

## Winfield United Church Reflection – April 19, 2020

### **“Courage is Beautiful”**

John 20:19-29

So, these past few days, I have been noticing a scar I have on my hand... it's by no means from a new injury. It has faded and subsided so much I can barely detect it... Can you see it? It's right here, this thin line of raised skin. It used to be much bigger. When I look at it, I'm reminded of my best friend from elementary school. Her name was Anita. Anita and I spent a lot of time together and most Friday nights found one of us sleeping over at the others house. On one particular weekend, we decided to climb the tree in her front yard and unbeknownst to me, a branch cut the back of my hand and bled quite a bit. Thankfully, I didn't require stitches. On the back of my other hand, I have a burn mark. I got this when I was about 11. I remember my mum had gone with my sister-in-law who was expecting to a doctor's appointment in the city. I had the job of making supper that night, and fish and chips were on the menu. I burned my hand when I pulled the pan out of the oven. Neither of these scars are disfiguring and thankfully, they hold not trauma for me. Someone once said that scars are like tattoos with better stories. And this past week, my scars gave me pause to think back to other times, times when I was a young girl and pleasant memories that go with them.

We have been of course, following the developments around the COVID 19 outbreak in our communities. These past days, we have heard the urgent and desperate pleas from Quebec's premier for health care workers, anyone with medical training, to please come and help with the COVID situation in long term care facilities. We heard from nurses, giving their firsthand experiences of working in some of the facilities and the deplorable conditions that met them. I've been thinking about what it must take to get out of bed in the morning and go into the hot zones of this virus... to provide compassionate care and attention to the sick and most vulnerable.

Last week, Dove, the makers of soap and other beauty products, released an inspiring ad campaign featuring selfies of doctors and

nurses at work, in their scrubs, masks hanging around their necks. The campaign is called “Courage is Beautiful” and draws our attention to the deep, sometimes dark indents, left on the faces of healthcare workers from wearing personal protective gear, which must be adorned constantly. The video a moving and poignant tribute to the battle scars healthcare heroes are wearing.

Let’s take a look at these portraits in the Dove ad now...

<https://youtu.be/sQQq0-ODBbc>

In our reading this morning from John, we hear of the encounter between Jesus and Thomas. Jesus has been making post-resurrection appearances to his closest friends. But Thomas has been absent and he isn’t buying what the others are saying... he doesn’t know how the dead can return... He wants proof....and who can really blame him for asking. He wants to see for himself, to have the firsthand experience like the others. He devoted three plus years of his life to following Jesus, his friend and teacher. He watched his arrest and crucifixion. He just wants some physical proof of what his friends are claiming to have already experienced. Then he will be satisfied.

Jesus extends an invitation to Thomas to touch his scars, to trace them with his finger. The experience moved Thomas from doubt to confession. This story invites us into that space of holy imagination. The gospel of John was written long after the life of Jesus, not by an eyewitness but rather by someone who lived life in fear of persecution ; it was written to a community that was struggling to believe in an unseen Jesus. So what does this story, in the midst of an Easter season like one we’ve never experienced before, mean to us? For me this week, it was the image of Thomas touching Jesus’ scars....It is a visceral experience...Thomas being in the presence of someone he loved and respected and followed, he left life as he knew it to follow Jesus. The death of Jesus changed his followers... they were left wondering, now what? This story, for me, is hope-filled. The peace Jesus gave them will be with them as they leave that upper room. That Jesus’s presence, the breath of his Spirit, will be with them as they go to hard places they’d rather not go and say hard things they probably would rather not say.

Courage is Beautiful... the selfies of healthcare workers convey not just the marks left on the outside from tight fitting masks that are the difference between sickness and health, life and death... they also convey the toll the work is taking, the exhaustion, the worry, the grief, all right there on their beautiful faces... this is my resurrection moment this week... I'm thankful that I have not been personally affected by the virus so far. I listen to news briefings and press conferences to keep up on the latest developments... But to see the marks of healthcare workers, somehow makes the COVID 19 virus more real... I am reminded of individuals are going to hard places because of their commitment to care of the sick... those with the courage to speak out against unsafe working conditions and to not stop until leaders and officials hear their pleas for help...to see those marked faces gives me a sense of awe, wonder, and deep gratitude. As an Easter people, may we too find our courage to speak and act in ways that are life-giving... a phone call to a friend, an offer to do errands for one who is shut-in. We do not know what the future holds, but together we will find the beautiful courage to overcome.

By way of closing, let us share a prayer written by our United Church.

I invite you to read it with me... let us pray...

### ***Thanks for Health Workers***

*Holy One,*

*We give thanks for those who care for the sick at this difficult time.*

*For diligent family practitioners and experienced specialists,*

***we thank you.***

*For care-full nursing staff*

***We thank you.***

*For cheerful housekeeping workers,*

***We thank you.***

*For attentive care aides,*

***We thank you.***

*For skilled X-Ray Technicians,*

***We thank you.***

*For administrators and support staff,*

***We thank you.***

*Holy One, we know that in hospitals and care homes,*

*in emergency rooms and in intensive care units,*

*the work of healing is dangerous and challenging,*

***and we thank you for those willing to serve.***

*(time of silent reflection)*

*We acknowledge the sacrifice and continual pressure that is*

*the lot of those who care,*

*and we thank you for work they do for us, and for the communities to which we belong.*

*Holy One,*

*May your Love sustain them, your Peace surround them*

*and your Holy Spirit inspire them through the most challenging times,*

*Amen.*