



Richmond Hill Reflections

“We Are Not Alone” (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

March 3, 2019; Last Sunday after Epiphany (Third Ember Day)

Readings: Romans 8:18-21; Excerpt from Isaac Marion’s *Warm Bodies*

“We are not alone.” The opening of *A New Creed* penned in 1968 was a statement of belief, yet today I see it as a cry of hope. We need to say “We are not alone” again and again because we increasingly feel otherwise. We feel alone in a roomful of people as everyone stares at their phones. Alone as we come home, close the garage and never need to see our neighbours. Alone as the world keeps dividing rather than coming together, even as church considering the UMC's decision to keep excluding LGBTQ people. Alone as we tackle one issue or another, set to give up over how insurmountable it feels, especially when it comes to climate change. We feel alone.

And though it may seem more pronounced today the sense of being alone is part of being human. Our passage from *Warm Bodies* reminds us birth is isolating. For nine months I was connected as I listened to my mum's heartbeat, her breathing, her voice. Suddenly I was alone in the cold air and bright light. From then on my task was to claim my voice, grow as my own person, stand on my two feet. This is especially true in the West where we've lifted individual rights and freedoms as ultimate values. Personal success is enshrined with markers you've arrived: big house, fancy car, lots of toys. Yet despite success, many feel disconnected, lost – existing but not really alive.

The letter to the Romans suggests the root of this experience is spiritual. In the lead up to our text, Paul contrasts living in the flesh with living in the spirit. Now flesh isn't our bodies. It's the disconnection we experience in the world, the divisions we create between each other, with other creatures, and the earth as a whole. According to Paul, creation's purpose is frustrated and I'd argue it has been for millennia. Those who use the bible to calculate the earth's age suggest it's about 10,000 years old. Interestingly that figure corresponds to the rise of agriculture and the shift to the world as we know it rather than the hundreds of thousands of years our ancestors hunted and gathered, tuned to the rhythm of other creatures rather than domesticating plants and animals, and reshaping our landscape. Unsurprisingly we started to see ourselves above creation and at the same time some people elevated themselves over others. Both ecologically and economically, this has become more pronounced in the last hundred years as we began using coal, then oil and gas to fuel our machines. As Paul says our minds are set on flesh. We're attached to the divisions we created between each other and our presumed disconnect with the rest of creation.

But it isn't hopeless. We need to remember who we are, recall the moment at our birth when wrapped in a blanket we were laid on our mum's chest, once more heard her heartbeat, her breathing, her voice. Paul suggests our alienation from each other and creation is tied to our presumed alienation from the one we call G-d. But Christ, not a last name but the reality of G-d's presence in all things, was revealed in Jesus. In him we rediscover that heaven and earth have always been connected, that

along with the rest of creation, we are G-d's children. When we know who we are, we can truly live, able to affirm: "We are not alone. We live in God's world."

This wisdom helps us break through the isolation that blocks change, calling us to solidarity with one another and the earth. A barrier to tackling the climate crisis is income disparity. Whole nations are burdened by impacts of greenhouse gases they didn't produce. In solidarity, countries like Canada which grew wealthy by using fossil fuels need to help them. It's why a fund was set up for developed nations to pay into. Closer to home there are people who can't afford to make changes. It's why we need government and corporate aid to help people implement solutions. Fortunately not all solutions are expensive. Rethinking room temperature (18 or lower in winter and 22 or higher in summer, not the other way around), lowering the temperature of hot water heaters, wrapping pipes to conserve heat, are solutions many of us haven't implemented.

Some of the best solutions remind us of our solidarity with creation. We can eat less meat, especially beef. We can help reforest by planting trees and supporting conservation efforts. We can encourage native habitats by letting part of our yard naturalize. Setting mower blade heights higher and leaving clippings on the lawn not only lower emissions but reduce the use of chemical fertilizer. Did you know that like chemical fertilizers insecticide production is petrochemical dependent? With this in mind there's an experiment taking place in the UK in which a series of farm fields are planted with wide stripes of wildflowers between rows of grain crops, creating habitats for insects that eat the pests that attack the grain. Not only has insecticide use decreased but yields have increased. These solutions take seriously that we're part of a large interconnected system.

We are not alone. It's easy to feel overwhelmed but we're not powerless. One of the most important things we can do is make connections. Talk to family and friends about solutions and take time in creation nurturing the sense of relationship. Communion is about that. We affirm we're the Body of Christ, but not just in this room, or as Christians, or other humans. As we share bread and juice we remember the grain and grapes, rain, sun, fields and vineyards, the insects, birds and animals that nest there. As we share this meal we do so in solidarity with each other, with the human family, with all creation. We may feel alone but we aren't. We live in G-d's world and together with creation we will bring to birth a more sustainable world. May it be so. Amen.