

## Reflection for May 12, 2024

### A Place of Refuge – Inspired by Psalm 1 and John 17:6-19

In June of 2013, Lenore and I went on an Alaskan Cruise. It left from Vancouver on a lovely sunny day. It was a specular trip. The scenery is absolutely amazing.

Throughout the years of living in the Lower Mainland I had driven over the Lions Gate Bridge many times. But I had never seen it from the deck of a ship as I passed under it. The inside passage is breathtakingly beautiful. The “calving” of the glaciers on route absolutely stunning.

Our stops along the way, Ketchikan, Juneau, and Skagway, all uniquely charming. Albeit “touristy,” they were fun to visit. I had a ride on the White Pass railway, a link to the past history of the Klondike Gold Rush. And of course, Lenore did some shopping.

Naturally, there was plenty of time to sit and lounge on the ship. A lovely breakfast looking out on the ocean or an elegant dinner in a splendid dining room with the sun setting in the distance. We had coffee and delightful desserts in the lounge. It was all very luxurious, and we were quite spoiled, as those of you who have been on a cruise before will know. It was a great retreat and a welcome refresh.

It’s important for us to take those kinds of time-outs and withdraw from the chaos that life imparts. We might do that by participating in a wonderful cruise or simply sitting having a tea or coffee outside. Occasionally, we might be fortunate enough to witness something spectacular like we did two nights ago, when many of us took time out to gaze at the sky alive from the effects of the solar storms. You might have a chance to visit with sons, daughters, grand-children or great-grandchildren. Although with the youngsters it can be exhausting in the physical sense, this is a great boost to our emotional health. Something we are so grateful for and celebrate this Christian Family Sunday.

Perhaps it is more important than ever these days to take a breath, stop, give thanks and rest our weariness, and maybe more importantly, our worry-ness.

The phrase “Stop the world I want to get off,” seems so apropos. I’m inclined to pray, “God I need a time out.” I’m not sure I can cope. I need some reassurance. Take me on a nice cruise so I can escape from this reality for a time. Sit me on a remote beach somewhere, so I can gaze upon your creation and feel at peace.”

#### **Pause....**

“The human desire for respite from the world and its incessant pressures is as ancient as the Bible.”<sup>1</sup>

For the people of the First Century, there was a desire to be free from tyranny and oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas H. Troeger, from *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 2, Lent Through Eastertide, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2008, p. 545

One can imagine a different kind of Gaza causing the early believers to retreat into hiding. There they would remember Jesus in prayer, in reflection and in meals of bread and wine. There they would enjoy one another's fellowship. There they would feel some security and peace. That was effectively their cruise ship experience, a respite from the outside world that would want to crush them. This was an escape from "The Evil One" we heard mentioned in today's Gospel reading.

And so, Jesus prays, "**Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life, that you conferred as a gift through me, so they can be one heart and mind, as we are one heart and mind.**"

Protect them God as they strive to live out the gospel. Be with them as they walk through doubt and tragedy. Comfort them in their grief. Hold them through their chaos. Guide with your reassuring grace that encourages them to continue along in their faith journey.

**"Make them holy,"** Jesus says, **"—consecrated—with the truth; your word is consecrating truth."** Ground them in your nature, give them strength to endure, bless them with the kingdom's promise.

And throughout history we have persisted. We have survived through tribal wars, civil wars, regional insurgencies, insurrections, world wars, hostile takeovers and any number of other conflicts. We have made it through the worst of personal human suffering, badly bruised and sometimes broken.

I believe that is because God provides a harbour for our aching souls, a refuge out of harms way. One way we can find it is through reflection and meditation.

### **Join me on a short trip.**

Visualize yourself sitting on one of those lovely comfy deck chairs on board a cruise ship. If you're comfortable close your eyes and feel the weight of your body on the fabric. It envelops you as you relax your muscles and let the tension drain from your neck, shoulders, torso, arms and legs. Take a deep breath in and then out. Do that for a second time, breath in and a breath out. Just let the tension flow away.

You are warm in the sun, but there is a nice breeze blowing across your face, cool enough to be refreshing, but not cold. Can you feel it? Can you smell the salty air.

As you grow more comfortable you feel buoyant, almost as if you were floating. You empty your mind of commitments and concerns. You let them float away on the wind. If they come back smell the salt air again and feel the pleasant breeze across your face once more. Breathe slowly in and out.

You have visions of lofty white clouds moving gently across the sky. They seem to dance as they shift and change shape. Look down and see the aqua blue of the ocean. The breeze moves the sea in small waves that crest with a frothy white. Feel your breath, slowly in and out. Slowly in and slowly out.

You are in a place where God calls us. It has been this way for eons. It is a special place where we leave this often-overbearing world and its chaos behind. This little piece of paradise is our oasis in the arms of a creator who offers respite from any

raging storm. This is peace. Peace away from harm. Peace away from worry. Peace, tranquility, reassurance.

As you breathe slowly in and out again feel again the pew or chair beneath you and come back to this place.

There are multiple ways to find that special place where we feel refreshed, renewed, and nourished. It might be on that cruise ship in the comfort of a deck lounge. It might be through contemplation or prayer. It might be reading a good book, gardening, walking, fishing or just looking out on the landscape. It might be talking with a friend. It could be a family visit. For the early Christians it was meeting in groups, sharing stories and meals. It was talking about hopes and dreams.

For all of us it has always been and will always be a place where Holy love beacons us forward. That was always Jesus' message. We find that often in scripture as we do today.

***I spelled out your character in detail  
To the men and women you gave me.  
They were yours in the first place;  
Then you gave them to me,  
And they have now done what you said.  
They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt,  
That everything you gave me is firsthand from you,  
For the message you gave me, I gave them;  
And they took it, and were convinced  
That I came from you.  
They believed that you sent me.  
I pray for them.***

***Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life  
That you conferred as a gift through me,  
So they can be one heart and mind  
As we are one heart and mind.***

We will always be God's own. And in God's presence there is always sanctuary, comfort, light and love.

Thanks for listening this morning,

Amen