

"Can You Hear Me Now?"

Well, last week was Easter Sunday, perhaps the holiest day of the year.

We made our journey through Good Friday, where we experienced the most horrendous execution imaginable.

We saw our Lord & Saviour *nailed* to a rough-hewn cross.

We saw the Christ humiliated by his nakedness, despised by the crowd and rejected by his closest friends.

The greatest man that ever drew breath and walked among us, endured that physical agony as the ultimate 'trade off', so that every man, woman and child from then until now and beyond, could be forgiven for their wrongdoings...our sins, in exchange for Jesus' life.

By his sacrifice He cleansed our souls. He gave us, not only a fresh start to this life, but he also prepared the way for yet another life to follow.

Then came Easter Sunday.

He was missing from his borrowed tomb.

The stone barring the entrance had been rolled away.

The shroud that covered his body was neatly folded and placed beside the scattered strips of linen used to wrap his body. However, the body of Jesus was nowhere to be seen.

Then later, after he had shown himself to his followers, He ascended to His Father in heaven, and left his disciples to carry on his work.

We have heard all these stories before and are all in great awe that Christ would willingly endure such torture for us, even though He had committed no crime.

We felt terribly sad on Good Friday, and yet, greatly elated on Easter Sunday, when we saw our Savior alive again.

Yes, He had finished His earthly mission with us, but He is leaving it to us to continue to build His Church.

We know how His kingdom on earth has flourished over the last two thousand years, and we know that we are a part of it, right here in Stirling.

God is with us, directing our life's journey, even if we don't know, or understand.

So, what now?

How can **we** continue His works?

What are we supposed to do?

As believers, we feel compelled to do something.

We each know how hard we work in our church, keeping our building in good condition, helping to pay the bills, serving on committees, singing in the choir, worshipping here every Sunday morning, visiting those of our flock who are shut-in, in hospital, or who require physical or emotional support.

But if we are to survive, perhaps we need to *crank it up a notch* and take a more public stand for what we believe.

We all have gifts. Some are gifted care-givers. Some have teaching gifts. Some have financial acumen, & some are blessed with understanding how to fix 'stuff'!

In whatever we do, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit is always with us, within our very being, helping us to make right decisions and encouraging us to make others a priority...in other words, enabling us to fulfill our destiny.

Remember how Jesus washed the feet of His disciples – a low & degrading job usually left to servants?

He was showing us the way, showing us how to serve others.

In today's scripture reading, it is rather significant that Jesus chose a Samaritan to make His point.

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the greatest parables that Jesus taught, as an example of living for others.

No doubt, showing a Samaritan as a good-guy would not have been a popular story to relate to the Children of Israel in those days.

In Matthew we read:

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes, you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me."

They questioned, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

When did we see a stranger and invite them in, or needing clothes and clothed them?

When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

And He replied: "I tell you the truth, whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do for me.'

But, how do we embrace agape (*unconditional*) love?

How do we change ourselves – get away from the selfish lifestyle of 'me – first'?

We could all use bigger ears to listen for the voice of God.

He wants to be involved in the entire life of a believer. No topic is too small or insignificant for His input.

There is no such thing as luck, as some would espouse.

If we diligently await the words of God, we will feel the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

I went on-line this week to find examples of some modern-day Good Samaritan stories. Clearly, headlines these days are filled with horrific stories of what is happening in the Ukraine. But running alongside those stories were headlines like this:

- Man jumps into burning building to rescue trapped children
- Bus brings 3,000 teddy bears to children in the Ukraine
- Regina man returns Albertan's back-pack lost on a train in Vancouver
- Black American state-trooper helps a sick, white-supremacist protestor, and
- American synagogue welcomes Muslims whose mosque was damaged by fire

It seems to me that a number of factors come into play to set the stage to act on good Samaritan intentions. First, we need to be prepared to look beyond our own hang-ups and biases regarding folks we'd rather ignore, exclude or avoid. It's a matter of 'going against the grain', I think. It isn't really a difficult task to show kindness to those we'd naturally gravitate towards anyway. But to go out of our way to risk actively stepping outside of our comfort zone is the more genuine 'Good Samaritan' reflex.

Secondly, there is a consideration of what others may think of our actions. It is very hard to take that step of faith that says we will care more of what God thinks of our actions. The mind-set that worries about what others "might" think falls under the old adage "most of what we worry might happen, never does anyway". Don't you think we need to give our God a little more credit? He has promised to be with us in all things. Is that a lie?

Finally, as we journey throughout our lives, there tends to be an 'us' and 'them' mentality, a series of opposites, like adults and children, or teachers and students. This rift branches into many factions depending on where you look – religion, race, politics.

Jesus was aware of this dynamic when he chose a Samaritan for His parable. He knew that it would be received as one of "them" helping one of "us", and that was the brilliance of His teaching point...a different slant on the golden rule.

Our challenge from the parable of the Good Samaritan is to ***seek*** ways for "us" to help "them". It is too easy to have tunnel vision, then fall back on an "I could have, should have" narrative.

The parables of Jesus are timeless in their impact. Two thousand years after this story was told, we are still learning how to demonstrate 'Christian' behaviour. I would encourage all of us to follow through on those nudgings of the Holy Spirit which remind me of that old Verizon commercial, "Can you hear me now?" AMEN