**Leading out of the Crisis**

**Pentecost 26, November 22, 2020**

**John 21: 1-14 Russell Mitchell-Walker**

In September five of us participated in a four week study group prepared by the Missional Network called Leading out of the Crisis. It largely focused on sharing stories and our experiences during this pandemic time, moving us towards thinking about what do we want to take with us out of this experience. Our first questions we explored were What are you noticing that is different in your neighbourhood and what have you observed happening in your community or neighbourhood? We heard about a variety of experiences. In general we all identified how much more walking, stopping to chat, and social distanced visiting there was when the weather was nicer.

Sam and Delia shared about stopping to have a conversation with a neighbour when passing one another in their building. In the interaction it was clear the person was lonely, and appreciated the opportunity to chat. He shared a tomato, even though he didn’t have many. They reflected that when we respond to the nudges we sense, we can receive more than we give. They both were amazed and delighted by the gift of the interaction.

Sheri talked about feeling isolated or disconnected from God during this time and finding that there are practices we can do that helped her find and connect with God such as reading, meditating, or prayer. She realized through this that God is with us, and we can reconnect. Our faith can go in seasons, we can be very faithful and also have times of disconnect, numbness, wondering where God is. Connecting with the scripture we reflected how sometimes we are not ready for ‘breakfast’ but God is patient and is there when we are ready. God’s grace strikes us in that we are not forsaken.

A few of the members talked about experiencing death during this time and one being comforted by memories of the playfulness of the loved ones with his grandchildren. This is a sad and lonely time and many of us miss things horribly. It makes the grief of death deeper and more challenging. They also identified the experience of God being with them through the death and grief. Taking notice of the moment and holding onto it is a precious blessing.

Breakout Rooms

I invite you to take some time reflecting together on these same questions, keeping in mind the reflections you may have from the scripture:

1. What stories do you have of what you have noticed that is different in your neighbourhood due to Covid-19?
2. What have you observed happening in your community or neighbourhood?

Groups of 4-5 for 7 minutes

Have someone take notes of reflections, insights, and ideas to send to me.

Out of this sharing I invite you to think about what common themes did you notice and how might they be important? Our group identified the following

Common Themes were:

* God is with us we are not alone, even in loss
* Pay attention to your surroundings
* Loneliness is prevalent and we are keenly aware of the importance of human connection – the personal/face to face contact
* God is reaching out to us, sometimes in surprising ways. We need to be present to notice it

How might these observations be important and where are we hearing God and connections with the scripture

* We will not be worshiping as normal any time soon, but God is here and holding us; it will be ok. There will be bread and fish for breakfast of some kind or other
* The net didn't tear - things have been heavy but we are sticking together, working together, we can get through this. God is holding the net also and won't let it tear. In crisis we are held, and there is strength.
* We need each other and we do this together with God. We point things out to each other. Listen to God's nudges from others.

Here are some further insights from Dwelling in the Word, as we reflected on the scripture.

* Peter was still sad from Jesus’ death and confused about the experiences of seeing him. As he dealt with this, he went with what was familiar, going fishing and the others went with him so he wouldn’t be alone.
* After fishing all night, they went from nothing to bounty. When you are stuck try a different angle, a different take.
* Jesus’ encouragement of them, changes the experience – we can help encourage people to make it different and be persistent as well.
* There was a large number of fish, there are limitless possibilities, limited only by our imagination. We can be open to listen and see what is right in front of us.
* Pay attention to Jesus’ surprises in our life, what kind of breakfast is Jesus cooking for us that we are not noticing - what do we need to do to throw the net on the other side?
* Feeling lost and needed to reconnect with God, feeling assurance, and calm from reading and connecting, and paying attention to where God is. Be aware of what is good.
* In the midst of grief, the disciples were able to recognize Jesus and embrace the moment. We can too. We can experience joy and gratitude even in the midst of grief.
* Jesus comes as a friend at our level. He shared bread and fish and they added their fish. It was like communion, they would have been hungry after all night. It would also have taken time to prepare, the preparation is important. Jesus welcomes us to the meal as we are – Peter probably did not have to worry about putting on his clothes. They were welcomed and able to share. We need to do the same with others.
* If we love it is easier for us to be open and experience the unexpected, mysterious and wonderful happenings of life. If we love (like the disciple whom Jesus loved) we are able to see things others don't
* Jesus gathered a diversity of people and personalities around him
* Don't be afraid to try something new or different. We can't say this is how we always did it these days; people do say we need to get back to the way they did. What do we want to get back to?

Breakout Rooms:

Given these reflections and your experiences, I invite you to take some time in breakout rooms with these questions:

1. Are there one or two experiences coming out of your stories or your experiences of church life over the past several months of this pandemic that you don’t want to lose.
2. Out of these experiences what do you want to make sure we take with us?
3. What do we want to let go of from the past ways of doing things?

Same groups of 4 or 5 for 7 minutes.

Have someone take notes of reflections, insights, ideas, to send to me.

Share.

The study group had these reflections:

1. Are there one or two experiences coming out of these stories you don't want to lose?

* Stop and smell the roses - admire and appreciate nature and pay attention to your surroundings and people around you.
* There is the story from the Jewish tradition that with every breath, we say the name Yahweh, God. When we are conscious of this we pay attention to God’s presence with each breath.
* In the immenseness of the universe, there is personal connection with Jesus, God, one another that is very important.

1. Are there one or two experiences of church life that you don't want to lose?

* Being able to cry together; supporting one another
* Zoom worship having questions for discussion in sermon - with others including those we didn't know as well
* Feeling of connection with church community
* Support from the church community in time of death
* Support for lunches that Alex prepared and meals for Victoria School
* Physically we are further apart, but we are learning a deeper connection - we can be connected from a distance, don't want to lose that.
* Having to say a hug, support without a hug
* Adaptability and flexibility
* Not take for granted our connection - treasure all the more what church offers in community.
* Hope this strengthens our mission - realizing we are all connected. Recognizing what is important to us, what we can have an impact on. We can make a difference.

For the week after this session, the group was invited into a daily practice of reading this litany and prayer and reflecting on the question: *What comes to mind as I read through this liturgy and pray this prayer?*  We will use this as our commissioning

In these in between times filled with disruption,

loss and new life;

*Lord, awaken me to your presence.*

In our new rhythms of daily life, with family,

friends, neighbours and church;

*Lord, awaken me to your presence.*

In our looking backwards and reaching forward,

wondering what is next;

*Lord, awaken me to your presence.*

In our growing openness and wondering what new

future you are leading us into;

*Lord, awaken me to your presence.*

Let us pray

As we continue to discover our part in God’s

mission right here in this place;

May I listen with expectation that God is present.

Always ahead, always beside,

Always guiding, everlasting.

Amen.

As we absorb all of this and reflect on our own thoughts and experiences, we can consider what we want to take forward as a community. Feel free to share any further thoughts you may have in the chat box, or with myself or Sarah Tkachuk as chair of the Leadership team. In the study, we discussed what themes keep rising that we want to take forward. Here are some of those reflections:

* We need to nourish ourselves before we reach out to other, so we can reach out to others
* Reaching out is important - finding ways to stay connected
* Seeing God in all things; Knowing God is with us
* Be curios and open to new ways
* People enjoyed visiting outside while distancing, as the weather gets cold can we use church space for socially distanced visits?
* Loving kindness for those who are vulnerable - supporting those in need
* Draw on/focus on joy, positivity, and faith especially as we move through the next wave.
* Focus on the present, this moment, being not doing; loving self enough to say no
* Be careful not to place unreasonable expectations on ourselves; not everyone is like Peter; we don't all have to be the same.
* Being Adaptable

This is a lot to reflect on, absorb and take in. This is because I just tried giving you a sense of a four week session in 15 minutes! I hope you will take some time to reflect on these stories, themes and ideas and what it means as we move into a new normal, over the next year or so. As we do so, may we remember that God is with us, inviting us to cast our net on the other side, share a meal, and feed one another.