

Mid-Week Reflection #7
Wednesday, May 13, 2020
By The Rev. Nancy Yee

Well, here we are again. You in your house. Me in mine. I hope you had a wonderful Mother's Day. This was probably the strangest Mother's Day, ever. Our first Mother's Day in a global pandemic! How did you fair?

For Mother's Day, two of our four children showed up at our place. They brought some annuals and my favourite kind of chocolate (dark 70% cocoa). Two of my brother-in-laws sent flowers to their mother, Alice, who is living with us right now. In my now usual pandemic paranoia form, I took the flowers in (they were left on our doorstep) and after putting the flowers away, wiped down our kitchen counter with Lysol and washed our hands a few times after picking up the basket and moving it around the house to see where it looked the best.

Taylor and Michael stayed for supper. We ordered from Venice House via Skip the Dishes. Let me say, this was a nightmare experience. To make a long story short, because it was Mother's Day, everyone was probably ordering in. The on-line site took a long time to confirm. It kept rejecting the order. So I reordered each time. Finally, out of exasperation, I said to Michael, "You order." Being a Skip the Dishes connoisseur, he had no problem. The order came about 45 minutes later. We ate around 6 pm, not really checking the time accuracy. The food was quite good.

On Taylor's insistence, we ate two meters apart. And talked about what it was like to live and work in a global pandemic. Tim and Nicholas are still in self-isolation in my Regina apartment. Their 14 days are up as I write this reflection. They're coming back to Saskatoon Wednesday. Something worth celebrating.

They left around 7:15 pm. Forty-five minutes later, another delivery. The same order! It seems one of my orders went through their system in addition to Michael's. We ate my order first, thinking it was Michael's order. Uggh! The kids had to come back the next day to get their extra food.

I've been reflecting on the kind of impact this pandemic is having on our society and on humanity, in general. On the one hand, we're all having the same experience and feeling the same feelings of anxiety. There's also a common hope of finding a vaccine or coming out of the pandemic and the lockdown well without any further outbreaks. However, our common anxiety increases when we hear the realities there may be more outbreaks if we're not careful. There's a common anticipation of loosening the restrictions, combined with a common anxiety of what if there's another outbreak. We just don't know what we don't know.

Yet, despite this common experience of fear and hope, each person and each group are feeling the impact differently. I am responding to this pandemic in my own unique way. And so are you. And my family is responding it differently than my sister's family. Clergy are responding and experiencing this common humanity-moment differently than lay people. Students' responses differ from farmers and small businesses. And even if this

common threat hits every part of the world and society, the poor are experiencing this pandemic differently than the rich. The list can go on.

I'm also kind of fascinated that now this pandemic is going on longer than anticipated to see how different people are reacting. Anger is surfacing. Some are protesting that their "rights" are being violated with these lockdown restrictions. And I'm fascinated, in a sad way, that this pandemic hasn't abated racism. Threats and violence against Asians in the western world have increased substantially. Of course, just recently, we have a well-known, beloved Canadian celebrity, perpetuating stereotypes of the "dirty Chinese".

Being a Chinese-Canadian, all these racist reactions are hurtful. And, if anyone has any of these thoughts, I'd say, "Please stop!" Racist thoughts are based on racist ideas. And these ideas and thoughts contaminate our minds, obliterating the goodness that God has created in each one of us. And once we let these evil thoughts into our heads, over time, these ideas will eventually contaminate our hearts, souls and spirits. And when we let that happen, hell will be unleashed, for now and for eternity.

It's been said that the battle is in the mind. To stop racism is to stop the way we think about people who are different than us, who look different, speak a different language and have a different culture. To stop racism is to be self-aware, to know why you think the way you do and why you react the way you do and to re-frame your thoughts so they reflect goodness, not evil. This re-framing is what God calls us to do as Christ does.

Healing, expanding, growing and purifying our thought life is essential to dealing with sin in our lives. We can only be like Jesus when we control the way we think about things. This is true not just regarding racism but everything else ugly that creeps into our thought life.

Philippians 4.8 (NIV) says

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

The Message translation says: *8-9 Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.*

I've mentioned Romans 8 before. I suggest you read it again and again until you understand the importance of renewing your mind to your spiritual life. To practice controlling our thoughts is part of our faith journey. May we have the courage and strength to walk the way of Jesus.

Here's a quote about the importance of our thought life.

*Watch your Thoughts, they become words.
Watch your Words, they become actions.
Watch your Actions, they become habits.*

*Watch your Habits, they become your character.
Watch your Character, it becomes your destiny.*

As God's people, our destiny is with God for all of eternity. But, our destiny could be disrupted and diminished, if not destroyed, if we let our thought life get away from us. That's why prayer is so important and reading and memorizing scripture. It keeps our minds on the good things of God, so we don't miss God's blessings.

You might want to read a bit more on the importance of your thought life.
<https://www.alyssajhoward.com/2016/10/17/thought-life/>

I think you would all agree we're in the middle of a storm, a BIG storm. And we feel we're being tossed one way and another, losing our north star, trying to navigate this storm in a sea we're unfamiliar. We feel like we're going down! And the storm doesn't seem to let up and end any time soon.

I'm reminded of another storm, the one Jesus was in with his disciples. Mark 4.35-41.
35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Here's a short video of that story. Don't you think we're like the disciples in the boat right now, regarding the pandemic? Look at their faces. Do you see yourself in them? I know I see myself in them.

Then, hear Jesus' words, "Where is your faith?" Remember, Jesus is lord over all creation. He commands the stars and the moon and every living creature on earth, including a virus. When Jesus extends his hand, the waters calm. When Jesus speaks, demons flee. The Lord can still our hearts and give us a vaccine. This waiting is a test of our faith and our resolve to live a life worthy of God's calling, even in the midst of a pandemic. Be still and know that God is God.

<https://www.jesustfilm.org/watch/jesus.html/jesus-calms-the-storm/english.html>



Humanity is going through grief. In the first few weeks, people were in shock. The world was deathly quiet, as we saw the numbers of cases and death increase. Shock is the first stage of grief.

Now, we're in denial. We hear things like, "Open the economy!" "Maybe it's not as bad as they're saying." People's emotions are taking place of rational thought. That's ok. That's what grief is. A bunch of complex emotions that needs working through.

What will happen to us in and after this pandemic is a mystery. One of my favourite movies is *Shakespeare in Love*. There's a line that gets repeated in the movie that speaks to mystery. When things aren't going right in the plot, one character will say, "It'll be o.k." Another character pipes in, "But, how?!" And the response is always, "I don't know. It's a mystery." I think this line is a good description of what we're experiencing.

Some people get annoyed and frustrated when we use mystery as an explanation for anything and everything we can't explain. These people have very scientific and intellectual minds. They believe there's an answer for everything. And, the answer "it's a mystery" falls short of their satisfaction.

But, I like the idea of mystery. There's something profound when we say, "Life is a mystery." Or, "Death is mystery." Or, "Humans are a mystery." My favourite quote on mystery is this: **"A mystery isn't something that's meaningless. It's the presence of such profound meaning that it's difficult to comprehend."**

This definition of mystery applies most of all to God. We will never attain the full knowledge of God. God is a mystery. But, it doesn't mean God is unknowable. It just means that God is so transcendent, we humans will never grasp the fullness of God's being. I've listed a few aspects of God's mystery below:

Mystery of God's love
Mystery of God's mercy
Mystery of God's providence
Mystery of God's salvation

Mystery of God's presence
Mystery of God's kingdom
Mystery of God's will
Mystery of God's presence within us

I can write something on each mystery. And there are so many more aspects to God's mystery we can list. Suffice it is to say that Jesus is the mystery of God revealed.

When we know Jesus, we know God. That's what Jesus said to Philip. Jesus said to him, *"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"* John 14:9

The key to knowing God is to be filled by the Holy Spirit. This is a huge topic of discussion and teaching I can't get into here. I wish I could. Because the Holy Spirit is the heartbeat of our faith. And I hope nothing less than for you than to know the Third Person of the Trinity like you know yourself. Maybe in future reflections, if the Holy Spirit gives me words to write to introduce you to the most wonderful person of the Trinity.

Paul talks about the Holy Spirit in the mystery of God's wisdom in his first letter to the Corinthian Church.

1 Corinthians 2.6-10

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

*"What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived"—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—*

*10 these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.
The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*

The Holy Spirit will reveal things to you about our Heavenly Father and our brother, Jesus, if you want to know the deeper things of life and God. All you have to do is ask and you shall receive.

Here is an article about how to respond to the mystery of God.

<https://leadership.lifeway.com/2017/03/29/3-proper-ways-to-react-to-the-mysteries-of-god/>

On the Mystery of God

An intellectual reflection

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BOSqHrU7ns>

Mystery of God Music

A beautiful piece of music to contemplate the mystery of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9iOKI-I8uM>

This is a short reflection. Mainly because I am in line to preach for the May 24 on-line service. But, because we're filming this Monday, I need to have a sermon prepared for then.

So, I need time to put into that for now.

But, before I sign off, I want to introduce you to something extra you'll be receiving on Fridays in your email from Heather.

Rev. Winna Martin' Epistle, "Around the Cross"

As you may know, Rev. Winna Martin is the Associate Priest for St. Matthew, St. Luke and All Saints. As part of her priestly ministry with those three parishes, Rev Winna edits, writes and coordinates a weekly epistle that goes out to the three parishes. I've attached the last two copies for your perusal.

The epistle is beautifully done and written. According to Rev. Winna, the epistle's purpose is to connect the three parishes she is licensed to by providing a folksy and homey forum where parishioners can read about what God has laid on her heart that week, and also enjoy contributions from other parishioners.

This is not an information bulletin and it's not a newsletter. Each parish already sends out regular communication about what's happening in the parishes. What Rev. Winna's epistle does is to provide a way for her to relate and serve parishioners, in her gifting areas. This epistle also allows for other parishioners to be able to creatively express themselves by contributing items to the epistle.

Because we are in the 521 process and Rev. Winna will be part of the clergy ministry team in the new parish, I thought it would be a good idea at this time to include St. James and St. Philip in her weekly epistle. Most people already know Rev. Winna, as she's been in the diocese for many years and she knows many parishioners at St. James and St. Philip. But, this epistle is a special way for St. James and St. Philip to connect with Rev Winna in this time of transition.

After hearing no objections from St. James and St. Philip wardens, this week, St. James and St. Philip will be mentioned on the first page of the epistle and I will be one of the clergy contact people mentioned at the end of the epistle. Deacon Rita will be added as well, until her retirement date, June 30, 2020. A communique will go out in Friday's announcements to St. James and St. Philip from Heather asking for contributions from St. James and St. Philip's parishioners for Rev. Winna's epistle.

It is our hope you will find the epistle edifying to your soul and spirit.

