

Reflection for Sunday 26th April 2020

Deacon Jenny Parnell

As I read this passage of scripture, my mind jumped to the story of the formation of geese:

When you see geese flying along in “V” formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in “V” formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone — and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front. If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those people who are headed the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point. It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs, whether with people or with geese flying south. Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

What messages do we shout out to others? Finally, and this is important—when a goose gets sick or is wounded and falls out of formation, two other geese stay with that goose and offer support and protection. They stay until the fallen goose is ready to fly again or until it dies. Only then do they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their group.

The past few weeks have changed how we do community, but we are still in relationship with God and with each other. Paul wrote our passage of scripture to ensure that people were working together as a community. Needless to say, putting others ahead of ourselves requires sacrifice. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,” Paul exhorts, the words bodies and living emphasize that Paul means practical actions in the world of daily life and work. All believers become living sacrifices by offering their time, talent, and energy in work

This morning we are taking our reading from our Circuit lectionary and we are looking at Romans 12:1–21 (NRSV):

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

that benefits other people and/or God's entire creation. We are individuals with different talents, but we have to work together as one body with Christ as the head. Paul taught that we have to renew our thinking and put on the mind of Christ.

When we do this, we change our perspective and look at things through the lens of Christ's self-sacrifice. We have to learn to be less self-centred and more community centred.

To do this effectively will mean working, talking, and praying together... Interdependence is not a weakness but a strength. Let us come together, spiritually and for the time being, virtually, and discern together, looking to be guided by God as we navigate the new landscape, we have in front of us. Amen

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

*You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.*

*Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you
mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the
rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue
air,
are heading home again.*

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese,
harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*



And a prayer:

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our
nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry.

For those who are guiding our nation at
this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions.

For doctors, nurses, and medical
researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people. For those
who are sick or grieving,
that they may know your comfort.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of
trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom
we pray, to the mercy and protection of
God.

Amen