

Water of Life 2017
April 23rd

John 20: 19-31

We give thanks for the unfolding of matter, mind, intelligence and life that has brought us to this moment in time, celebrating our common origin with everything that exists and the mystery we call God. Amen

Retirement gave me the time and energy to turn from things material to things spiritual. I wanted to learn more about worship, the meaning and guidance in the Bible, and to sort out the wheat from the chaff, as it were, just what I could consider worthwhile and true from what I considered to be folk lore and myth. So I threw myself into a degree program at Thornloe University which offered what I needed, courses on the two Testaments, on church history, on worship, on spiritual development, on prayer, mysticism and religious ethics. Here was much to learn, to contemplate, to accept and to reject. But I was surprised that I was, at the same time, learning as much about myself as I was about the curriculum courses.

Later, as a lay reader, I was expected to write and deliver homilies and found that I reveal my personal spiritual beliefs, more than was my intention. And you probably know more about my spirituality than I do about yours.

Our indwelling Spirit expresses itself in one or more of three ways. Spiritual expression is not a one size fits all, but a profile.

The first way is maintained through ritual which is a set of actions done in the same way for a specific purpose, bringing a feeling of reverence, seriousness or intensity, and acted with the purpose of developing feelings or states of mind. This can happen during group worship or in the silence of one's own mind.

The next way is called Mysticism which is the experience of the direct and transformational presence of God. One becomes conscious of God's presence providing direct and new ways of knowing and loving, based on states of awareness in which God becomes present in our inner acts. It is a personal matter of cultivating inner states of tranquillity rather than seeking to transform the world and it brings about union with God in divine love.

And the third way of spiritual expression comes about through service, which is a spiritual commitment or feeling for social reform. This is not related to the type of work done but to the attitude of the heart behind it.

Today is the kick off to our Water of Life campaign for 2017, and this will provide you with more revelations about my life and philosophy. But in return I shall reveal what I know about you.

In today's Gospel we read the metaphor of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on his disciples, in other words, commissioning them to go out into the world to continue his mission, to make a difference in the lives they touched. To me this is reminiscent of the passage in Genesis when God breathes the breath of life into man. Jesus message is simple. God is not a God of vengeance as modelled in parts of the Old Testament, but a God of love and compassion. Jesus new understanding of Judaism is not found in the complex rules and regulations as described in the books of the law, but as the way God wants us to live. This eventually became the message for a Christian community, called the Way of the Lord. Simply stated, to love God and to love what God loves, to take care of each other and of all creation. This injunction is embedded in my heart. And I cannot recall any time that I was not aware of it.. I have followed it all my life and it consequently dictated my profession. It is what I try to be.

The MacDonald family has relocated many times in our married life and has attended many churches, some more spirit filled than others, but never have I encountered people like you, the people of St. John.

As a member of the Pastoral Care and Outreach Committee it seems to me that we are always asking you to contribute, locally for Benevolent, Food Bank, Rawlinson Fund, Christmas Index, Community Dinners, Stone Soup, Discretionary Fund, mittens and other winter articles for children, and for our refugees, and that is only locally. You also contribute nationally and internationally through Primates World Relief and Development Fund and here I am again asking for more.

I often worry that you will experience donor fatigue, but you always respond freely and graciously.

Today is Water Sunday, the beginning of a new campaign to provide safe water sources for third world countries, including Haiti and some countries in Africa.

Water is used in the Bible by the prophets as a symbol of God or of the awesome, creative power of God. A symbol of everlasting life or life eternal. Living water is ever flowing which contains, creates and communicates life. It is appropriate that our efforts to assist people are symbolically associated with the spirit of God.

On a practical level, bringing life and health to people who would suffer illness or even die from water borne diseases. It is inspiring to realize that we help preserve the lives of children who otherwise might not live past the age of five. More than that, we, through Life Water Canada, provide education on how to protect the source of water and for good hygiene. Children are thus empowered to be role models for their elders, reinforcing good personal hygiene and control of infection. Children, relieved of the drudgery of water collection, can attend school and may become the leaders of tomorrow, perhaps another Desmond Tutu, or Nelson Mandela or Miriam Makeba. They may become teachers or health workers, bringing their countries out of poverty and despair.

I recently read a quotation in a book which Linda Walker lent me, by Edward Everett Hale, a 19th century author, historian and Unitarian minister. I think that we could adopt it as St John's motto because we are living it out.

“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something, and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do. And by the grace of God, I will.”

I shall not call this today a homily. It is intended as a letter of gratitude, a love letter, if you will, to you, the people of St. John, who show in practical ways your strong spirit of service.

We pray: May we have truth in our hearts, strength in our hands, consistency in our tongues, and love in our beings. Amen