



## *Richmond Hill Reflections*

**“Come and See”** (Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft)

March 1, 2020; First Sunday in Lent

Reading: John 1:29-39; “I Am” by John Clare

As I told those who came together for the Ash Wednesday service, I love Lent. I know people generally love Advent but I appreciate the invitation each year to engage in self-reflection. As I shared before, Lent began as a time of intentional prayer for people who were to be baptised at Easter. They needed to be sure they were ready to let go of things in their life that would hold them back from modelling their lives after Jesus. This was important, after all another evolution of this season was as a period of penance for people who’d recanted their baptism during times of persecution, denying allegiance to Jesus in favour of the emperor. This is where we get the tradition of ashes. What links both of these is baptism. This season is a chance to ponder what it means both as a church and individuals to be baptized, to be a community of followers of Jesus, each striving to emulate him. This is why I chose to start Lent not with Jesus in the wilderness but rather a meeting between him and two people who wanted to know where he was staying.

I love how he simply invites them to “come and see”. Just as John’s disciples do that, in this season we are invited to do the same. I see this “come and see” invitation in a couple of ways. One is to “come and see” who Jesus is. I don’t mean this in an abstract, “think about him” way, but an intimate, get to know who he is to you. That’s why prayer is such an important part of Lent. For Discovery Time through these weeks, the children will learn various spiritual practices. No one form of prayer is good for us all. Some of us connect better with quiet reflection while others get more out of congregational singing. One method I highly recommend is *lectio divina*. This is a way of reading a bible text slowly and listening for words and phrases that jump out. Different words stand out for different people. It’s like each person has a conversation with G-d through the reading. Another method is imagining you’re in the story. The children are doing a version of this right now. As Jesus invites the people into the house, he invites you too. What do you see? How does he show hospitality? What do the four of you talk about? How rich a Lent it will be if we each take the reading of the week and take time for *lectio divina* or contemplative reading. Over the course of these weeks we will each personally know more deeply who Jesus is.

Another part is “coming to see ourselves” more fully. I’m sure you’ve had this experience. Your friend says something about you that surprises you. They see something in you that you don’t see in yourself, usually a gift, quality, strength you find it difficult to acknowledge. We can be very critical

of ourselves. Now don't get me wrong. At times we need to be. None of us is perfect. We are a mixture of talents and failings, weaknesses as well as strengths. We sometimes harm those around us. We all had a shocking reminder of this last Saturday when we heard the accusations against Jean Vanier, that he engaged in sexually abusive relationships with different women over the course of several decades. It hurts because so many of us looked up to him, seeing him as a saint, not unlike Mother Teresa. After her death we started to hear stories about her as well. We all have inner wounds. The women he harmed are now spiritually wounded. My heart breaks for what they went through and I commend them for their courage. My heart breaks for members of L'Arche too, especially the people we have got to know over the years. I cannot imagine how they are processing what they've learned. That being said, I wager that Jean Vanier carried a deep hurt as well as inflicted one on those who trusted him. I'm not excusing his alleged actions but trying to understand the how and the why. I know harmful things I've done in my life have a source, a wound in my own heart, a fear of loss combined with an expectation of rejection I've carried since my mother's death when I was small. I've done a lot of soul work plus therapy. But it's always going to be part of me. I could be like John Clare feeling forsaken, a self-consumer of woe, yearning not just for lost innocence but the grave, but I'm more than just that experience.

One of the challenges is to not only see the negatives but to try and see good qualities too. That's why trying to see ourselves through the eyes of a friend is so important. G-d or Jesus can be such a friend. Taking time in quiet reflection is good for this. Through silent prayer, we turn within and take time to be in the presence of the One who loves us. With each intake of breath, one imagines them saying "I love you" and then exhaling to say the same back. The inhaled "I love you" is harder for many of us to believe and yet it doesn't mean it isn't true. Alternatively, we can take time with a friend, and over tea have a conversation, let them share with you how they feel, what they see in you, as you do the same. When we start to really believe that we are loved, not in spite of the hurtful things we have done but including them as part of our own story, our hearts start to heal. It is like the ash traced on the forehead either on Wednesday, or again at the end of the service. It is not just a sign of sorrow but also a gift. When mixed into soil it can bring needed nutrients and help plants to grow. This Lent can be a spiritually growing time for us all.

John pointed to Jesus as one who came to show us G-d's love. For so long people thought of G-d with fear. I wonder if that's internalized shame, expecting to get what we feel we deserve. Yet we hear Jesus refer to G-d as a parent. No matter what we do, parents never stop seeing us with love. May we come to see this love over these weeks, take time to deepen our connection with G-d, nurture our friendship with Christ, and see ourselves with loving and forgiving eyes. Amen.