

**April 22, 2018 Rev. Debra K. Schneider & James Roth Manor Road United Church,
John 21:1-17 Financial AGM – Reflections**

GOSPEL

John 21: 1-3

REFLECTION

Familiar Comforts

Rev. Debra

One of the things I love about the gospels is how human the disciples are. Here we find them in the midst of what must have been a distressing, heart-breaking and tumultuous time. If their lives have been turned around when Jesus called them to leave their former lives behind and follow him; now, I suspect they have been totally turned inside out and upside down!

How could they possibly even begin make sense of all that has happened? What could the future hold for them now?

Many of us also experience times of deep loss, confusion, and turmoil—times when we can't make sense of what has happened, times when we are overwhelmed, confused, bereft—times when we simply cannot see a way forward. Like those long ago disciples, when life crashes in on us, we too tend to go back to what we know.

My mother, when she was overwhelmed by life, used to disappear for a day. She would go to her father's home to clean his house, do his laundry, cook him a meal, and strangely.... she would return home refreshed. Her father was a touchstone in her life.

When we are feeling lost we tend to go back to the familiar, to the comfortable, to the comforting. We go home, we call an old friend simply to hear their voice, we rest, we pray, we eat our favourite foods, and perhaps—just perhaps we allow ourselves to be cared for by those who will love us back into life—those who will be strong for us until we regain our footing, find our balance, and begin to recognize ourselves again.

In one sense or another most of us, given the opportunity, will take our dearest companions along and go fishing.

Such times are fallow times. We're like the frozen, seeming lifeless, fields of winter. If anyone were to observe and comment on what we are accomplishing, they might say we 'have caught nothing.'—that we are doing nothing. And it is true, on the surface of things, we often seem to be accomplishing very little; but the truth is, we are doing our necessary work—the difficult spiritual work we must do in order to regain our strength, reorient our vision, and prepare ourselves to begin once again to put one foot in front of another with a sense of purpose and possibility for the future.

GOSPEL

John 21: 4-14

REFLECTION *Sharing from our Bounty* James Roth (MRUC Member)

When Rev. Debra asked Susannah & I whether we would speak today on the subject of stewardship, I got to thinking....because I knew Susannah would stick me with giving more of an answer than, "because that's what we're supposed to do"! Which, of course, she just did. So in anticipation of this I considered why we give to the Church. Not the Church - like Susannah said, since we were both raised as Christians, we're completely indoctrinated to do so. And everything we've experienced in our adult lives, and in our life together, has only led us to conclude that what we were taught as children was correct.

But why do we give to this Church? Why Manor Road United Church? And as I thought about it, I realized that Debra had herself provided me with the answer. Eleven years ago, when we - Debra, Susannah, & I - were all first starting out here at Manor Road, I had found the answer in a conversation Debra & I had. I was saying something about the nature of God. His physical nature, I mean: that He doesn't have one, since God has no Form. Debra's response to my musings was profound, and has stuck with me ever since. She said, "That's why Jesus' message is about love, and compassion, and out to and living for other people's sake. Because the only way for us to truly know and experience God is through other people."

In our Gospel passages today, Jesus refers to his disciples as his 'children', and many of Jesus' parables revolve around family and households. This isn't an incidental thing. Family plays a big part in most people's lives. Family are the 'other people' that we usually care about the most. 'Family' means more to us than mere 'community'. Communities happen everywhere, all the time, whenever & wherever people have a common interest. Often that interest is little more than proximity: the community we call 'Toronto' is formed around the common interests of 3,000,000 people living close together and having to share public space.

But families are founded on something much deeper than common interest. They are founded on love, and it is love that nourishes and sustains them. We love our families - even if and when we don't like them very much! And the families that matter the most to us aren't necessarily the families that we were born into, but the families that we choose to be a part of. Our spouses, our children, the people that we choose to spend the biggest & best parts of our lives with - these are the families that matter the most to us. These are the people through whom we usually learn the most about God.

The Church is also a family, because it is founded upon love: a love of God. A love of God that makes us wish to - and be capable of being - a member of God's family. To come to love God more by knowing God better. And that's part of what Debra was telling me eleven years ago when we both started here at Manor Road: the way for us to know and love God is for us to know and love one another. This is what it means to come together as a Church.

Manor Road is like our branch of God's family. Our wing of God's household. As the years have gone by - and it's hard to believe it's been eleven years - this lesson has become all-the-more true to Susannah & I as we come to understand that lesson better. We are part of a family built on and around our love of God. As members of God's family - as people who wish to eat breakfast around the Lord's fire - we wish to contribute our share of the bounty that God has seen fit to provide to us to that breakfast. Providing for the Church is like providing for our family: the family our love of God has led us to join.

We both encourage and welcome all of you to also be a part of God's family. To join us at the fire to share in the breakfast that the Lord has made for us. Whatever bounty God has seen fit to put in your net, we encourage and welcome you to join us in giving back to God. To give back to God through His family - through our family - in order to tend to the well-being and growth of that family. That's why we give to Manor Road United Church.

Thanks be to God!

GOSPEL

John 21:15-17

REFLECTION

Loving Jesus- Loving the World

Rev. Debra

Earlier, just before Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him three times, he also speaks words of commissioning to the disciples saying, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

On the night before Jesus is crucified, Peter indeed does deny Jesus three times, saying, "I do not know the man!" Now, not once, not twice, but three times, Jesus asks Simon Peter, "Do you love me?" For each former denial, Peter is now given the opportunity to declare his love. "Yes, you know that I love you!" And, with each affirmation, he is given a job to do, "Feed my lambs," "Take care of my sheep." "Feed my sheep."

It seems that love for Jesus is always meant to be expressed through our love and care for one another, the world and its peoples. We can lift our hands in praise and sing love songs to Jesus with passion and heart, but if we don't care for those who are given into our care... we might just as well lower our hands, silence our voices, and forget our prayers; because, here in this post- resurrection appearance, Jesus not only repeats but extends his earlier commissioning to love one another. Now, they are also called to care for all those who Christ gives into their care. Now, through this old story, Jesus, continues to ask us even, and perhaps especially when we falter and fail him, "Do you love me?" And when our answer is, "Yes," he continues to put us to work, caring for others in his name. We are commissioned not only to pray, but to live into his prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth."