

## Reflection for September 27, 2020

### Nostalgia

*Is the Lord among us or not?*

*If there is any encouragement in Christ, let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...*

May the peace of the Lord be with you always.

Let us pray:

*Holy Mystery, the stories of our ancestors touch us as dark sayings of old. Help us behold truths in their stories, we are frightened to see in our own. Open our eyes to see your presence amidst our hopes and fears. Open our hearts to the courage it takes to assume leadership in our communities, while remaining your faithful followers. Open our minds to perceive hope in the midst of despair. We believe, Great Spirit. Help our unbelief. Amen.*

“Is the Lord among us or not?” A familiar question? The Israelites are filled with doubt, fear, anger, and uncertainty. They are on the verge of violence. Moses has received death threats. They condemn Moses for bringing them out of Egypt only to let them die of thirst. They yearn to return to Egypt—the place of bondage and oppression. Can you believe it? They seem to be overcome with nostalgia for what was or never was.

As Brian Erickson observes, “This is one of the signs you have really lost it: when you start to idealize your past. Nostalgia never leads you forward, because nostalgia casts an impossible standard—a candy-coated, much-improved rendering of what once was. Whether it is holding on to the church of our youth (which ceased to be many years ago) or clinging to a season of our own lives in which things were better

than they are now, nostalgia quickly steals our joy and makes us indifferent to the flowing streams of living water God has provided here in the wilderness.”

Wade Davis writes: “For many years, those on the conservative right in the United States have invoked a nostalgia for the 1950s, and an America that never was, but has to be presumed to have existed to rationalize their sense of loss and abandonment, their fear of change, their bitter resentments and lingering contempt for the social movements of the 1960s, a time of new aspirations for women, gays, and people of color.”

“Yet here we are, living in this strange world of space and time, trying to work out what it’s all about. We are adrift on a misty gray sea of ignorance, seeking a sun-kissed island of certainty, on which we hope to find clear answers to our deepest and most poignant questions” (Allister McGrath, *Born To Wonder*).

*“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my love complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”*

Where do we find encouragement in this time of uncertainty and disruption? Moses is instructed by God to pick up his staff, the symbol of God’s providence, gather his leaders, and go ahead of the people to a place God will direct him. Elizabeth Bounds offers a helpful suggestion: “Find time for meditation, prayer, and reflection so as to live fully and truly in the midst of difficulties, suffering and joy; be alert to your reactions to your daily experiences, attending to feelings of

aversion, anger, gratitude, joy, and the other emotions of daily life; then find some moments of quiet (even lying in bed or driving the car!) to bring these emotions before yourself and God.”

In his book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz writes: The economy uncertain, education in decline, cities under siege, crime and poverty spiraling upward, international relations roiling: we look to leaders for solutions, and when they don't deliver, we simply add their failure to our list of woes.

This is a difficult time for anyone in leadership in society. Dr. Bonnie Henry, who has so calmly and competently guided the people of British Columbia through this pandemic, has received death threats. But just like the first son in Jesus' parable who changes his mind, those who oppose the COVID19 protocol measures may recognize the moral imperative to adhere to the stipulations mandated by Dr. Henry.

This is also a difficult time for anyone in leadership in the church. To have the mind of Christ, to be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind seems like a tall order. Paul wrote these words to his beloved congregation at Philippi from a Roman prison cell where he was awaiting execution. He would add: “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” My fervent prayer is that American evangelical Christians who support the current president's white supremacist agenda will change their minds and heed the words of Jesus in *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 7: 21-23): “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

Moses did not abandon the people but, along with his own spiritual leaders—the elders—led the people through the wilderness to living water, with God ahead of them. We believe, as we journey through our own time of uncertainty and disruption, that Christ goes ahead. In the words of the cherished hymn: “All the way my Saviour leads me, cheers each winding path I tread, gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread. Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul athirst may be, gushing from the rock before me, lo a spring of joy I see!”

Let us pray:

*God of overflowing abundance, when your people suffered from thirst, you satisfied their need with water from a rock. Receive our gifts this day, O God, and transform our gifts into blessing that grace the lives of others like an ever-flowing stream. Receive our thanks and our praise, our industry and our love, that all might share your manifold blessings. Amen.*

*Rev. Bill Cantelon*