

**Reflection on Ephesians 1:15–23**  
**Rev. Christine Gilbert for St. Andrew's Uniting Church**

During Monday's gathering of the Spirituality Group for Women, we began by sharing one high and one low point for us since the last time we met. Many of us mentioned some experience with nature as a high point. They were simple, unextraordinary stories about birds, flowers and morning light. But as each woman shared, I heard in their voices a depth of joy and gratitude that conveyed transcendence within their encounters.

I wonder if we are drawn to nature—at any time, but especially now—because it is an aspect of life that is unconcerned and non-anxious about the concerns of the day.

Flora and fauna *instinctively* lean toward life. Plants and animals, *by their nature*, seize every opportunity to thrive. We see it in green shoots that pierce through miniscule cracks in the driveway or trees whose roots lift pavers and asphalt. We see it in the birds who fly in the winter wind and rain with twigs in their beaks, busily preparing nests for eggs that, with hope, will hatch in the spring.

In contrast, we can be overly cautious if not sceptical at times. We can become disheartened by the challenges that arise in our pursuit of the good or by the possibility of failure when an opportunity to love presents itself. Before we even take the first step, a flood of “what ifs” can enter our minds and soon we decide it's all too hard and sink back into resignation.

Perhaps that is why the Olympics are so alluring. Besides serving as a distraction from COVID, we watch as athletes pour their heart and soul into achieving incredible feats, sometimes against the odds. We often see in them the best of human nature, whether it's the willingness to share a gold medal or cheering a competitor onto victory.

The Letter to the Ephesians invites a recovery and strengthening of this way of being within Christian community. According to Paul, resurrection is *the narrative* at the foundation of our faith and life as Christians. He affirms that the power that raised Jesus resides within us, prompting us to choose life over death and giving us what we need to fulfil the calling to be the Body of Christ in this world.

In her book, *Resurrection and Moral Imagination*, Sarah Bachelard writes,

The resurrection shows that Jesus and all that he taught and lived, his ministry of healing and forgiving, his radical inclusiveness and love for the alienated, unlovely and 'legally unsatisfactory', has not been cancelled by the violence done to him.

In other words, yes, the crucifixion of Jesus revealed the fear and ugliness that can rule our world, but such things do not have the final say. And this realisation can be tremendously encouraging for us.

Bachelard goes on to observe that the resurrection of Jesus caused every aspect of his follower's lives to be, in her words, "constellated in radically new ways." If before the resurrection, life revolved around standard things such as commerce, politics and religion, in the resurrection a new epicentre was revealed. The Church and we as its members are now called to orient our priorities and ways of being around the person of the risen Jesus, to pursue real, lasting life in his way.

What is on offer in Ephesians might best be summarised by a compelling line at the end of a Wendell Berry poem: practice resurrection. *This is now our nature, this is our instinct*, says Paul, to practice resurrection, to move toward that which is life-giving as a plant orients itself and stretches toward the light.

So, what does this look like, practically? How might we practice resurrection as individuals and as a church? While the exact application depends upon each circumstance, there are, I think, some aspects from today's dense reading we might be able to tease out for further reflection.

First, Paul prays for God to give the Church a spirit of "wisdom and revelation" and for the eyes of their heart to be "enlightened" as they "come to know Jesus Christ."

The Greek word translated as "knowledge" does not mean abstract ideologies or dabbling in concepts about God from a distance. What Paul has in mind is wisdom gained through first-hand relationship. Paul wishes for us to know Jesus in the way a gardener knows the soil in her garden, or an oval curator knows his cricket pitch, or a couple knows the routines and rhythms of their partner.

At the heart of Paul's prayer is for the Church to get to know Jesus *so well, so personally*, that we can do nothing less than choose life. He wishes for us to become a people after God's own heart who can sense an opportunity to love and give ourselves to it.

I saw this enacted when the Church Council agreed to open St. Andrew's for same-gender weddings. By a show of consensus cards, everyone around the table quietly yet resolutely affirmed *this is who we are*—hospitable, inclusive, loving. Why would we be any different when it came to this matter, as controversial as it may be?

While I appreciate the outcome, I was most encouraged by what I intuited to be wisdom and revelation born out of personal experience. We are aware of God's love expressed to each of us and those we love, especially those of us who have gay or lesbian family members or friends. This first-hand knowledge of God's love led the way in our discernment.

Secondly, in this reading, there is a deep assurance in Paul's message. The power that brought creation into being is put to work in Jesus, raising him from the dead and seating him at God's right hand to rule over the new creation and his Church.

Paul's poetic imagery declares there's a trajectory to history we can entrust ourselves to. We know the beginning and the end of the story. And this offers us hope in our present which can sometimes feel mired down by relentless routine, conflicts big and small, and anxiety about the future.

But, hope, says Rowan Williams, is not simply "confidence in the future." Hope, he says is "confidence that the past, present and future are held in one relationship." What has been, what is and what will be are interconnected, they inform one another. Therefore, Williams suggests, the Church needs to be marked by profound patience. In his words:

Patience with actual human beings in their confusions and uncertainties; patience in an environment when so much seems to be unclear and in danger of getting lost; patience in the sense that we realize it takes time for each of us to grow up into Christ. And if it takes time for us, then it takes time for the Body, the community, to grow overall.

In this season of upheaval and change, it is tempting to wish to anchor ourselves with familiar forms and structures. With so much up-in-the-air and a growing fatigue with a crisis that has no apparent end, we may want to pin some things down. But as we grow in all things into Christ, we are invited to *trust the process itself*, a process that is dynamic and organic, inviting response to each present moment.

The power that raised Jesus into new life is at work in creation, in the Church and in each of us. The path might be full of unexpected twists and turns but, if we keep moving towards the horizon set out for us in Christ, the way will continue to open and love will continue to deepen among us.

A poem by William Stafford comes to mind and bears repeating. In his poem "The Way It is," Stafford speaks of a thread woven into our lives. Though unseen and sometimes misunderstood by others, we hold the thread and the thread holds us amidst the changes and realities of life.

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.