When we enter into the stories of the Old Testament we enter a journey. The journey of God’s people begins in Paradise and takes us through the rough terrain of the Middle East. We rest and dream with Jacob, count stars with Abram and Sara, watch as sibling rivalry divides and devastates families and travel with Joseph, as a slave into Egypt. In each one of these stories, the Creator plays a role in the lives of the characters that reminds us of God’s promise to be with us and invokes our thankfulness and praise.

Our tradition of Thanksgiving is a direct result of these stories and many others like them. For the act of thanksgiving and praising God is found not only in these stories; it has been practiced by our ancestors in faith for thousands of years. Our faith stories teach us how to offer our thanks.

Lois and Ken Goldrich, writers for The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, describe two ways the Jewish people have learned to offer thanksgiving through scripture.

One way is through prayer. They begin each day by reciting Modeh/Modah Ani, thanking God for restoring their souls each morning... In addition, to emphasize the importance of giving thanks, they actually bow as they begin and end this section.

This is the English translation of Modeh/Modah Ani:

Grateful I arise this day,  
Eternal God, to You I pray  
for the spirit You’ve renewed in me  
mercifully and steadfastly.

They continue: “How else do we thank God? We do it through acting ethically, kindly, and generously, modeling in our own behavior those qualities ascribed to God. As the midrash relates: ‘Just as God is gracious and compassionate, you too must be gracious and compassionate... As the Holy One is faithful, you too must be faithful. As the Holy One is loving, you too must be loving.’ Can we get away simply with paying lip service to these admirable qualities? Absolutely not! As the Talmud relates: “As God clothes the naked, you should clothe the naked. [As] the Holy One visited the sick, you should visit the sick. [As] the Holy One comforted those who mourned, you should comfort those who mourn. [As] the Holy One buried the dead, you should bury the dead.” Clearly, we can’t get away with delegating these tasks to others.

Lois and Ken Goldrich also suggest that: according to the Talmud, ancient Rabbinic writings that provide the basis of religious authority in the Jewish faith, the answer lies in giving thanks -- in explicitly recognizing God’s role in the world. Everything belongs to God. Therefore, when we give thanks for anything, we acknowledge God’s sovereignty over all the earth and gain the right to enjoy all that we have. A small price to pay for so large a gift!

Lastly the Goldriches suggest: “consider reciting Psalm 100 (Mizmor L’Todah, A Psalm of Thanksgiving) at your Thanksgiving table this year...for the privileged we have this Thanksgiving to “worship God in happiness and come before God in joyful song.”

This is Psalm 100 (from The Message):

1-2 On your feet now—applaud God!  
Bring a gift of laughter,  
sing yourselves into his presence.
Know this: God is God, and God, God.
   He made us; we didn’t make him.
   We’re his people, his well-tended sheep.

Enter with the password: “Thank you!”
   Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
   Thank him. Worship him.

For God is sheer beauty,
   all-generous in love,
   loyal always and ever.

May you, your friends and families be blessed this season and may we each find good ways of saying thanks to God for all that we have.

Rev. Peg
Martha and I have a drawer full of hand-knit dish clothes at home. None of them made by us. Most have been gifts from church members and friends. Perhaps some of you knit dishcloths like these. Or if you haven't perhaps some of you, like us, use them.

These little dish clothes are not the only hand-knit items in our home. Thankfully we have been gifted with sweaters, baby clothes and blankets, Afghans, mittens, hats and even socks. My father-in-law would only wear hand-knit wool socks. Bessie, my mother-in-law, would carefully hand wash them and put them on metal forms, shaped like feet, so that they wouldn't shrink. Perhaps some of you have done the same thing and you know what I'm talking about.

I began to knit as a child. My dad’s mom sat patiently with me and taught me so I could earn a Girl Guide badge. We took the bus to Ottawa St. in Hamilton and bought a bright red ball of wool and a pair of my own needles. We then made the short bus trip back to grandma’s house to begin, what soon became, the most stressful time I ever spent with my grandma. I was not a good student, and I didn’t pay enough attention and so was not very good at knitter. (Well, I’m still not!) In fact, I actually never finished the scarf I was making for the badge. I think the guide leader took mercy on me, or my grandma, and gave me the badge to end the torture for both of us. I can knit now, but finishing a project is still an issue.

I have always treasured the knit items that my grandmas made for me over the years though. My favourite was a toque, scarf and mitts all done up in my high school colours. The same colours were my university colours as well, so I wore them for a very long time. In fact the toque still gets worn in the winter when I am shoveling the sidewalk. Maybe you have a favourite sweater or toque someone made for you years ago.

The image of knitting is used in the Bible. In Psalm 139, the writer is speaking of God and God's ways. I love this psalm, for the poetry is so wonderful.

The psalmist writes, "If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast." He realizes that God is with him in all places. Not only that the poet recognizes that God has been with him even before he was born. That God was with him, forming all his parts: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Knowing all the time and effort it takes to make a sweater, the thought of God knitting us together is pretty awe inspiring. I image God must have had a more patient grandma or was a better student!

Either way God is faithful to us from the moment the process of our living begins to the very end...

So the way I look at it...each one of us has been a unique gift to the world...we have offered comfort, warmth and love to others, just like a beautifully hand- knit sweater, or toque has been for us. And just as we have treasured the hand-knit gifts we have received from others, our lives have been treasured by those whom we love and love us in return. Thankful then for the gifts we have received...and the love that made it all happen, let us remember always that we are truly blessed by a creating and loving God who is always with us.
Peg’s Ponderings

Friday, September 27, 2019

It is relatively late on Thursday night and well past the deadline for the Weekly Update! (Sorry, Maleigha…)

I just got home from a meeting of the Association of Dundas Churches and am trying to take in all the work the churches of Dundas do together. My pondering tonight is….Did you know?

Fifty years ago the churches of Dundas came together, despite differences of theology and understanding of social issues, to service the needs of the community

As part of this Association, St. Mark’s:

Has been a part of initiating programs like the Dundas Food Bank, Routes Youth Centre and Dundas Community Services
Is currently working with groups like EcoWham (Eco Churches of West Hamilton) to bring about awareness regarding the Environment
Holds an annual event focusing on Truth and Reconciliation
Supports the work of Ellen Osler Home, local women’s shelter
Ensures that a church hosts a community dinner every Monday
Takes part in an Advent Walk and Lenten Lunch series
And so much more…

There is a lot going on in the Dundas community and a lot of that is thanks to the work of the Churches in town. One of the events we are supporting along with Dundas Works is an “All Candidates Meeting” on Oct 15th from 7-9 at Dundas Baptist. In our narthex (the space right outside the sanctuary as you come into the church) is a box where you can place any questions you have for the candidates. Your questions are due October 1st and will be collected and categorized. Questions for the candidates will be formulated using the most common themes and issues from all the questions collected. I hope we all take this opportunity to engage our local politicians with the matters that concern us locally and globally, by asking the questions and attending the meeting. If you have any questions about the Association of Dundas Churches, please feel free to speak with me or Dorothy Bartalos.

See you all on Sunday!

Peg
The introduction for the book of Numbers in Eugene H. Peterson’s rendering of the Bible, “The Message,” reads like this:

“The book of Numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up. The pages in this section of the biblical story give us a realistic feel for what is involved in being included in the people of God. We need help in getting along with one another. Wise discipline is required in becoming a people of God.”

In the book of Numbers we encounter the Israelite community as they travel from lives of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land of God. By this stage in the story they had been travelling under the leadership of Moses and by the grace of God for 2 years. However, even at this early stage of their 40 year journey they were experiencing challenges. In Egypt they had work, food and homes but in the wilderness, as they searched for this Promised Land, they were hungry and tired. It was getting hard for Moses to keep the community safe and together. So God often spoke to Moses with ideas about how to keep the people moving forward. Out of these conversations came many laws and best practices that became a part of the Israelite tradition long after their arrival in the Promised Land.

There was to be a census of families and a distribution of community tasks by family. Health concerns were addressed by banning members of the community who had skin diseases or had touched the dead. Fines were established so that those who committed wrongs against their fellow traveller could make things right. Bugles were created so that Moses could call the community together or signal to march on. Offerings and festivals were also established and described.

And so on and so on.... Some of these practices continued on for many years, even centuries. Being in community hasn’t changed much. Today we have laws for just about everything. We must go to school until we are 18. We must obey the posted speed limits on our roads. There are by-laws, labour laws and statutory laws. And there are unwritten laws. Why? We may think we’re more civilized than the Israelites, who no doubt needed laws as they travelled in order to hold them together. I think we need laws for the same reason: to keep us together and safe.

The image of a journey is a favourite for “religious” folks. There’s the Jewish Exodus, the Christian road to Emmaus, the Middle Way of the Buddhist tradition, pilgrimages to Mecca for Muslims and the Golden Temple for Sikhs. We all like a good journey story. Now we have started a journey together. I’m no Moses and you’re not the Israelites, but we will need some rules if we are to make this journey safely. There are trumpets in the building that we can pretend are bugles, so that set of rules is covered. When I blow the trumpet once, you can enter the sanctuary! Silliness aside, I think we do really need rules. But I only have one rule...

Whereas a faith community is a place where the things we say and do build up each other so we can each fulfill our call to follow Christ’s way,
Whereas we are called as a community and individuals to engage in the world in order to change the world with God,
Be it resolved that we always work together to make this place a clear reflection of God’s love and way in the world.

When we make mistakes, let us ask for forgiveness. When we hurt each other, let us take time to heal. When we make a wrong turn on the journey,
let us be still and listen for the still small voice of God who will be speaking to us and telling us which way to go next.

May this journey unfold in a way that will bring us to the place where God wants us to be!
And we’re off…but all the lights may not be, when I leave the church! I haven’t found all the light switches yet - something to discover over the next few weeks. Or we can take up the old “Motel 6” motto, “We’ll leave the light on for ya.” Probably not the most economical approach though.

This past week was full of people to meet and meetings to attend. Thanks to all the folks who shared their wisdom and knowledge about St. Mark’s with me. As well, I thank you all for such a warm welcome this past Sunday. I have so much to learn about what makes this community of faith tick and I’m enjoying the learning thus far. The Spiritual Leadership team held a meeting and there’s lots of energy for the ministries of pastoral care, worship, youth and adult education. I’m learning about the “Houses” that some of you belong to and how the members of each House work together to meet, greet and welcome Sunday worshipers. The Weekly Update committee held a meeting and shared with me how this newsletter helps spread the news and highlights of what’s going on here and in the Dundas area. And as a staff we met to talk about how we can work together well and how we can focus our ministries in line with our mission statement. I also had the opportunity to meet seven of my colleagues from neighbouring churches through the Association of Dundas Churches Ministerial. On Friday I will meet with St. Mark’s Special Events committee and hear what’s planned or being planned for this coming year. Whew…!

As I have witnessed the ebb and flow of a week at St. Mark’s, I have tweaked my office hours for at least this coming week. I will be in the office Tuesdays from 12:30 to 2:30 and on Thursdays from 10:30 to 12:30. These office hours are times when I should be in the office, unless I get called away for some reason. I will be in the church far more than the hours listed above, but these will be dedicated times when I’m not booked to be anywhere or do anything else. If you are in the area or wish to chat, please stop by during these times! I am also available at other times, just give me a call and we will work out a time to get together.

The Creator brought about all that we know of and more, in just seven days through the Word, or with a Big Bang, depending on who you listen to! God has been with us these past seven days, for surely we would not have been able to do as much this week without the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. As the weeks unfold may we continue to rely on and trust that God goes with us.