

Moderator's Online Worship for Sunday, April 26, 2020

Moderator Richard Bott's Reflection

I'd like to start by recognizing that the table that we're sitting at tonight has empty seats.

Canada, the people of Nova Scotia, and the people of many communities there are grieving, because of the killings of what we now know are at least 23 people. This has touched not just The United Church of Canada, but all of our communities across the country. There are people realizing family connections, children to went to Camp Berwick, where one of the victims was a leader and a teacher in the wider community.

I think it's important that we recognize that there fewer people at our table tonight because of their deaths and because of the grief. My hope is that, as a community of faith, we will constantly and continually reach out to those who are grieving. That we will offer support where we can. And that we will always share the love and the trust that we have that those who are grieving are held safe not just by God's love, but by our love, too.

As we take a look around our table, I wonder who we *do* see here. Who are the people that we're walking on the road with. Some of us are fortunate, as I look at the screen in front of me, and see couples or families together – fortunate, in that there are people who are right beside them, physically, to walk this road. Although I am by myself in my space, I have the chance to gather, every morning – 9 o'clock my time – with a group of ministers from across Canada. That group changes from day to day. We come together to pray, not just for one another, but for the world. That's a group of disciples that I'm walking with.

Who are the disciples of Jesus' that you're walking on the road with, right now? Who are the people that you're talking with, about "the things that happened in Jerusalem this weekend?" Who are the people that you are wondering with? Who are the people that you get to ask questions of, or share how your heart is feeling – whether it's broken, or burning with passion? You see, I think its important that, when we're able, we walk that road with others. Whether it's a short journey – from Jerusalem to Emmaus – or a much longer journey – 40 days in the boat – or maybe a much longer journey – 40 years, walking in a desert – it's important that we not walk alone.

One of the things that I know about walking with others is that, as the writer of Ecclesiastes put it, when one person falls down, there's someone to help them up. When somebody falls into a pit, there's someone else to lift them out. Sometimes we need people who can support us. Other times, we need people who can challenge us. Sometimes we need to be the people who can pray – other times, we don't have words, and someone else needs to be our voice.

This journey of living as a disciple of Jesus isn't solitary. It's in community. Community is what we make it, together – in our physical spaces, or in our virtual spaces.

So – who are you walking on the road with, to Emmaus? Because, it's not just other disciples who show up. If you take a look around, on the journey you're on right now, Christ is there. Christ is present. Christ is walking with you – whether you recognize him, or not.

Where are you seeing Christ in the world? Where are you experiencing the presence of the one who taught us what it means to love God with all that we are, and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. How are you listening to Jesus open up the words of the prophets?

When you take a look into the eyes of the people around you, do you see Christ's presence? Because, I know, that when I take a look into the eyes of the people who have gathered with me – even across these thousands upon thousands of kilometers, I'm finding Christ show up regularly. Sometimes in surprising ways. In questions – and in answers – in stories – and in fears – in the singing that we get to share together. But, most of all, right now, I meet Christ in the actions of hope in the face of despair. In the actions of compassion in the face of frustration. In the love that is shared.

So, on this road, as we recognize who our companions are, and sit down and break bread and eat and celebrate the presence of Jesus Christ, let's look for those moments where our hearts are burning within us. Where we celebrate, and where we grieve – and let us know that we are *not* alone – ever.

Christ is with us.

Alleluia!

Amen.