

## SNOW BOUND

Last Sunday, I generously offered to give away some of my snow.  
So far, apparently, everyone has been too bashful to come forward to accept my gift. I did say some of my snow, not "all of it."

I don't want to give it all away because it does look nice.  
Even after four months of snow, it still looks pretty.

Snow is amazing how it covers things up.  
After a good snowfall, Buffalo, NY looks good, and so does Hamilton, Ontario,..... and after a heavy snow, Cleveland, Ohio looks okay, too.

I do dread how my yard will look after all the snow melts.

A week ago, we had some strong winds come through, and some of my laziness was revealed.  
I firmly intended to train the dogs to do their business in one area, far from the house,..... but.... when it got really cold.....well..... I became negligent. Still, a few days later.... it would snow,... and it was out of sight,..... until that windy night.  
Oh my,.....three big dogs..... .... you get the picture.

Ah, but we got more snow this week, and now even more today.  
My place looks great!  
Even so, the wind did prompt me to consider other things that are unseen.

Because of my horse related injury, I didn't get all the leaves raked, nor did I get many weeds pulled, last fall.  
Plus the dogs have gotten into stuff, such as garbage, plastic buckets and branches,..... and that's all under the snow.

In addition, with so much snow, it's hard to use the wheelbarrow, so the soiled straw from the chicken coop is just outside the barn,... under the snow. There's a lot that is unseen.

Snow does a fine job of concealing things, yet it sure has its drawbacks, too.  
It seems, every other day, there is more shovelling, including on the roof.  
Travel by foot or by car is more difficult, ...and ...there's the obvious related condition of there being cold weather.  
Snow happens in freezing temperatures, and that means more layers of clothing,..... and it means..... nature is mostly dormant,.. with just a few exceptions.

Nevertheless, Spring and warmer weather will melt the snow cover,,, exposing a huge mess..... and the potential for a significant runoff.

Maybe lots of snow.....is not so bad,..... as long as it never melts,..... YET,.....that can't happen. No one really wants that to happen;... it would be catastrophic if it did.

Snow is good is a good cover-up,..... but there are hazards to concealment.

A common response to shame is concealment / a cover-up.

Our theme for Lent is "Ashamed No More."

In our Western culture,... we don't talk much about shame or honour, and so...we tend to conceal / hide our shame,... and other deep hurts.

To be sure, there is a big difference between guilt and shame.

Guilt is the awareness of: "I made a mistake."

Shame is believing: "I AM the mistake."

The healing process for guilt begins with confession, and then continues with the steps of restoration, including forgiveness, and so on.

Eradicating shame takes a different path, a more profound, and often painful journey. Subsequently, it is all too common to cover up the shame, in order to hide it and/or make oneself look or feel better.

Shame can crush self esteem with dire consequences, such as self-sabotage, low motivation and.... numerous destructive and abusive behaviors, including physically abusing others and chemical and alcohol abuse.

Those reactions are usually recognized, and more like a vicious ice storm, than a snow covering.

Most adults with shame, have more sophisticated methods of disguise and suppression.

Denial and ignoring shame are a couple of ways of covering-up.

And, that snow-job takes many forms, such as:

Being stoic, thick skinned, detached and avoiding intimacy.

Some people conceal their shame by dumping lots of snow on it, and that can mean being very driven--success / conquest driven, or it may involve striving to wear a different personality, such as a comedian or an ultra, magnanimous servant who does great charitable deeds for others. That's disguise works very well.

Shame has formed many impressive saints--individuals too good to be true,.....which is telling, and a sad way to live.

There are other distractions that are also used, including fancy clothes, and so on.

All attempts to hide shame conceal the inner truth. Some techniques are more obvious and disparaging from the beginning.

Many are like layers of fresh snow,.....that keeps building deeper and deeper,.....to the point where it's painful,..... yet melting it away / exposing the shame.... feels even more painful.

And, that is a problem..... a late winter problem.

I want to say a few things about how to avoid causing shame--just a few brief examples.

First, never tell a child, or for that matter, anyone, "You're a bad person" or "You're a bad boy or girl." A undesirable action does NOT make someone bad. Nurture the person and the positive, without using punishment for the negative.

Another is to give value to children by letting them know that you are listening to them and respect their views / feelings,... and spend time with them,.....when THEY need it, not just when it is convenient.

Also, show children and adults that you are comfortable with failure and mistakes. Perhaps, we could even celebrate failures..... because failure is a wonderful tool for learning and growing. Especially Children,.... they want to please their parents and adults, and so a negative / disappointing reaction to failure cuts deep.

We all fail, so let's be honest and forget the snow job, and move on.

And, that connects to the last example I want to share: which is, when it comes to theology, tell the whole story.

Don't use the Bible to make people / children afraid and ashamed, and always emphasis love, forgiveness, acceptance and grace.

I think sometimes we give half stories to our children and youth. Then they become young adults, and engage in things they were warned about, and then feel ashamed to attend church.

We all mess up, and so will our youth. Let's tell the truth to the best of our abilities, and not lofty fairy tales.

To begin, one of the passages for today that we did not read is Luke's version of the Temptation of Jesus.

The text teaches many things, including how temptation can happen and how Jesus resisted yielding to the temptations, and it presents Jesus' perfection, too.

However, we are not Jesus,..... and we will often fall to temptation, ..and we can learn,....confess the guilt, seek forgiveness and move on.

There is grace and the invitation to grow.

Let's include that in the message and the part about Satan abusing the scriptures.

In Luke's story, Satan presented a "literal" interpretation of a verse from today's Psalm passage, instead of the metaphorical understanding. Satan failed to present the big picture.

Today's Psalter lesson tells us about the providence of God: how God provides shelter / a refuge, and will sent angels to guard us.

And, ....it's all about love,.....and it's for anyone, everyone who loves God and calls out for help.

And, arrogantly jumping off a tall building to test God, is Not an act of love.

Nevertheless, loving God can be a huge leap for someone with shame. Yet,.....understanding the extend of God's love and devotion to helping us,..... is most encouraging and draws us to love. Moreover, a warm shelter and comfort is salvation for anyone out freezing in deep snow--metaphorical speaking. And, the message includes God's honouring us, too.

Paul adds to that awareness of salvation in the Romans' text. And, he notes in verse, 11, it's not about shaming anyone.

In addition, note what else Paul says:

First: there is no distinction / we are all in this / all included, and we can take this two ways.

One -- I think we all struggle with varying degrees of shame. This is a message for all of us.

Two-- We are all in this together, and I think we need each other to help us dig ourselves out, too.

The second notable point reiterates what the Psalmist said.

We merely have to respond to God's love with the sincere passion to call out to God for help / for salvation.

Back to the snow analogy.

Standing in the middle of a snow drift, asking God to make the snow and everything concealed... all go away is insulting and similar to what Satan suggested to Jesus.

Healing / salvation is a journey of love, trust and community.

It is a process.

The Deuteronomy text printed in the bulletin is a call to put God first,.... with the reminder of the long, arduous journey out of bondage.

It's important to recall the long journey through the wilderness to the promised land. A journey full of mistakes, grace and God's forgiveness and love. Likewise, it is important to recall the saving life and message of Jesus, and that is why we do communion.

Most of us, and I dare say, none of us, have reached our promised land.... where all the shame and debris is gone.

Nevertheless, by the love and grace of God.... and with the compassionate, accepting love and help from each other..... we will get there.

And, it begins by accepting what it buried under the cover-up and asking God for help and living that request for help.

The radiant love of God will melt away the snow and free us from that bondage, and then the Honest journey with God and each other begins.

Anything less than honesty and love is a snow job.

Spring is around the corner. God will show us salvation, and shame will be washed away.