

## Reflection, April 28-29, 2018, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Season

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It doesn't seem that long ago when part of my daily routine included reading bedtime stories to my children. Those of you who have, or have had, small children will relate to the importance of bedtime rituals and routines. All my children had their favourite stories, whether about trains, or princesses, or toys, or fairies or animals. But one that they all enjoyed when they were quite young was *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. Probably many of you will know this children's classic.

It begins: "In the great green room, there was a telephone; And a red balloon; And a picture of...The cow jumping over the moon; And there were three little bears sitting on chairs..." The story continues, naming the objects in the room and visible through the window, then turns to saying good night. "Good night room; Good night moon..." and good night to each object named earlier, ending with "Good night noises everywhere." Sometimes our kids were asleep before the story was finished. Always, hearing it was a comforting and calming experience.

As I pondered this Sunday's readings, I was drawn to this idea of "story."

On this Fifth Sunday of the Easter Season, we continue to make our way through the Acts of the Apostles and its stories around the birth of the early church. Today, it is the account of Saul--Paul--being introduced into the community of believers in Jerusalem following his dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road. Naturally enough, the apostles and other believers are afraid of Saul who, only days earlier, was persecuting the Christians. But, persuaded by Barnabas, the community accepts him, and Saul is soon fearlessly preaching the good news of Jesus and the Resurrection. The passage ends by describing how the Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria is living in peace and growing in numbers.

Like a favorite adventure series, we can hear and experience this episode and the full collection of stories in the Acts of the Apostles with enthusiasm and even a bit of excitement. We see what may be possible when people are united with Jesus through the action of the Holy Spirit. We may be inspired to ask whether we could experience something similar here in our community today. Luke has compiled an account in Acts-- choosing the episodes to include and the words to describe them--so that others can learn of this experience. As we read these stories every year during the Easter Season we are blessed and encouraged and comforted.

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But there is another dimension to these scripture stories. To explore this, let's turn to another, much more recent story--whose end we don't yet know.

We were all shaken and saddened by the tragic deaths and injury of too many on Yonge Street in Toronto this past Monday. This mass killing is not in a distant land. It is so close--on a street that many of us have walked upon--perhaps recently. We sense that the victims--ordinary Canadians and visitors doing the most ordinary of things--are just like us. We may be frightened, or angry, or determined not to be intimidated. But few of us are untouched. Many of us probably turned to prayer in the moments and the hours after we had heard the news. In the days following, we may have asked ourselves whether we are called to respond in some way as an individual or as a community?

What light do our scripture readings this weekend shed on this confusing world in which we live, and how to live in it? Often, I think, as we hear passages such as these, they may seem neat and tidy--and perhaps a bit distant from our day-to-day experience.

But if you look at it more closely at these books and the context in which they were written, there are many clues that the world of those days was not so different from ours. Paul had enemies who want to kill him. Jesus was scorned by many and even those who admired him were often confused--who could this be who calls himself a vine and his Father the vine dresser? Most of the letters of Paul, John and other authors in the New Testament were written to people and communities who were confused about something or even in conflict.

It is often said of Bible stories that we know the end of the story. And this may change the way in which we read them. In a certain way, I think it makes us gloss over the confusion, the doubt, the uncertainty, the lack of information that the people in those bible stories must have felt at the time. So what allowed them to act? What kept them going? It seems to me that it was the same for them as it is today for us--striving always to act in unity with the spirit of God within. It was this way for Jesus--he united himself in prayer with his Father so that he could live a life of service, self-sacrifice, love, forgiveness and trust even while suffering in a very imperfect world. It was the same for Paul and for John. That is the only way to make it through our broken world and these scripture stories from their lives may help us do the same if we pay attention.

As we go forward this week, I invite each of us to do a bit of homework. Find a story of service to others or of forgiveness that inspires you. It could be from scripture or elsewhere. Then share that story with someone else as a gift to help them along the way.

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