

***Faith for the Road
Matthew 18:15-20
6 September 2020
Sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae***

There was a story I heard several years ago on CBC that has stayed with me. It was a story about a young Oblate priest who came from France to the Northwest Territories in 1953 to live and work among the Dene people.

He remembered one night, “It was winter time and very cold, early afternoon but already dark. I was driving from Yellowknife to Rae in my 15 year old pick up truck and a Dene elder asked me for a ride. The land has taught the Dene to live in a world of silence. After ten kilometers, the elder, Kolchia reflected, “Driving is like having faith in God.”

I was trying to figure out what he meant, but after two kilometers I gave up. “Grandpa, you talked about driving and faith in God. I’m not sure what you meant.”

Kolchia turned slightly toward me: “You started the engine and you put the lights on. We could have said, “We see only one hundred meters ahead. Further on, it’s one hundred kilometers of darkness, so we cannot go to Rae. But you got the truck in gear, we started to move, and the lights kept showing ahead of us. Must be the way with God too, who shows us only a bit of the future, just enough for our next move. If we are afraid and

if we stand still, we'll never see further ahead. But if we go with the little light we have, the light keeps showing us the way on and on.”

This scripture reading from the lectionary this morning, at first glance seems like a bit of an awkward one to start our first Sunday together, but it too is all about trusting God to show us the way. Although Jesus is focusing his teaching on dealing with conflict, his teaching really is rooted in the acknowledgement that sometimes the road ahead can be daunting and the communities we build can, like us humans, be imperfect. But we are assured that when we put Christ at the centre – when we live from a place of faith – God will show us the way. Just like our Dene elder Kolchia described, with faith, we will find that little by little God will shine light on the road ahead.

And so I think this message in our scripture is a really encouraging one for us today, at this new beginning, in these very challenging covid times. Because we have needed a lot of faith lately, haven't we? This has been a challenging year for all of us, living with constant change and fear and adaptations. We have adapted how we do everything, how we greet one another, interact with friends and family and co-workers, how we worship. At times the road has felt very dark. Even now, we have had to adapt how we meet one another at the start of a new ministry. We have

been displaced from our sanctuaries, we have had our world totally upended. We have lived with fear and uncertainty, economic strains and grief, so much grief. We have had no idea where the road ahead will lead, and we still don't. But we have had faith that God will see us through, and as we come together to start this new ministry, as we begin to reopen our society in the midst of covid, we have faith that God will continue to be with us going forward.

Because we are an Easter people, a people of faith, a people who know that from death God brings new life, who know that there is no obstacle that is stronger than the love and power of our God. We are an Easter people who know, where two or three are gathered, Christ is with us. And so we continue to come together (however we are able) and we courageously travel this new road together, having faith that we will be shown the way forward, even when the road seems unclear, even when it seems there are insurmountable challenges, even when we do not know the way.

Jesus' friends were just learning this, just learning to really trust God along unknown roads. When we meet them today, Jesus had just foretold his death and resurrection again. Talk about an unknown road ahead. His friends really have no idea what was going to happen next, they can't

begin to imagine what Jesus is talking about, and are having a hard time believing what he says is real. And Jesus knew that when the time came for him to physically leave them, it was going to be challenging for them to stay strong and faithful, hard to build community when they were feeling broken and grieving and afraid. So Jesus gave them this teaching, he gave them this teaching about trusting that even in difficult and unusual situations, God will be with them. And today, through this scripture reading Jesus is telling those who will hear to not give up. He says, when you disagree with someone, work through it. Talk together, pray together, and if that doesn't work, involve the community. Don't simply give up on each other. Persist, because relationship, because community, is important. And together, anchored in God's love, you can get through anything.

Today we can imagine Him telling us, stick together, even when you can't be physically together. Talk, don't forget one another, do not isolate one another (or yourself), pray together, even though it is more difficult in these strange covid days, build and strengthen relationship, share this faith, persist, because relationship, because community, is important. Oh, and remember, God is in this.

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Life, community, isn't always easy, the way forward isn't always clear, it takes a lot of work. Jesus knows this, that is why he took the time to share this teaching, and that is why it has endured all these years.

Sometimes in life we can feel like we are driving down a long dark road with no idea what to do next, but we need to keep going. We need to keep trusting. Because we aren't alone, Jesus reminds us. Where two or three are gathered, in person or virtually, Christ is there. "... whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven ... truly I tell you, where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." God is in this.

It is a great reminder for us today, as we begin our ministry journey together, apart, needing a little faith for this road. As you sit in your home, or at your cottage, or wherever you may be, perhaps alone, maybe with some family, worshipping away from this sanctuary, remember, where two or three are gathered in His name, Christ is there. Christ is in this.

As strange as it has been to gather this way, as awkward as it is to begin a new ministry this way, when we seek to celebrate our faith and build relationship in Christ's name, we have the assurance that not only will Christ be with us, but we know we do not have to fear the road ahead – the transitions, the growing edges, the adjustments, our eventual return together to the sanctuary, the virus count, any of those unknowns.

Because Christ will be with us, and will provide wisdom and light for the road, as we seek to be His disciples and build community rooted in faith. We only need to bring a little faith, and a desire to be a part of what God is doing here. With Christ at the centre of our worship and our meetings and our decision making, we will be shown the way. And as we work together, and listen to one another and pray together and share ideas and fear and hopes, we will build relationship, we will encounter Christ in new and exciting ways, and we will grow into the disciples that God calls us to be in these covid days.

So let us start our journey together as a family of faith trusting in God's guidance and great mercy for us all, keeping the faith for those who are too burdened by the sorrows of this world to feel it, singing songs from our homes and in our hearts of resurrection, and gaining strength and insight from the blessings of community, anchored in Christ.

Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this journey with you, may it be a blessed one for us all. And may the light of Christ, our faith in God and the energy of the spirit guide us always. Amen.