

It feels like the world is going through a reset as we confront this mysterious bit of matter called COVID19.

- We are quite aware of the changes to the work-a-day world with many working from home; school on the internet!
- We have to stay home more, visit less – some are getting reacquainted with themselves as actual individual beings – who are we apart from Job and Social Circles?
- Stress has exposed parts of our social fabric that we usually try to ignore.

Who would have thought that an African American named George Floyd would change the narrative of American social and political life?

Who would have thought the discovery of the remains of 215 children near a former Residential School in Kamloops (and 750 more on the Cowessess Reserve) would change the narrative of Canadian politics?

Who would have thought the treatment of Uighur peoples in western China, as one example, could influence international relations and make us as consumers think about the actual cost of the cheap clothing we insist on buying?

And the Church – where exactly IS the Church these days? What are we becoming? Where are we going?

It is sad but true, it usually takes a shock to the system to get real change happening – true in the world, true in our lives.

It even happened to Jesus one day.

The passage from Mark which we read describes a time when Jesus left Galilee towards the area we would call Lebanon today – greater Syria back then. Why? Why did Jesus go there? It seems for a time of retreat with the disciples – getting away from the crowds, the detractors, resetting the compose so to speak.

By this time, though, the fame of Jesus the healer went before him. So, despite trying to be invisible, Jesus was found by a woman, a Gentile, whose daughter was possessed by a demon. The geography was different, but it was a request that Jesus had heard before and to which he responded. But not today. In fact, listen to the dialogue again:

She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ But she answered him, ‘Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’

I think I have exhausted most of the available commentaries on this passage trying to explain what really happened. Most have trouble dealing with the words that it seems Jesus actually said – he called the woman a dog!

This is not the sweet little Terrier that brings its dish, waving her little tail, and to whom we say, ‘Aren’t you cute’. This is a village dog, a cur, the one that hangs around the garbage pile and somehow survives fleas, ticks and all.

Some Commentators suggested Jesus was testing the woman, testing her faith. But he never did that anywhere else. The only conclusion I can come to is shared by a few modern commentators – Jesus called the woman a dog. Was he having a bad day? Exhausted? Probably – but . . .?

The woman was not put off; she came back with a Zinger – even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.

Can’t you see Jesus looking at her, maybe even grinning a little? It was a Gotcha! Moment. Go, said Jesus, your daughter will be well.

This passage is often taken as an exception – maybe Mark got it wrong – or left something out – or something. But what if Mark got it right?

It means something we need to consider. When Paul says that the Eternal Son of God emptied himself, he meant it. Jesus was born fully human – and I confess our Creed that he was – is – Son of God. But Jesus had to grow up, learn how to be a kid, learn how to be a faithful Jew, learn Scripture, figure people out.

With Jesus’ relationship to John the Baptist, he would understand his role as Messiah – to proclaim and initiate the Kingdom of God. Except, things didn’t quite work out the way one would expect. There was opposition, there was the Cross. How else do we understand Gethsemane? This was not part of the plan, was it Abba? Take this cup away – where is Plan B? Then Jesus understood – “not my will, but your will be done.”

Is it outrageous, a blasphemy to say Jesus had to learn? That he could not have solved $E=MC^2$ squared?

To me, it makes Jesus’ ministry much more passionate; his courage much more profound; his love tested and maturing like yours and mine.

The woman, probably illiterate, taught Jesus the lesson he needed to hear. As he returned to Galilee he became less interested in purity of people or the Law, and more concerned about heart, justice and inclusion.

Once when we lived in Malawi, a minister friend asked me to go with him to a church out in the sticks, so to speak. It couldn’t be accessed in the rainy season, so after the rains it was time for a visit. Besides, I had a car and Felix didn’t. It had been a poor rainy season and immediately we could see the people were having it tough, But they were glad to see us and we had the usual service. We baptized about 30 babies and children, had communion and Felix preached long enough to make up for several missed Sundays. There is a custom in Malawi – not always honoured – that families might give the Minister a

small gift on the day of Baptism – ministers were not paid very much. Felix joked to me that in this poor village there would not be any gifts.

As we walked away from the Church, tired and dehydrated, I felt someone touch my hand. It was a little girl and she put something into my hand and ran back to her parents. I looked down and there was an egg. AN EGG! As I looked back, I saw the parents with the child I had baptized,. An egg, a gift – it was all they had. I have never emotionally recovered from that moment – thanks be to God!

Little children were taken from their homes across Canada so the Christian Churches could extract the “savage from the child” - in the language of the day.

African men and woman and children were captured, manacled, and force marched to the Coast to get on slave ships where half of them might die.

Uighurs are brainwashed and captive so we can get cheap stuff.

Women in too many countries work 12 hour days, 6 days a week, to satisfy our consumer needs.

The Aboriginal peoples of the Americas are still treated as somehow unworthy of equality and justice. Their honouring of the forests, the rivers, the life within, seen as somehow quaint and out of touch.

And that is how many people see the Church these days: on a good day, quaint and out of touch. On a bad day, as responsible for aiding and abetting the forceful displacement of innocent children. We face isolation; we face condemnation.

Jesus is Son of God, Messiah – but Jesus had to learn as well as give. I think Jesus taught the Father that this being human is not a slam-dunk.

Jesus learned – and his arms opened wider.
We are learning – now what?

The United Church has a clergy resource called “When the Church Leaves the Building”. Gets my attention.

We live on Sechelt unceded land, but we know so little about the Sechelt people. They used to number in the thousands. Settlers brought Small Pox and numbers dwindled to the hundreds. There was a Residential School here which was burned down one night – as with the Catholic Church – twice. There is an ecumenical group called Syiyaya – I am wearing the pendant that symbolizes the attempt to meet each other, learn from each other, and form deeper community. We have more to learn than do the Sechelt people.

Syiyaya means ‘friends and relations’.

That is always where we start to learn - Our humanity, our common humanity.

Jesus looked up and instead of a foreign gentile, he saw a woman who loved her child and took a risk. Can we do that? In love, in the absence of the world’s love, can we take a risk? Can we change? Our future depends on it. . . . Amen