

JESUS TODAY

I'm not sure if it is still a common practice, but it used to be, upon returning to school, the teacher had each student write a brief essay on what *you did during your Summer holidays*.

In a way, that is what I'm doing; I am sharing a bit about my summer experience, or more specifically, my sabbatical experience.

My presentation would be much simpler to produce if what I did and learned could be quantified, listed, charted and measured; however, I was more in the right brain – in the feeling, processing and emotional domain.

My plan was to spend 4 hours each day doing disciplined studies and readings, 4 hours doing chores and the evenings with family.

The time doing chores did reduce my “do list” some,yet the most significant benefit of doing labour intensive work was that it became a purge for my mind and soul.

Old thought patterns and residual tensions tended to fade while pounding shingles on the roof of the barn and making sure Dave didn't fall off.

My 4 hours of disciplined study evolved into something else, thus my reading list is only modestly depleted.

Responding to an inner calling or maybe it was a “yonder” calling, I paused, absorbed and felt myself in the presence of more.

I now better appreciate Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Nearly every day, I would read Jeremiah 29:7-14.

I accepted the requirement to serve/ minister / be gracious... in the context of where we live.

To be sure, what really echoed in my soul was the benevolent love of God that radiated from verses 11 and 12: “... I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Then.... when you call upon me and come and pray to me, **I will hear you.**”

In the beginning, I was keenly aware of the blessings of being in a gracious church that gave me the time to recharge,... and the blessings of my delightful natural setting,... ..yet, with that came a sense of unworthiness,... and some anxiety, too.

I wasn't sure if I had the wherewithal and resources to maintain such a place.

Did I take on more than I could handle? Would it all end soon?

But,... I kept reading, each day, that... God has wonderful plans for me..... and..... a hopeful future,.. .. and I found that embracing that love of God... invites a closer relationship with God.

I also found many kind and helpful people who assisted with answers, and such things as: roofing, electrical wiring and hauling manure, to name just a few more blessings.

I wanted to give more,.... yet it seemed that I was receiving more.

The tone of my Summer journey was formed during my flight back from Toronto, after attending the MC Canada Assembly.

During the flight, I watched the movie “True Grit” – a remake that starred Jeff Bridges and Matt Damon.

The movie was good; however, it was the music in the movie that moved me.

Interestingly, the theme song, used repeatedly through the movie, was “Leaning on Jesus.”

For some reason that song opened something up within me,.... maybe it touched an old, hidden childhood corner..... or maybe it was More.

I downloaded the sound track, and played it over and over again,... and then began playing it on my guitar. The process was most interesting,.... and another old song surfaced, too: “What a friend we have in Jesus.”

As I said, my experiences, this summer, were mostly in the feeling domain, and so I think it best to present what I learned in that format.

I will share my myself with you... with music.

I know that I’m not a good singer,... and so I have some pity for you.

Truth be told, I always wanted to get paid for singing,..... but that never happened. :) Well,..... in a way..... I’m being paid now.....

Anyways, I’m not performing; I’m sharing..... so mistakes will not be noticed. This is an opportunity for all to be gracious. :)

{Sang “Leaning on Jesus” and “What a friend we have in Jesus”}

Emotions,..... usually don’t ask good questions..... because emotions are not rational / objective.

Yet, the Mennonite in me wouldn’t allow me to completely abide in the irrational / in the feeling mode.

I was a little troubled with all the Jesus emphasis in those songs, and that discomfort was enhanced by a couple of churches I attended.

They did the Jesus talk that is common in many churches. That populist, Jesus cult Christianity seems to infer that there are two deities, that Jesus out ranks God.....AND.... that Jesus is owned / subject to the whims of the “saved.”

I'm uncomfortable with that perspective.

Generally, I try to relate to directly to God.

For me, Jesus is his life and message presented 2,000 years ago: a redeeming, loving life and message from the love of God, that was affirmed and empowered through the resurrection and God's Spirit.

Moreover, Jesus always pointed to God; he said that God is the love and salvation. We follow Jesus, not because of Jesus, but because of God.

Still, as the John text points out, Jesus is a part of God, in God as God was in him.

Similar to the Jeremiah passage, the Gospel of John reading also reveals the loving, caring, hospitable and empowering nature of God,.... as demonstrated and expressed through Jesus.

The God of love graciously strives to reach and touch us, dwell with us, and care for us,..... and receiving this love transforms us to want to share that love: to serve, to do justice, peace and grace..... to be..... as Jesus.....

We call it being a follower of Christ, **yet**....following a mandate is too difficult without the empowering emotion of love – God in us.

The historical Jesus.... lives today when,... from love,... we follow his message and way of being,..... and ...Jesus also can be the label for the loving, gracious nature of God.....keenly felt in the morning dew, in the serenade of song birds,.... ..in helpful hands,in the stillness of the soul and the yearning of the heart.

I've blended the rational side with the emotional, and that is okay..... because God is the God of all: of our thoughts, feelings and actions.....

Again, in the spirit of summer reflection, I will try to do another song to share an emotion my response. ("Precious Lord Take My Hand")

After that, we will have the closing song, and you'll be invited to join in on the chorus.

I chose the closing song because my summer journey included touching some new grief and old grief. My uncle is dying, and he helped connect me to my mother's memory.

There were other losses this Summer,..... and this past week.

"Will the circle be unbroken".... should be taken more as an emotional pleading than a theological expose. The song is about a longing for restoration and wholeness.

For me,... "...in the sky"... is not a far off place... we call heaven, but rather the union of love. That union is often how we perceive heaven, but it can also happen in silent stillness..... or by singing together.

Wholeness is living and being in love, and that is where God through Jesus invites us to be, today.