

AFTER CHRISTMAS: A TIME FOR LOOKING BACK...

(Psalm 23)

*Dearest God, thank you for the promise, birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
the One whom we love, follow and serve.*

*As we worship online here today, may Your Presence, in Him, by your Spirit, be very real,
for we pray in Jesus' Name*

Amen

I remember a friend once telling me of how her being locked for almost an hour in a washroom cubicle was a blessing. She was teaching at a local university in the same South African town where her husband was the Presbyterian minister of a large congregation, and where their 3 very active young children were at school. It was a particularly stressful time of the year for her, what with the year-end programs and activities at church, school and university. But still, wanting to appear the supermom, she had rushed home in the middle of the day to prepare food for her family, you know, to enjoy a surprise sit-down lunch together. ***But first, she needed just quickly to pop into the washroom....***

Now, the washroom toilets in South African homes are often just separate little rooms off by themselves - and that's just when Celene says, it happened! It was as she was wanting to leave that she discovered that the door was stuck – and that there was absolutely no other way to get out! She tried jerking it and kicking it, pushing, pulling ...but nothing! And that little window behind her was way too high and too small for her to try squeezing through. All she could do was just sit down and wait. She had left her office with mountains of exam manuscripts still to mark, reports to complete – but there she was! STUCK IN THE LOO!

Of course there were some angry, frustrated tears at first, but then, she described how a little Christmas miracle happened, and she calmed down. She says that she met Emmanuel in her washroom that day as she allowed herself to stop struggling, slow down, stop! Pray!

Uncannily, when she later heard them arriving home she tried opening the door again, AND IT JUST OPENED... When she came out she said she was quite different from when she had gone in: ...calmer, quieter, more centered, refreshed! That whole incident reminded her of how the Psalmist writes in Ps 23 of us being forced at times to lie down in green pastures because God would '***revive our drooping heads***' or '***restore our souls***' Can those times when we feel most resisted sometimes actually be the opportunities we need to stop, reflect, recalibrate...

Some see this whole Covid year as such a time, and maybe for YOU it has been that, but that really hasn't been my experience at all, and I suspect neither has it been so for many of us. Instead of stopping and replenishing, Covid-2020 for me has mostly been a time for some pretty frantic and anxious reacting to all the uncertainty of our ever-changing circumstances: I seem to have spent it constantly just trying to catch up to wherever the next direct or indirect Covid challenge was coming! ***Some speak of Covid fatigue, I think that for me and so many of us it's definitely more like Covid exhaustion!***

But how wonderful it was to focus these past weeks on celebrating first the Advent and then the reality of Christ's Christmas coming.

Even if most of us were having to do so in social isolation. Still, it has been wonderful to do what we can to celebrate some of the familiar traditions and meanings of Christmas. But now here we are! Christmas Day is behind us and we are within just a few days of the New Year.

Let's approach these next two weeks as a time of stopping. Let's imagine that our washroom doors have jammed shut behind us! Let's see ourselves as those who have been given this opportunity indeed to lie down together in green pastures. **I'm inviting you to join me today and this week in some looking back –reflecting on the high and low points of the year that's past!** And as we do so, let's intentionally allow ourselves to look for where holiness has still always been with us.

Do you have a prayer journal – I do, though haven't used it for a while. As you think back over 2020, how about joining me in listing your blessings and your challenges – I'll be doing so in two columns. And then, I'll prayerfully be asking God to help me discern just where God was in each and every one of those circumstances: *...perhaps quietly waiting for me? ...perhaps crying with me? ...perhaps challenging, or encouraging?*

Here are some of the questions I'll be asking:

What lessons do I suspect are to be learnt as I look back over the slate of what has past?

What have I done that seems to have been aligned with God's will for me?

What could I/should I have done differently?

What am I learning about myself?

What am I learning about God?

Where and how has Christ seemed very real to me? ...very near? ...or far away?

After sitting for a while with these questions, I encourage you to share your insights with someone you trust: either in person as you are able, or by email or other social media, the phone. You may even risk praying together...

As we do so I suspect that it may indeed surprise us to see what the Lord is doing & - indeed - has done in our lives!

Please feel free to let me know what you may find (robin@trinityvernon.ca) - I would love to hear from you!

Our Trinity church office is closed until Jan 4, with much of our usual congregational activity on pause. However, I will still be here with you each Sunday for a time of reflection, so please continue to join me, online of course.

Rev Robin Jacobson