

Preamble to message for June 28,2020

Just a little preamble to my message today.

We are living in extraordinary times! In the midst of a pandemic we are witnessing heroic acts of human sacrifice, people putting their lives on the line for people they have never met and to whom they have no connection. I don't need to list them you know who they are.

At the same time we are in the midst of racial tension, the like of which has not been seen since the sixties.

We have witnessed a brutal act of inhumanity with a knee on the neck for eight and half minutes while the victim cried out that he could not breath.

Surely we have not forgotten the events in Nova Scotia recently where an assailant in the guise of a policeman shot innocent people and burned homes.

A friend shared with me the story of a teenage girl walking along a road with three other girls at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, when a car stopped and four teen boys got out and proceeded to beat and kick the girls. Fortunately a postal employee came by in her truck, sounded an alarm and the boys fled. She got the license plate number and they were caught.

What happens that seeds and encourages those kinds of behaviour?

Where and why do some people come off the rail of decency. It makes you wonder if they have lost their soul, that the goodness, or Godness of their lives has evaporated.

That is some of the thinking that is behind this message.

: Anything can happen at a well

“The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”

In Nicholas Evan’s popular novel, *The Horse Whisperer*, Annie Graves travels across the continent with her daughter Grace and Grace’s severely traumatized horse, Pilgrim, in a desperate attempt to convince a Montana rancher named Tom Booker to help them. A friend has told her that Booker is one of that elite group of people with the ability to heal injured horses.

“They could see into the creature’s soul and sooth the wounds they found there. Often they were seen as witches and maybe they were. Some wrought their magic with bleached bones of toads, plucked from moonlit streams. Others, it was said, could, but with a glance, root the hoofs of a working team to the earth they ploughed. For secrets uttered softly into pricked and troubled ears, these men were known as ‘whisperers’.”

In addition to the challenge of calming Pilgrim, who has been severely injured in a gruesome riding accident, Booker soon discovers that he has two human souls to heal as well. Grace has blocked out all memory of the accident in which her dearest friend was killed and she

herself lost a leg. Crippled for life, she turns her fear and anger inward, blocking anyone's attempt to help her get on with life.

Her mother Annie, a high rolling advertising executive has alienated herself from both her husband and her daughter for years and is suddenly forced to come face to face with what she has sacrificed because of her career.

Grace's physical and emotional injury following the accident is, but a shadow of Annie's inner alienation from herself. Annie has lost the ability both to give and receive human affection.

It is a story about a woman in search of healing for a wounded animal who ends up finding herself healed, in ways she was neither looking nor expecting.

This week's scripture does something that few others do. It tells us how wounds and divisions, especially ones that are longstanding, get healed. Jesus is the healer in this week's story, but in ways that are not always obvious at first glance. On one level of course, Jesus heals someone in a way she is not expecting. It is a story of a Samaritan woman who comes to a well to get water. She is minding her own business, doing the laborious work that women did in those days. She knows her place and is suspicious of the obviously Jewish man perched on the well as she approaches in the heat of the day. She is understandably taken aback when he not only speaks to her, but asks for her help.

Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

She is a Samaritan. He is a Jew.

She is a woman. He is a Man.

It is a highly public place.

Jesus, as usual, is inviting trouble in his typical unconventional attitude and behavior. He should not be speaking to a woman in the first place, let alone a member of a tribe of Israel, long despised by Jewish people.

It is all disorienting, dislodging, confusing, confusing and -wonderful, - right from the start.

When we are dealing with Jesus, suggests John the gospeller, expect the unexpected. People we think we have figured out don't act that way; and things we never expect to happen, do.

It's hard to tell what's going on in this conversation with Jesus and this woman, with every word giving you the feeling that it might mean something more than it seems. Something happens in the encounter. When it starts out, they are perfect strangers. When it ends up the woman is so excited that she wants everyone to know about this man that she has met.

“The women left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!’”

She leaves behind what brought her to the moment in the first place, because she finds something for which she did not realize she was searching, someone who meets her at her level of being as no one else has before. And once she has been met, she feels found. Or is it that she has found part of herself that had been missing. At the end of the story of course, it's not just the woman who is excited about Jesus, but a whole town of Samaritans.

A whole town of people have found themselves. They have found that they belong, after all. Found that in spite of centuries of hatred between two peoples, what matters is their worth before God is incontrovertible!

All because of a conversation that got started at a well and a man who actually saw people and who helped them see themselves.

Jesus puts people in touch with the experience of a love that embraces them at a level deeper than thought and action. When that happens they find that something that was broken inside of them, is coming alive again; something that was lost in them, suddenly found. When that is our experience, the exterior dimensions of our lives change too. The need for all the old suspicions, all the old rivalries and all the old fears, just don't matter anymore.

People have come into their souls again, which is a place each one of us individually and all of us collectively need to be.

Because soul gets lost, we become lost souls. To be a lost soul is to be unable to find the connections that keep us in communion with others, that keep us rooted in ourselves. Lost souls are unable to take their place in society, to engage in its rituals, to feel one with its traditions. They are dead to them. Until a person regains soul, they are not fully human. They have lost all that energized and humanized them.

People who lost their souls often die of it, because they are cut off from that central experience of being one with oneself. It is the worst loneliness of all.

Psychiatrist James Hillman writes:

"One day in Burgholsli, the famous institute in Zurich where the words "schizophrenia" and "complex" were born, I watched a woman being interviewed. She sat in a wheelchair because she was elderly and feeble. She said that she was dead for she had lost her heart. The psychiatrist asked her to place her hand over her breast to feel her heart beating, it must be there for she could feel it beating, he suggested." That," she said, "is not my real heart".

She and the psychiatrist looked at each other. There was nothing more to say. She had lost her soul, she had lost the loving, courageous connection to life and that is the real

heart, not the ticker which can as well pulsate isolated in a glass."

Like the family in *The Horse Whisperer*, the Samaritan woman in our story today and that woman in the hospital, we can and do lose our souls. We lose them when we no longer see the connection between who we are and the love that longs only to enfold us in its embrace. Jesus, both in his message and his intimate encounters with others, helped people reestablish that deep connection with themselves, where God and healing are found.

He constantly cut through the clear and arbitrary regulations that people established in order to determine who was worthy and unworthy. By bluntly declaring to the woman at the well that she was worthy to receive the life he came to give, he was also declaring that all were worthy to stoop and drink of that life giving stream.

And you my friends, may not have come to this particular "well" today looking for anything more than the ordinary drink that have come to expect; but, if you are not careful, He who knows the hidden mysteries and the labyrinth ways of the heart, may just ask you for a drink. If he does, give him what he asks. Give what it is you have to give—bring it up; haul it out from the deepest depths of your soul, including the darkest places you have hidden even from yourself.

For in giving him that, which is all he asks, you will feel coming to life in you, a gladness you never thought possible and the joy of knowing a love that flows freely to all who want to receive it.

For the one who meets us here and everywhere we care to find him is the one who simply wants to give to us from that life-giving stream.

And the people said----Amen