TO: Friends of Melrose

FROM: Rev. Sonia Ireson

Greetings in the name of the One who loves us and holds us dear.

In February when I broached the subject of going to the Maritimes for the summer, it seemed so far away. The time has gone fast and here we are the last week for preparation both from a personal and work stand point. Carolin and I leave on Sunday right after church. We are taking my car and it is partially packed. We did a trial run on Saturday to make sure that we could get all our gear into it or whether we would have to take her SUV. Clothes, computers, printers, and room for Ellie’s cage. It works. We’ve tried to make sure that everything we are taking is on wheels. Cubes with wheels for the large supply of books, wheels on our luggage, anything to make the transporting from car to accommodations a little easier.

I wish you all a wonderful and healthy summer. May it not be too hot, nor too uncomfortable and you all be safe and enjoy some new experiences. I will be continuing my letters throughout my continuing education leave, not sure about during vacation, yet.

This week brings a story from Hamilton’s Lincoln Alexander Parkway’s accident history, on Tuesday of this week. A seventy-year-old motorcyclist apparently hit a vehicle in front of him, during a slow-down of massive traffic causing him to be tossed from his bike. As of Tuesday, he was reported in critical condition, transferred to hospital with a severed limb. The man who was first on the scene and provided first aid by using a belt as a tourniquet to stop the bleeding, is a driver who works for my son-in-law, Vince MacMillan Transport, a Steel trucking company in Erin. The driver, James Tucker had years ago almost lost a leg requiring nine surgeries; fortunately, it was able to be reattached. He describes his clear-headed thinking during the ordeal, but the aftermath of shock setting in. The Police telephoned him to check on him the next day and commended him for acting while others stood by watching. His actions, they said, saved the man’s life.

What causes us to be able to face up to extraordinary situations in the heat of the moment, and then, when we replay and realize what has transpired, break down? People have been known to be able to lift cars off others when jacks have failed. Remarkable endurance comes when adrenaline shuts out all thoughts of impossible tasks. We have heard of such tales on battle fields. The human spirit has a great capacity to rise to occasions one would never expect could happen.

This begs the question does the Holy Spirit rise up during our times of trouble without us asking, in giving us the power and the strength to do what we normally couldn’t? I know we pray for guidance and help from the Holy Spirit when it occurs to us, however, I would like to think that the Holy Spirit jumps in, when we are in need, but short on asking for help.

We have seen pictures of a young man climbing the outside of an apartment building on balconies to rescue a toddler; we have seen humans edging their way across thin ice to rescue animals or humans trapped in open waters. Where does this strength come from, this ability to react calmly in the face of danger, to refuse to let the word “impossible” enter their mind.

In a world in which we hear so much negativity, slamming and shaming on social media, it is such an uplift to sift through the good stories about people helping other people, standing up for them, and rescuing them, by finding a resilience that comes from deep down inside and takes over until the feat is passed.

My attention was drawn to the Book of Ecclesiastes this week by something I noted on an incoming email. It contains twelve chapters and is thought to be the reflections of a Royal Philosopher.

“All is vanity. What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?” asks the writer. He muses on the ongoing aspect of repetition – generations come and go; the sun rises and sets; the wind blows and returns; streams run to the sea. There is nothing new; all has been there before doing its normal course of events, again and again.

He speaks of so much futility – in seeking wisdom, in being self-indulgent – simply chasing after the wind without anything to be gained under the sun. The same fate befalls the wise and the foolish. “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil.”

The author thought to be King Solomon, David’s son, then moves into the famous third chapter – For everything there is a season. He is essentially looking back over his life with regret and realizing that no matter what he sought in answer to life’s significance, and emptiness in his own pleasurable pursuits, God always remained present. God provides for the just and unjust alike. So, life is not about what we can gain for ourselves, it is made purposeful through our ability to attach ourselves to the hipbone of God. In the end “Fear God and keep (his) commandments for that is the whole duty of everyone.”

When we attempt to find meaning in our various pursuits, they all seem to lead to dead ends. Life continues to remain unsatisfactory until we recognize God’s intervention and we decide to put our trust in God’s abiding faithfulness.

As you go about your daily grind, you may ask, “What is it all about?” Years ago, I had heard my teenage son ask, “Why am I here?” At some time, perhaps, we all ask, Why am I here? Some never figure it out. There are even times when we might say, “Please take me out of here!” Sometimes the pain is too much to bear; the futility of everything we try, creeps in. Self-directed expression does not give us the answer. We only rise above the meaninglessness of life ,when we venture to step outside ourselves, to give ourselves in service to others. Our kindness comes back to us in ways we might not expect.

The renown Fred Rogers, of Mr. Rogers’ Neighbourhood says “There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.” Indeed!

Chasing after the wind infers that we have chosen our goal to be in the pursuit of earthly pleasure, not the storing up of heavenly treasures that fortify our soul. For everything there is a season, and a time under heaven, a beginning and an end. God has made everything with opposites, presumably so that we can appreciate their quality and know different levels of satisfaction

Our pursuit of pleasure for pleasure’s sake often leaves us disappointed; pleasure comes from living in the moment with awareness of the gifts that surround us. It is often the little things that raise our spirits and the joy that comes from making someone else’s life a little easier or better.

I agree with the writer, a life dedicated to oneself, is really nothing but “vanity,” chasing after the wind. When you have moved outside yourself in the service of others, I am sure you will agree that it is most rewarding.

Be strong! Stay Safe! Be of good cheer!

Together in the Service of Christ

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