they had been slaves, he parted the Red Sea when the army was closing in behind, she fed them manna in the desert when they were starving, and she made water spring from a rock when they were thirsty. Now God chats it up with Moses for a bit and they decide they better take things into their own hands and they craft the golden calf.

And before we judge them too harshly, ask yourself, have you ever become impatient with God over an unanswered prayer? Have you ever wondered if God was paying attention or listening? I know I have. It's times like that that we imagine we're on our own and instead of trusting or praying or just breathing - we doubt.

We are uncertain about the new territory we find ourselves in too. We're struggling to make sense of our new situation and are longing for what was familiar. But as the Israelites couldn't go back to Egypt, we too must live in the present.

Which leads me to our next question. What do you hope for?

Again, turn to your neighbour, the comment section online or write it down! Voicing our hope draws us together in encouragement. What do you hope for?

It's great to hear this from one another!

And one more step now. Can we take those hopes we have and be fueled by the Holy Spirit in order to bring them to be? Are we willing to work as hard as the woman sweeping, sweeping diligently until she finds the coin she was looking for? Will we go out far and wide to search for how we might bring about those

dreams and hopes? Are we willing to allow God to interrupt our plans so that God can work alongside of us to bring hope and healing?

I had an interesting encounter this morning already. I stopped at Safeway to pick up some coffee cream for this morning and as I rushed down the aisles (which I'm usually rushing on a Sunday morning!) a young man stopped and asked me if I was a priest. It's one of the hazards of wearing a clergy collar in public – you never know what might happen! I only had about 20 things on my mind that needed doing this morning. And that's why, in that moment, I had to remind myself to allow God to interrupt me to see the person in front of me.

And we chatted for a bit, and another man joined in and it was a holy encounter of encouragement and care.

It was a reminder to me that God is always at work, sweeping, searching, bringing us together in unique ways to bring about the Kingdom of love.

This week a colleague in ministry, Pr. Erin, said: *we make a path by walking it.*

What a good reminder as we restart so many things this fall. *We make a path by walking it*, by being together, by working together, listening, worshipping, praying. Friends, come join in this holy work, sweeping into the corners, reuniting people in hope and love, proclaiming God's good news to a world in need. Amen.