

First Sunday in Christmas December 30, 2018

Time moves fast but today's lesson from Luke makes me think we could all be suffering from whip lash. Jesus went from cradle to 12 years old in seven short days! But I suspect in temporal terms we all might wonder what happened to 2018!

Perhaps you also watch or heard the Queen's Annual Christmas message: it was a very mindful message for this season, in the midst of all the challenges countries, communities and individual citizens face. The Queen did not ignore the impact of tribalism whatever its base, nor the passing of people we love, rather she said: "Through the many changes I have seen over the years; **faith, family** and **friendship** have been, not only a constant for me, but a source of personal comfort and reassurance."

FAITH; FAMILY; FRIENDSHIP

I think those three concepts are fitting for the times we are in and for some of the scriptures we have before us today.

FAITH

So, let us follow her lead and take a quick look at faith first. Some of us were taught that faith means having to believe literally everything that we find in scripture as having happened just the way it was recorded and if we don't believe every word...we are faith less!

Today, I am indebted to many theologians and not least among them for my grappling with "faith" is Marcus Borg. He writes that the more we explore the life of Jesus the more we learn **how** he had a "radical trust" in God. He held on to the Divine in relationship, in an intimate and loving relationship, which he said was there for us all as well.

This meant that he paid attention to God and I suspect his time was in listening and coming to know what it meant to love what God loves and to see life, all life, as God sees! His faith was built on relationship of trust which yielded faith. (There is a catch: this gift is available to us but WE must access it everyday..taking time to be WITH God) He knew deeply he

was beloved of God...and this he said was available to us as well....but it takes time to be with God....

..faith calls us to affirm the reality of God; centrality of Jesus (as Christians); and the centrality of the Bible. (MJ.Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*)

FAMILY

We have two families in our readings for today: Samuel & Jesus' families

Samuel was prayed for by his mother Hannah, who had been barren. So he was dedicated to be in the priesthood, for her prayers for a family were granted and in gratitude she gave him to God. Samuel will grow up to be one of greatest spiritual leaders in Israel: a judge, priest and prophet. While loved by his family he recognized his calling and was dedicated to serving Yahweh as he lived and learned at the sanctuary at Shilo.

Our story of Samuel ends with the lines: "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow in both stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people."

Our gospel story about Jesus and his family ends on a similar note. "Jesus increased in wisdom, and in years, and in divine and human favour."

However, Mary and Joseph had a challenging encounter with their son Jesus, according to Luke. Challenges or even conflicts are predictable in any family with a child entering adolescents! For often the child you once knew and could predict, now becomes something of a stranger. (We today call that the teenage years...)

It took three days for Mary and Joseph to find their son, after it was discovered he was not with the caravan returning home with family and friends from Nazareth after attending the Passover celebrations. Those must have been three horrific days searching for Jesus. When they found him, his response seemed rather cavalier: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

The short answer would be NO!

The good news for us (for one, not being Jesus' parents) was that Jesus was raised in a family who cared about him, loved him and were doing their very best to raise him in their faith. But he was a human young boy/man, something we too often forget. And yes, like Samuel, here we see him already dedicating himself to being responsible first and foremost to God, however, as he could, or felt called to be.

Pádraig O Tuama (a leader in the Corrymeela Community in Ireland) notes we have an example of the "audacity of the Incarnation; somebody was born, grew, learned, loved and was love, misunderstood and caused misunderstandings."

There is an old Irish saying that goes something like this: "You know, we are all related to Jesus...on his mother's side."

FINALLY, FRIENDSHIP

Later in the writings of Matthew (12:46) and Mark (3:31) and Luke (8:19) we find Jesus is defining kinship or family, in an ever widening way by claiming that, "My mother and my brothers, are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Is Jesus rejecting family? No, it is an expansion of the traditional custom of placing family as an idol, above ALL else (see the Shema). For Jesus, it was God as his Creator & Parent first. With this personal and intimate connection firmly established and reinforced, then comes family/friends being of one kind regardless of blood ties. And, like Jesus, we too become more loving and forgiving with everyone when accept that we too, like Jesus, recognize deeply we are beloved ourselves. A very wonderful and expansive circle is formed.

The challenge for us today is not to give up on our families or friends when they hurt or disappoint us, anymore than Jesus did later in his life. For if like him, we become intimately rooted or connected with God/Yahweh/Jesus, we can handle more gracefully the challenges that close family and friends often give us and **we give them**. Queen Elizabeth has faced family challenges and misunderstandings and our gospel stories are riddled with friends, family and discipleship issues as well.

THANKFULNESS

Giving thanks for the help that others give us as gifts are part of this circle of faith, family and friendship.

The last two issues of our local paper *The Gabriola Sounder*, have examples of gratitude and thanksgiving. The Mackay's took out an add to publicly thank our outstanding **Volunteer** Fire Department for stopping a devastating fire that could have destroyed their home. They thanked their neighbours and "Gus" the dog who first sounded the alarm. They saw how skilled these volunteers were and also felt surrounded by their comforting support! They were grateful and they themselves have given much to support others far and wide.

This week's issue of *The Sounder* has a letter from Joëlle, Victor Anthony's widow. She wrote a gracious letter, thanking those who unsolicited stepped forward to help them during the duration of Victor's illness. Joëlle expressed their love for Gabriola and also how fortunate they felt with a sense of humbleness. This came from a family who has given so much themselves of their time and talent to this, our island home as well!

As we here at Christ Church Gabriola move forward in faith toward and through this coming year:

—let us do so with thanksgiving that we walked this earth for a time with those now gone from us in sight, but not from our hearts;

—let us give thanks for the families who have loved and cared for so many of us over the years as Mary and Joseph for Jesus and Hannah & Elkanah for Samuel;

—let us remember with joy those friends who have held our hands and our hearts as they entered our lives and those who have journeyed with us in faith as followers of Jesus the Christ.

MAY OUR CIRCLE GROW EVER WIDER

L.A. St.Clair