Love Deep and Wide

May 15, 2022, Easter 5

Acts 11: 1-18 Russell Mitchell-Walker

John 18: 33-35

Once upon a time in a large forest there lived a very furry bunny. He had one lop ear, a tiny black nose and unusually shiny eyes. His name was Barrington. He was not really a very handsome bunny. He was brown and speckled and his ears didn’t stand up right. But he could hop, and he was, as I said, very furry.

In a way winter is fun for bunnies. After all it gives them an opportunity to hop in the snow and then turn around to see where they have hoped. So in a way winter was fun for Barrington. But in another way winter made Barrington sad. For, you see, winter marked the time when all of the animal families got together in their homes to celebrate Christmas. He could hop and he was very furry. But as far as Barrington knew, he was the only bunny in the forest.

When Christmas Eve finally came, Barrington did not feel like going home by himself. So he decided to hop for awhile in the clearing in the centre of the forest. Hop hop. Hippity-hop. Barrington made fresh tracks in the snow. Hop. Hop. Hippity-hop. Then he cocked his head to see the wonderful designs he made. When it got too dark to see his tracks he decided to go home. On his way, however, he passed a large oak tree, and heard a lot of chattering going on. It was the Squirrel family. What a marvelous time they seemed to be having. He asked them if he could join them, but he couldn’t because he was a bunny and bunnies couldn’t climb trees. Even though he could hop and was furry, he couldn’t join their party. They wished him a Merry Christmas and Barrington went on his way.   
The same thing happened at the beaver’s house and they welcomed him until they learned he couldn’t swim, which prevented him from getting into their lodge. So even though he could hop and was furry he couldn’t go to their party. It was getting cold and snow was falling so hard his tiny bunny eyes could barely see what was ahead of him. So, he headed home and on the way heard the excited squeaks of field mice beneath the ground. It’s a party, Barrington thought, as he suddenly blurted out through his tears “Hello field mice. This is Barrington Bunny, may I come to your party?” But the wind was howling so loudly and Barrington was sobbing so much that no one hear him. And when there was no response at all, Barrington just sat down in the snow and began to cry with all his might.

Bunnies, he thought, aren’t any good to anyone. What good is it to be furry and to be able to hop if you don’t have any family on Christmas Eve?

Barrington cried and cried. Suddenly, he was aware that he was not alone. He looked up and strained his eyes and to his surprise saw a great silver wolf. The wolf was large and strong and his eyes flashed fire. He was the most beautiful animal Barrington had ever seen. For a long time the silver wolf didn’t say anything at all he just stood there and looked at Barrington with those terrible eyes.

Then slowly and deliberately the wolf spoke. “Barrington”, he asked in a gentle “voice, why are you sitting in the snow?”

“Because it’s Christmas Eve and I don’t have any family and bunnies aren’t any good to anyone” Barrington said.

“Bunnies are, too, good.” Said the wolf. “Bunnies can hop and they are very warm.”

“What good is that”, Barrington sniffed

“It is very good indeed,” the wolf went on, “because it is a gift that bunnies are given, a free gift with no strings attached. And every gift that is given to anyone is given for a reason. Someday you will see why it is good to hop and to be warm and furry.”

“But it’s Christmas, and I’m all alone. I don’t’ have any family at all” moaned Barrington

“Of course you do” replied the great silver wolf. “All of the animals in the forest are your family” And then the wolf disappeared. He simply wasn’t there. Barrington had only blinked his eyes and when he looked – the wolf was gone.

“all of the animals in the forest are my family,” Thought Barrington. “It’s good to be a bunny. Bunnies can cop that’s a gift…a gift, a free gift”

On into the night Barrington worked. To the beavers’ house he left a stick, after finding the best one, deep in the snow. At the squirrels’ house he left some dead leaves and grass that he dug and dug for, so their nest would be warmer. With both gifts he left a note, ‘a gift, a free gift, from a member of your family’.

It was late when Barrington started home, and he knew a blizzard was beginning. Hop, hop, hippity hop. Soon poor Barrington was lost. It’s a good thing I’m so furry he thought but if I don’t find my way home soon, even I might freeze.

Just then he heard a squeak squeak, and saw a baby field mouse lost in the snow, crying. “Hello little mouse, don’t cry, I’ll be right there,” Barrington called out.

“I’m lost.” Sobbed the little fellow. “I’ll never find my way home, and I know I’m going to freeze.”

“You won’t freeze,” Barrington said. “I’m a bunny and bunnies are very furry and warm. You stay right where you are and I’ll cover you up.” Barrington lay on top of the little mouse and hugged him tight. The tiny fellow felt himself surrounded by warm fur. He cried for awhile and soon, snug and warm, fell asleep.

Barrington had only two thoughts that night. First, he thought “It’s good to be a bunny. Bunnies are very furry and warm”. And then as he felt the heart of the tiny mouse beating regularly, he thought “all of the animals in the forest are my family”

The next morning the field mice found their littlie boy asleep in the snow, warm and snug beneath the furry carcass of a dead bunny. Their relief and excitement was so great they didn’t even think to question where the bunny had come from. As for the beavers and the squirrels, they still wonder which member of their family left the little gifts for them that Christmas Eve.

After the field mice had left. Barrington’s frozen body simply lay in the snow. There was no sound except that of the howling wind. And no one anywhere in the forest noticed the great silver wolf who came to stand beside that brown lop-eared carcass. But the wolf did come, and he stood there without moving or saying a word. All Christmas Day. Until it was night. And then he disappeared into the forest.

This sad, powerful story is an example of the kind of sacrificial love Jesus is talking about when he gives the commandment to love one another as I have loved you. It is a challenge to think how we might offer that kind of love, though some in Ukraine and other parts of the world where there is conflict and oppression do it every day. He also loves as a servant, as he has just washed the feet of the disciples, something none of them would ever have done to each other. That was a slaves’ job. But Jesus shows us that serving one another and being vulnerable is also the kind of love and care we are to offer others.

We have been through another challenging pandemic year, and this may be part of the new normal. As we have moved through this year, I have seen members of our community love one another through serving others.

We have had servants making sandwiches at Indigenous Christian Fellowship every Friday, and others making cookies or muffins for those lunches. We need new folk to step up as we thank Linda and Larry Fowler, and Debbie and Perry Morehouse for their serving, as they take a break. We thank Doug Scheurwater for Coordinating.

We have had servants taking bulletins and announcements to those who are not online, and have been isolated during the Pandemic.

We have had servants who stepped up to purchase groceries and deliver them to households who were quarantining because of getting COVID.

We have servants who have been offering their time and talent on committees over the years, and some who have stepped back or are taking a well deserved break, so we need others to step up.

We have servants who make cards and those who send cards to those we thank and those who are going through grief or other crisis. We have a Gratitude Team who regularly sends thank yous to those who serve in our community in a variety of ways.

We have servants who deliver items to Carmichael Outreach and volunteer there.

We have servants who help with worship each week through our house groups.

We have servants who serve in the community in ways we are not even aware of.

We are blessed to have all the ways that so many serve in this community.

The other story, from Acts, is an example of God’s radical inclusive love. Peter recounts his experience that led him to understand that God’s love and their mission is to include the Gentiles. Previously Jews and Gentiles did not mix. You were considered unclean if as a Jewish person, you went into a Gentile’s home. But with this vision and new understanding, God transforms the old perspective to a radical new welcome of Gentiles into the Christian community, which up until then had been solely a Jewish movement.

As we think about this passage, we are challenged to reflect on who is missing from our community? How much does our community reflect the demographics of Regina? How might we expand our diversity and be more welcoming to those different from us? This is the work for us as a community as we move into the future. Are there partnerships we can build that might help with this? I am excited about a potential new renter of a Filipino Church who are looking for some space to worship. While building a partnership with them would not bring them to our worship on Sundays, there are opportunities for sharing in our ministry programing and LSC gatherings that could bring us a rich diversity. May we be open to these and other opportunities for partnerships and relationship building as well.

May we continue to love one another as Jesus loved, and step in to serve where others have stepped back. May we celebrate the servanthood of those who give so much, and encourage ongoing service in our community. May we be open to ways we can increase our radical hospitality and inclusiveness to others who are different from us, and share God’s love deep and wide.