

Homily  
Epiphany 2,  
January 15, 2023  
Reverend Michael Fleming

Let me begin with something from Ann Weems as a way of introducing our first homily on fulfilling what Isaiah said when he wrote, “The old shall dream dreams and the young shall see visions” . We have been blessed with a God-given opportunity to reflect on our past, present and future as a faithfilled and faithful community of Christ who stand at a crossroads, looking east and west, north and south, wondering which way to turn.

In her poem OUR LORD IS CALLED HOPE, Ann wrote,

“Our God is a Lord who turned  
things upside down and inside out  
a man who dined with sinners  
a man who befriended prostitutes and tax collectors  
a man who was called heretic  
a man who broke Sabbath rules  
a man who changed water into wine.

And he bids us to follow him  
to turn things upside down and inside out  
to go where the hurting is  
to change water into wine  
to change who we are into the Kingdom of God.

(from Searching for Shalom Westminster/John Knox Press 1991)

I believe that this is truly what we are called into being – we the worldwide Church which has as her foundation the life, ministry, words, deeds, death and resurrection of an itinerant preacher – teacher - healer from Nazara; we the template here in Metcalfe for

all that the universal Church could and should be about as we seek to serve Christ and others; we who can respond to the call from Jesus to “follow me”.

As we all know, the world, and our small corner of it, has changed drastically in the last few years and continues to morph into...well, we're not all that certain as to what shape things will have in the future. All we know is that everything that we once held as permanent and immutable is now fluid and open to becoming something new. In one sense, that was the same reality faced by those men and women who hid behind a locked door following the political and state-sanctioned execution of the one whom they called Messiah. As they sat in the uncertainty of how their world had changed and wondered what was to happen to them in the new reality, they reflected on what life had been like for them up until he whispered from the cross, “It is accomplished- Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”. They thought of his words spoken about this kingdom of peace, love and equity which he offered; of the conditions for membership in this new world being service, sacrifice and trust in the great unknown who was God; of the people whose lives Jesus had changed forever – the lame, the deaf and the blind, the lost and the lonely, those cast away, the lepers of all sorts of conditions physical and emotional; of his dedication to the principles of equity and honouring of ALL God's people – male and female, gentile and Jew, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, whole and broken, children and adults and all those in-between; lost and found, hookers and tax collectors, farmers and fisherfolk – indeed the whole woof and warp of the tapestry of the human experience.

As we face the future, I want through these homilies to offer us the opportunity to spend some time in reflection and contemplation of what we are and what we are capable of becoming as the body of Christ, as sisters and brothers in the Lord, as one in the Spirit.

And so, how do we start; where do we start? In Alice in Wonderland, the King of Hearts said, “Begin at the beginning and go on until the end; then STOP”. With this sage

advise, let us go the beginning of our life as the body of Christ: at the age of twelve, as I said last week, Jesus had an understanding that he and his God were in a special relationship, one which would grow and mature until it was time – time for revelation to the world of God’s incredible offer to join in the dance of the universe. When he is thirtyish, Jesus leaves his village of Nazara because he has a deep sense ( what our young people call their spidey-sense) that the time was ripe for the grand unveiling of the kingdom and that it was to begin with his second cousin John on the banks of a river/stream called the Jordan. There, Jesus is affirmed as the One who was waited for when the Spirit declares, “This is my Son, my beloved One on whom my favour rests. Listen to him”. Turning in obedience to the One who sent him, Jesus enters the Jordanian wilderness for a time of trial and testing, a retreat into reflection and reaction to the will of the One now known by him as Abba, Father.

Returning, Jesus gathers the beginning of a fellowship drawn from the margins of his world: farmers and fisher folk, beggars and taxcollectors, and women and children – not the rich and powerful of his world- the Romans and the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Saducees and the Kings and...and...and – but those whose lived lives of such desperation on the edges of the culture to which He had been sent. What a motley crew it appeared to be and many of his compatriots treated these Jesus people as a joke, but as we know, the joke was on them. The first clue came when Jesus sat on the side of a hill in the Galilee one bright sunshiney afternoon and opened his mouth and declared “Blessed are...” The words that follow were the outline of both life in the kingdom of his Father, but also the conditions necessary for participation in the blessedness. The word blessed according to the Oxford Dictionary, means to be endowed with divine favour. In Hebrew, the expression BRUCH HESHM means that the one who is blessed trusts that God is present in their life and that he or she is in a real relationship with the Creator. In Greek the word used is MAKARIOS happiness which comes by being one with God. Now, we need to understand that the word happiness is not just sweetness and

light times, but really speaks of an inner sense of calm, peace and serenity which comes from inviting God to cradle us in arms of Love. This is the blessedness, the happiness of the Beatitudes. But, for Jesus when he spoke these words, there was a “therefore” that followed each of the blessednesses – “If”, Jesus said, “you believe that you are truly loved by God, that you are in his heart and hands, then you have the obligation to offer that same shalomness to others and invite them into the peaceable kingdom.”

This Jesus did more with the things he did rather than the words he spoke – for Jesus, actions DID speak more loudly than words for those who saw life as a struggle for survival in which there was little or nothing to sing and dance about. The stories Jesus told, the healings Jesus did, the embraces Jesus engaged in – all pointed to what is the result of kingdom – living : acceptance as a daughter or son of God, a citizen of the kingdom, a brother of Jesus, a bearer of God’s Light and Love to the world.

This offer, this invitation to both LIVE IN and BE the kingdom is still here and even as I speak, Jesus is knocking at the often - locked door of our hearts and souls with the simple invitation to join in the dance. Rarely though does the kingdom come in spectacular ways: no, most often, like Carl Sandburg’s definition of the movement of fog - it “comes on little cat’s feet”. The kingdom comes not with great fanfares and trumpets blaring, not accompanied by the oohs and aahs of fireworks lighting up the skies; the kingdom gives no warning, advertises not its arrival but births itself when strangers look out for strangers; when a word of hope is spoken to one who lives in their own land of darkness; when a simple expression of care and concern makes all the difference to someone who has been told all their life that we are less than whole, less than valuable; when a held hand is the lifeline; when a smile is the melter of an iced-over heart; when an invitation to enter someone else’s private space is the greatest gift offered.... It is in the littlest of things that matter and that are remembered longer and more deeply than all the words preached or spoken....

I wrote something years and years ago that ran in part like this –  
Simple gifts we often miss  
because they do not come with lavish bows  
or flashy paper.

Simple gifts we often miss  
because are carried in familiar hands  
with no tag reading,  
“from me to you”...  
Simple gifts we often miss  
because they come as wind over the water,  
as breeze kissing the field,  
as sigh unheard in the tumult and all the confusion.

Simple gifts we often miss  
because they are placed quietly on the table  
when our backs are turned or our hearts are dead,  
and silently wait until they are discovered,  
opened, treasured and shared...

In the life and words, in the deeds and the sharing of life together did those first followers of the one called Christ find their ministry of simply sharing themselves with all the lonely people who, like Eleanor Rigby pass through life as shadows of who they could be IF one person looked them in the eye, said “I love you” and taking their hand, invited them on the journey.

Are you able?

## REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. I imagine I am sitting on the shores of the Galilee as Jesus spoke of blessedness (read Matthew 5: 1-16).  
Do these words speak to me or about me?
2. What might I do to be more reflective of the kingdom in my own life and in my daily walk with others?
3. What role should/could the church play in creating kingdom people and “equipping the saints for ministry” in our geographic area around Metcalfe and in our diocese?
4. What do I see as the great strengths of the parish? Where do I think the parish can better respond?
5. What can I do to help bring the kingdom closer for myself and others and what can the parish do to help in that process?