

Holy Trinity Anglican Church Metcalfe

Easter 5

May 7, 2023

Reverend Michael Fleming

Fr. Michael: As we gather on this new day to celebrate our life in the Risen Christ, we acknowledge that our homes and this, our house of worship, lie in the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples.

People: **Together, may we discover a common pathway of reconciliation and hope for all God's children on our faith journey. Amen**

Fr. Michael: Out of the world of cut-throat competition, of winners and losers, and too many left behind we come together.

People: **The ways of the world are not our ways; the ways of the world are not Christ's ways.**

Fr. Michael: Out of a world of hatred, violence, individualism and life-taking power, we gather as God's community, as God's koinonia, as God's people.

People: **God's ways are inclusive, expansive and life-giving for all people.**

Fr. Michael: Come and worship the One who knows no limits! Swim and splash in the waters of divine community! Resurrect our hearts and souls in the worship of the One!

People: **Praise to the Everlasting One. Alleluia!**

(Time Graves from LiturgyBits)

Fr. Michael: Gathering as the koinonia, the community of God, we pray, "Almighty God,

People: **to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen**

Fr. Michael: As the first community waited and wondered what it was all about, we join the angel chorus and acclaim, "Glory to God in the highest,

People: **and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory. Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Fr. Michael: Lord, may we honour your name not by paying it lip-service but by trusting the vision it speaks of and the way it calls us. May we honour the vision by following you, speaking into the Word with our actions and showing who it is we have chosen to follow. May we love in your name, speak in your name, care in your name and willingly touch the outcast, remember the sick, visit the imprisoned, clothe the naked and give water to those who thirst for you.

All: **Amen.** (Roddy Hamilton from Listening to the Stones)

Fr. Michael: Almighty God, your Son Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Give us grace to love one another and to walk in the way of his commandments, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

All: **Amen**

Reader: A Reading From The Book Of Acts (ACTS 7:55-60) Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

The Word Of The Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

Reader: Grant us grace Lord that like Stephen we may learn to love our enemies and to seek forgiveness for those who wish to harm us in any way; through your Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

All: **Amen**

Reader: Our Psalm for this day is Psalm 31:1-8

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Incline your ear to me; make haste to deliver me.

All: **Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

Reader: Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag and my stronghold; for the sake of your name, lead me and guide me.

All: **Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

Reader: Take me out of the net that they have secretly set for me, for you are my tower of strength. Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of truth.

All: **Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

Reader: I hate those who cling to worthless idols and I put my trust in the Lord. I will rejoice and be glad because of your mercy for you have seen my affliction; you know my distress. You have not shut me up in the power of the enemy; you have set my feet in an open place.

All: **Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

Reader: A Reading From The First Letter Of Peter

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 PETER 2:2-10

The Word of the Lord

People: **Thanks be to God**

Reader: God of all time and space, you initiated the relationship of love and generosity with all creation at a time before and beyond all knowing. Through the Word and the Spirit, you continue your eternal love for all beings. Fill us with a deep and abiding awareness of your presence, your call and your grace in our lives and in your world. Shape us into the people you have created us to be - poured out in creative mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ of all creation.

All: **Amen**

Fr. Michael: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: The holy gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the Blessed St. John (St. John 14:1-14)

People: **Glory be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 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'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

This is the very Gospel of Christ.

People: **Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Homily

**DARK AND STORMY**

I want to begin my thoughts this day with the words which opened a novel entitled Paul Clifford written in 1830 by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. While I've never read the book, I know how it begins because its' opening line was borrowed by a friend of mine who is, like me, a frustrated author to open his as-yet-unfinished opus. Sitting on the roof of his doghouse, my bro Snoopy typed, "It was a dark and stormy night..."

Indeed, it was a dark and stormy night one May evening in 1975. I had just been elected by the student body to be the Head of Divinity at Trinity College and my triumph over two others who would go on to become bishops of the Church was greeted by a terrible storm of wind and water, but I felt good regardless.

Meeting the next morning with the Dean of Divinity, I was given the parameters of my new role at the College – I would not have to work in a parish the following year, for my “parish” was now the students of Trins – both divines and the artsey-science ones, being available as a shoulder to cry on or a wise advice-giver to all the student body and mayhabs even a member or two of the faculty. For this, I was given a set of rooms situated over the bedroom of the august professor of theology, one Eugene Fairweather and I was delighted because now I had a private washroom, a bedroom and a sitting-room complete with a fireplace all of which overlooked the garden of the Provost of the College, George Ignatieff. Life was swell and I looked forward to whatever the future would hold for me.

My delight was short-lived however when I realized that my habit of procrastination meant that I was months behind on my Master’s thesis and I needed to get moving. Borrowing an electric typewriter from my parents, I became determined to at least get the first draft of the first section done before the end of term. With a full carafe of coffee and Beethoven on the stereo, I set about the task and was well into the fourth day of the intro when there was a knock on my door. I was on a roll and really didn’t want to blow the moment, so I did what I did. I shut off the machine and sat at my desk, frozen.... the plan was to out-wait whoever was on the other side of the door and deal with whatever the issue was IF the other left a note. The knocking was rather persistent but I remained stoically calm. As I huddled there, I could hear a particular wheeze when “the other” called my name and I knew who it was.

The knocker was a student in divinity who was not at all popular with any of the Divinity class, nor most of the lay folk because he held certain views regarding the role and place of women not only in the Church but in the world generally. He had been particularly intolerant of the women students who were studying theology because, in his view, there was no place at the inn for them – oh, he allowed that they might become deacons, but that was as far as he was willing to accept them in clerical orders. While my female co-students at that time could not be ordained in the Anglican Church, a few of them were studying in the hopes of upsetting the apple carts and pushing strongly for a change of both attitude and heart of the hierarchy of the institution. A few had left the college because of him and I assumed that he was presenting himself to me as Head of Divinity in the hopes that I would be able to convince the women who were left that what they were doing would not be a good idea. How little he knew me!

In time, the knocking stopped and I could hear him and his nasal noise going down the back stairs and when I believed that the coast was clear, I continued with my incredibly insightful thesis work. Half an hour later, there was a pounding at the door and several voices that promised to do much harm to me if I did not open the door, for they knew I was in my room, having observed smoke from my ciggies wafting from my window. Giving up all hope, I opened the door and found several of my friends standing there who informed me that (I will call him Ralph) was fixing to leave the college the next morning. These friends thought it would be a good idea if I, as Head, was to go to Ralph’s room and bid him a not too warm farewell on behalf of the student body. When I seemed hesitant, one told me that perhaps the Dean would be interested in the inaction of the new Head and that perhaps I might be in a spot of trouble if I did not exercise my pastoral and political skills at that moment.

I consulted with them as one of my confreres poured everyone a glass of rye from my stash and it was determined that I was to try to be both warm and fuzzy and stern and reproachful all at the same time.

I knew that I had to do what they wanted and thus left my room, fearful of both the encounter which lay before me and the knowledge that all my alcohol would probably be consumed in my short absence.

Arriving at Ralph's door, before I knocked, I simply said, "God, why me?" I knocked and went in and it was around 10 in the evening. I emerged at 4 in the morning, having spent six hours listening to Ralph, trying to understand why he felt as he did about some pretty incredible women who both graced our class and challenged our thinking relentlessly. I will not share the content of the conversation save to say that as I left the room, I was moved to give Ralph a large (for me) hug and I wished him Godspeed while assuring him of two things: we would never agree on the role and place of women in any world that he dwelt in and that I was really concerned for him as a human person.

That Sunday at chapel, the epistle was the story of the stoning of St. Stephen and the gospel was centered on the words of Jesus from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do".

As I sat in that cold austere space, I heard both the words of Jesus and what Stephen said as the first of his assailants picked up their boulders: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" as the rocks rained down and his life ended. Perhaps for the first time, I heard all those words clearly – the hardest thing for any of us to do is to forgive someone who wishes us harm or who acts in ways which are hurtful.

You see, before I went into Ralph's room, I was in the company of the rock-throwers, certain of the righteousness of my position and just as certain that Ralph was a menace to the class and that we would all be the happier without him around. But I guess God had another idea in mind – I who went there to deliver a sort of deathblow, found myself genuinely caring for his welfare while not being in any way supportive of his worldview. In my opinion, he was a troubled spirit but one who needed not to be attacked and reviled, but one who needed to be understood and cared for and about.

I tell this not to make brownie points with you but because it was one of the life-changing moments with which I have been blessed – while I can still be rigid and unmoving in some of my opinions, that evening or perhaps more the next morning, I learned that each person on this earth is a child of God, worthy of care, deserving a listening ear. I learned that forgiveness, true forgiveness is very very hard to give because human nature demands retribution and revenge but that is not, as we have prayed today, the God way. I pray that when next you encounter a "Ralph" situation or person you would think prayerfully and seriously of a question posed in another very old book entitled *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon published in 1896 – WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? And then simply sit and wait until you hear the Voice.....

Fr. Michael: Knowing who we are and whose we are, we proclaim with boldness, "I believe in God All: **the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Reader: God of grace and light, found within the structures of our shared humanity, you cannot be contained by us, You choose to dwell in our hearts and our homes. Look with love upon us and the homes in which we share life and watch over the people and places where we seeking your blessing. Build up our homes to places where the happy may find peace, the sad may be comforted, the hungry may be fed and the weary find rest.

People: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: Build up the places where we work so that the honest may find reward, the dedicated may find delight and the imaginative may find new horizons.

People: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: Build up our community and our fellowship where the isolated may find friendship, the marginalized may find a welcoming hug, the unloved may find true acceptance. In our parish life together this week, we pray for Roy, Beth, Louise, Marjorie, Irene, Howard, Myra, Jeanette, Sarah, Zachariah, Cheryl, Richard and Deb.

People: **Lord, hear our prayer**

Reader: Build up our nation and bless all those entrusted with the care of our society's fabric. We pray especially this day for Charles 111, our Sovereign King and all members of the Royal Family. May they use their skills and their calling to fashion communities filled with grace and understanding, where generosity of heart and spirit and mind and soul may be the foundation of our life together.

People: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: Build up your Church so that all your children may find and celebrate their place as unique and special creations of yours, chosen and essential to the fullness of your grace and love.

Reader: Today, we pray for The Diocese of Jerusalem and Archbishop Hosam Naoum, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; Bishop Susan Johnson and Bishop Michael Pryse and St. John the Evangelist, Ottawa and the Reverend Gary van der Meer, as well as Shane, our Bishop; Anne, our Metropolitan; Linda, our Primate.

People: **Lord, hear our prayer**

Reader: Help us this day, Lord, to be living stones and not dead weights, dreaming dreams and living gloriously the joy and kindness of a faith that embodies everything that life should be. We pray all this in the name of Jesus the Cornerstone. **Amen**

(The Reverend Doctor Derek Browning from Starters for Sundays adapted by RMF)

Fr. Michael: If we say that we are completely put together, the truth is not in us.

People: **But if we confess our distractions, our errors and our anxieties, God will meet us and renew us. Before God and all God's people, we confess that we have been reluctant to speak out clearly, naming the injustices we see and declaring God's vision. Before God and one another, we confess our reluctance to receive and honour our calling as people made, chosen and called as witnesses to God's dream of justice and joy. Remind us Lord that you have made us for your service and recharge us with your Word; renew us Lord and grant us the courage to live out your Way of peace and love. In Jesus' name we pray.**

Fr. Michael: God has promised that whenever we repent and seek a new union with Him, forgiveness is granted us. That promise comes true now – Sisters and Brothers, know that in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit we are forgiven and made new. Alleluia! And may the peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: **And also with you.**

## WE SHARE THE GIFT OF GOD'S SHALOM WITH ONE ANOTHER

Fr. Michael: Merciful God, the gifts we bring are so small in comparison to the vast needs in our world – nowhere enough to save the millions dying of starvation in the world or even to meet the needs of the hungry and the homeless in our neighbourhoods. Yet, we have brought what we can and as you once multiplied five small loaves and two small fishes, multiply these gifts as well so that the hungry may receive all they need and more.

All: **Amen**

Fr. Michael: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Fr. Michael: Lift up your hearts.

People: **We lift them to the Lord.**

Fr. Michael: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Fr. Michael: We give you thanks and praise, almighty God, for the gift of a world full of wonder, and for our life which comes from you. By your power you sustain the universe.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: You created us to love you with all our heart, and to love each other as ourselves, but we rebel against you by the evil that we do. In Jesus, your Son, you bring healing to our world and gather us into one great family. Therefore, with all who serve you on earth and in heaven, we praise your wonderful name, as we say,

People: **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.**

Fr. Michael: We give you thanks and praise, loving Father, because in sending Jesus, your Son, to us you showed us how much you love us. He cares for the poor and the hungry. He suffers with the sick and the rejected. Betrayed and forsaken, he did not strike back but overcame hatred with love. On the cross he defeated the power of sin and death. By raising him from the dead you show us the power of your love to bring new life to all your people.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: On the night before he gave up his life for us, Jesus, at supper with his friends, took bread, gave thanks to you, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which is given for you." After supper, Jesus took the cup of wine, said the blessing, gave it to his friends, and said, "Drink this, all of you: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which is shed for you and for many, so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me."

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: Gracious God, with this bread and wine

we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we offer ourselves to you in him. Send your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts, that we may know the presence of Jesus in the breaking of bread, and share in the life of the family of your children.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: Father, you call us to be your servants; fill us with the courage and love of Jesus, that all the world may gather in joy at the table of your kingdom. We sing your praise, almighty Father,

through Jesus, our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, now and for ever.

People: **Glory to you for ever and ever.**

Fr. Michael: And now, as Jesus has gifted to his faithful Church, we pray,

People: **Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Fr. Michael: Lord, we died with you on the cross;

People: **now we are raised to new life.**

Fr. Michael: We were buried in your tomb;

People: **now we share in your resurrection. Live in us so that we may live in you.**

Fr. Michael: The gifts of God for all the children of God

People: **Thanks Be To God**

Fr. Michael: Lord, the eyes of all look to you in hope and you gave them what they need. You open your hands and satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. We too, turn to you again to be filled – to share the Bread of Life, to drink the Wine of your life-giving stream, to taste your goodness and live. May the time we have spent together in your Presence nourish our hearts and our minds, strengthen our relationship with you and renew our commitment to live in this world as your committed and faithfilled disciples. For you alone are God, the Source and Sustainer of all life.

All: **Amen**

All: **Glory to God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Fr. Michael: We are a baptized people, a community of hope and trust. We are the new race, dedicated to doing unlikely and outrageous acts of grace and love and sometimes even taking on what seems impossible. Thanks be to you whose power is make perfect in human weakness. So, go now and the blessing of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Father, Son and Spirit be with you this day and always.

All: **Amen**

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