

IN CASE WE FORGOT

You know,..... I believe we are living in very opportunistic times.

A number of years ago, I commented that it felt like our culture was caught in a dial tone – where most everyone was numb. I wouldn't say that anymore. I think we are waking up,..... BUT.... as we wake up,.... I wonder WHAT it is we are discovering?

What is it that we value? What is precious to us?  
What are we living for? And, who are we?

Our Nation is doing some “National” Soul searching. We are framing and examining WHO we really are.

We have our “narrative” of what it means to be a Canadian, yet when times get tough,..... we tend to wake up and learn if that narrative is true or just a myth.

These days, we are exploring difficult questions, such as:

What does Nature and wilderness mean to us? Is nature just a place to vacation and something that can be turned into cash? We keep extracting from nature, yet it wasn't that long ago, when only a handful of people were troubled by mining the tar sands. Now, it is from page on National Geographic.

We used to be peace keepers. Then we became warriors, but now we are reconsidering that approach. Even so,..... we are not ready to totally stop fighting in hockey games or give up violent video games or stop watching violence in movies. ???

The financial crisis is prompting us to think about what it means to be a member of our society. Are we all in this together..... or .... is it every person for themselves?

Also, how are we responding to our perceived threats?..... with justice based on empathy, reconciliation and grace,..... or with a cold impersonal justice that bleeds revenge and the domination of the weak– .... called getting tough on crime???

There are some interesting court cases in the news. I won't use names, but the father who recklessly allowed his children to freeze to death, will receive 3 years in prison. Why? Is he a threat to our society? Will he knock on our doors and seek to take our children for a walk when it is -40? ..... Or, are we punishing him because we were made very uncomfortable from learning about what he did..... .what life is like for some people, for the poor and many aboriginals? We don't appreciate learning about and feeling **that** pain?

How we do justice .....reveals a lot about who we are.

We did better dealing with the schizophrenic bus rider, yet the media is really playing up the passion for revenge – an eye for an eye.

And, then there is the case of the Polish visitor in B.C. who was welcomed to our country with avoidance and then tasors.

People in Poland don't think Canadians are very friendly and welcoming, and they have doubts about our sense of justice, too.

We are in the midst of learning about our selves, and our wake up call is presenting a mixed bag.

And interestingly, I'm usually critical of the US, ..... but I think they are tilting in a better direction right now.

What are we **seeing** about ourselves? What are we doing? How are we behaving WHO are we?

What we value and how we behave does say a lot about who we are.

Yet,.... have you ever said something that .... just slipped out.... and you immediately knew it didn't match your self image and you hoped no one heard it?

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And, I think most of us have done something that was the opposite of what we actually wanted to do, but we did it anyways. That kind of behaviour often happens when a romantic relationship is having troubles.

You know what I mean,..... you want to say, "I'm sorry", but something ugly and accusative comes out instead?

Freud suggested that those "Slips" are actually very telling?

Perhaps, BUT, circumstances / situations are not always so simple. For many of us our Good intentions arrived by going on a detour through the dark tunnels of insecurity, shame and guilt. Too often, we try to be what we think others want us to be, yet we're not sure..... and it seems our best efforts are NOT working.

The drive to own love and acceptance is truly a bumpy and disappointing journey.

And, maybe there is ambiguity. Maybe we don't know what is expected.

I recall my mother telling me as I was leaving home to go to university, for the first time, "BE SURE TO BEHAVE AS A CHRISTIAN!"

I had an idea of what she had in mind, but I wasn't sure. I remember thinking, ..... "does she want me to act like a Jesuit during the Spanish Inquisition?..... Or as a crusader in Jerusalem..... or maybe she wants me to sell everything I have, give the money to the poor and stay at home living off my parents??"

And,..... since there was some confusion in her message,..... I was forced to forget all about it.....Until later,..... when I wanted to know what it really meant to be a Christian.

Sometimes we need to be reminded. .... we need a refresher course.

Sometimes we are confused,..... and sometimes.... we just don't know.

I imagine Jesus thinking to himself, “Do these guys really get it? Do they understand what is going on? ..... And,..... will they be there with me till the end, when I need them most? Will they STAND by me?  
\* Do they know what following me really means?

The Mark passage opens with Jesus explaining to his disciples where he is heading – to persecution, suffering, rejection and death,.....but death would last only three days. It all sounded too crazy , so Peter pulls Jesus aside to straighten him out / to tell him to shape up and be a smart, sensible leader / prophet. BUT, that is NOT who Jesus is.  
IT IS PETER WHO IS CONFUSED, and not Jesus.

Jesus’ rebuke separates himself from Peter’s perception... and then Jesus cogently states,  
“YOU ARE SETTING YOUR MIND **NOT** ON DIVINE THINGS BUT ON HUMAN THINGS!”

Here is a key aspect / an important lesson to remember:  
where is our focus? What consumes our thoughts and concerns?  
Are we contemplating the divine..... or the little details?  
Where is God in our vision of life..... and in our vision of ourselves?

Our expectations, values and actions reveal a lot about us,.... and what actually controls us?

Jesus then addressed the crowd saying,  
“If any want to become my followers, **let them** deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.”

I think it really matters how we define life / how we understand what life is about..... which breaks down to how we perceive ourselves.

Followers of Christ..... are invited to peel away the agenda, the expectation that others put on us, and the guilt and the shame that is very controlling. “LET THEM....deny themselves” is not mandate, but rather a gentle invitation.

One of the best ways to learn about self is to go **without** the things we think we need.  
The financial crisis is forcing humanity to do just that.  
We are..... or soon will be..... learning to do without.....  
We will be left with who we truly are..... after we DENY self.  
We may be surprised at what we discover. Our Minds May.... or may not be on human things.

Carrying the cross:

Carrying the cross is not a reference to some heavy load. Picking up our cross does **not** mean we must suffer **or** that we must be super nice all the time.

Picking up our cross means accepting the way God has for us, accepting the hand we have been dealt, if you will, and making the best of it.

It does not mean that we must die for our faith, but it does mean that we must be willing to do exactly that – to die for our faith.

The important thing is that we are willing to LIVE .... to really live.

Paul Mullens of Scarboro United Church in Calgary, told the following story:

The scene was a Church gymnasium in Los Angeles, California in 1969, the Viet Nam War was raging. The Watts Riots had happened not long before. Parts of Los Angeles was still burning.

L.A. was a crucible of sorts. I was sitting on the floor with about a hundred others, most of us seminarians who, like myself, were in the process of preparing for the ministry. They were all watching intently as a large black man, with a large Afro hairdo, paced back and forth in front of us, glaring at us, like a caged lion. He was a leader in the Black community in L.A. and it was quite clear that we would sit there until he decided what would happen next. To this point, having been introduced to us by our professor, the leader had said nothing.

And he continued to say nothing. Pacing back and forth, back and forth. It seemed like an eternity. Finally he spoke.

"The problem with you white folk, the problem with you middle-class, wet behind the ears, white folk, is that you haven't got a clue what you are willing to die for. And because you don't know what you are willing to die for, you haven't got a clue why you are alive!"

He went on to say more, much more, but that is all I needed to hear. He was exactly right, and I knew it. At that point in my life it was true for me and it was undoubtedly true for most of those seated there.

It was also true for me that I began to understand that picking up one's cross has a lot more to do with what you are willing to live for... than with carrying a burden of suffering.

What are we living for? Why do we do what we do? Who are we?

To troubled, tormented..... and forgetful people comes the story to jar the memory, a story to peel away the ugly labels and the tarnish of neglect. It is the story about God refreshing Abraham and Sarah's memory about WHO they are..... and WHO we are.

As God gave them their names, and the living promise of generations to come, we the reader hear the wake up call.... for each one of us.

God is saying to each of us:

“YOU ARE SPECIAL IN GOD’S EYES.”

You are children / heirs to this covenant.

Remember where you came from..... who has a plan for you, and who is always with you!

WE are created in the image of God, and I firmly believe that we have the spark of God in us.

For too many sad reasons, that Spark and that awareness has been covered up.

Perhaps it was Bad theology that painted our souls with shame and guilt.

Or, our affluence has numbed us with a burden to labour for useless toys that isolate us and take more than they give.

Maybe, Hardships and losses have dimmed our hope and stolen our passion for living.  
And, for many sad reason, we may have forgotten who we are, .... why we are alive, and where we are going?

Something is happening..... We are waking up. Some people are discovering something truly amazing – there IS a spark,.... and this awareness is spreading.

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I'm going to do something a little different. I'm going to show a video.

This video clip is made by a group called *Playing for change: peace through music*  
Playing for change is a multi media movement created to inspire, connect and bring peace to the world through music.

However, you will have to move to front to see it.  
So, as we now get it going, Please, everyone.... move as close to the front as you can, NOW.  
[video clip of the song Stand by me - [http://vimeo.com/moogaloop.swf?clip\\_id=2539741](http://vimeo.com/moogaloop.swf?clip_id=2539741)]

Around the world..... we heard the unifying plea “Stand by me”

Moreover, God was saying to Abraham and Sarah, “In case you forgot, you need to know that I will always stand by you.”

Jesus was really asking his disciples, “Will you walk with me?  
Will you be with me to the end?  
Will you stand by me?”

That complex question can NOT be answered by someone who does not possess or know self?

The conundrum is:  
We can't give what we don't have, and we can't promise what we don't know.

We gain ourselves / our lives by letting go..... by releasing all the burdens and lies,.... and discovering the spark that is embedded deep down inside each one of us.

The spark is that you and I are loved. WE are loved just the way we are.  
The spark is love. We don't have to earn it.

In case you forgot..... God is love, and that is the beginning.