

Reflections May 24, 2020

Text John17: 1-11, Preached at Bolton United Church by Rev. Eleanor Scarlett

Since the middle of March, we have been huddled down at home and have not been able to gather face to face because of COVID19. Yet we have found ways to stay connected and to be nurtured by means of different forms of technologies. Like others, I too miss the personal connections. I miss being in church, seeing your faces, hearing your laughter, and sharing in your stories. Many of us have found creative ways on how to use this time of social isolation wisely. It is my prayer that as we move through these difficult days, we will continue to hold firm to the assurance that Jesus the liberator is with us.

Today is the last Sunday in the season of Easter, the reading comes from John 17, 1-11. There is much in these words of Jesus' prayer for us to hold on to. There are many ways I could go with this reading; today though, I am drawn to the theme on unity: The text emphasises a particular type of unity, one given to those who are followers of Jesus it is a unity that is rooted in the surety that we belong to God.

In verse 6 of the text Jesus prayed this profound prayer for his disciples. ⁶“I have revealed you^[a] to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸For I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

¹⁰All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Divine One, protect them by the power of^[b] your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. This is a profound prayer that offers so much hope, a hope we crave today.

At the inauguration service of the United Church of Canada this was the chosen text. As I was reading and re-reading this text, I wondered what it was that led the planning team to have chosen this text. The church's focus was on the unity of Jesus, the One who boldly prayed for his disciples. One wonders what was happening in the world at that time?

In a conversation with a member of my lay educational committee when I was a student, she shared fondly some of the events she remembered. She mentioned that World War I had ended and there was a semblance of hopefulness, people began to seek opportunities that were life giving. It was not surprising that during this period some Canadian women were given the rights to vote, this was a major turning point as some women were finally beginning to take their rightful places within society.

Communities were working more closely together; this was a time of opportunity and growth. They had gone through the war years; they had experienced devastation, destructions, and lost lives. They were moving into a new reality of hope, that comes in and through the Risen Christ.

Here we are 95 years later, and the world is in quarantine due to the Coronavirus Pandemic. For some of us we have been on this journey of isolation for more than two months and we are looking for some signs of hope, anything we can hold on to.

This text is speaking to us in a profound way, it is challenging us to work together. John reminds us that Jesus' prayer for us is for us to be one with our God. What lessons can we learn from this time of isolation? Here in Canada as well as in other parts of the world, countries are being exposed in the way they have taken care of the elderly and the vulnerable. While in other countries the daunting reality of race and inequality is staring us in our faces. We lament, we weep, and we cry out to God for answers.

As I reflect more closely on these words, I am reminded of the prayer shawl ministry that several of our churches have adopted. Shawl ministries brings people together in community, the shawls are given to anyone near or far who are going through struggles, celebrations or just someone who would just like to have one. Each one has a unique prayer that is stitched into them. Eden United, has a vibrant Shawl ministry that impacted many lives near and far. To be wrapped in a prayer shawl, made by loving caring, praying hands is a ministry that engenders love and gratitude.

Jesus may not be with us as fully human, yet he is with us interceding for us as One. I may no longer be in communities where there are vibrant prayer shawl ministries yet, I treasure the many that I have been gifted knowing that each shawl is uniquely wrapped in prayer. I hold on to the love, care, and memories of those women working, praying, laughing, and crying together as a living testimony of being one with Christ.

Prayer shawls are prayers of love made visible, so this week's gospel account of Jesus' prayer for his followers is love that transcends the pages of scripture and the sands of time. We are God's dearly beloved. Listen, can you hear the voice of Jesus praying this prayer for you? Can you feel yourself surrounded by God's love for you and for this world? Can you feel in these words what it means to be in Christ, to be covered with his abiding love and the divine desire for relationship?

Can you sense the power of prayer as these words enter your mind, heart, and being? When Jesus says, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine" he is laying claim to us. What does this mean for you? Does it make any difference that these words are also spoken about others you encounter in your daily lives? Have you experienced 'unity' especially during this time of social isolation? Let us be mindful that this unity we are called to live into is rooted on Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour and no one can take it from us.

As we leave the season of Easter for the Ordinary Time, may we remember that nothing with God is ordinary. May we continue to pray the prayer Jesus prayed with his disciples that 'all may be one.' Prayer allows us to enter into deep conversations with our God as it draws us into the presence of the Divine.

Remember also, that by the works we do others may experience the presence of Christ in us. As we move through these in-between times let us do so knowing that Jesus has already wrapped us in the words of this prayer. "Holy God, protect them by the power of^[b] your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one." This is good news for the people of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen!