

The comfort of a familiar voice
Rev. Jim Cullen – April 25, 2010

When I was 3 ½ years old I got lost. About 5:00, I went looking for my Dad who was bringing the cows up for milking. Somehow I missed him and kept walking. I walked to the back of our farm, through another farm or two, across a road; I kept walking in the rain and the darkness for about 3 hours. It was then that I saw a light and went to the house. I told them who I was and that I was lost. The lady said, “I know your Dad.” That was all a scared child needed to hear. It was not too long before the police arrived and took me home to anxious parents, uncles and neighbours. I told them about my adventure including the green and white fox I saw. I do not remember this experience. That was back in 1947 or 47. I have clippings that my Mother saved from the Owen Sound Sun Times that told the story.

When we are in need or when we are lost there is nothing more important than to hear some comforting words – words of assurance – words you can trust.- like sheep responding to the shepherd’s voice.

The lesson this morning comes from Jerusalem. It is winter. It is cold and unpleasant. Jesus is being quizzed by his critics about being the Messiah. *Tell us plainly*, they demand, *Are you the Messiah?* Jesus answers, *I have told you and you do not believe, ... you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.* They don’t believe, not because Jesus is not a shepherd, but because they are not his sheep.

The sheep, the flock who follow Jesus, belong to him. They and we can respond to his voice, his words, his message of comfort and hope.

We learn much from Psalm 23. We hear the voice of the shepherd. Listen to the words... familiar as they are to many of you... *The Lord... makes my lie down ... leads me ... revives my soul ... guides me ... comforts me.* Each of these phrases responds to deep human need. The hurt are given comfort; the weary are invited to rest; the lost are assured of guidance; the depressed are offered revival of spirit. Every word reassures the mind and smoothes the spirit. This is what we need to hear.

As if these things were not enough, the psalm offers an image of welcome and hospitality. *You are with me ... you anoint my head with oil ... my cup is running over.* The traveler has come home. Hope and confidence return. It is once again possible to engage in life. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

The reading from Acts gives us another story about hearing hopeful words. Dorcas has died. She is a Christian disciple whose life has been devoted to the service of others and whose death leaves an enormous gap. When such people die there is anxiety around who will do what they did. Perhaps their good works will cease. Their death makes a difference because their life made a difference. The story of her being raised from death at the hands of Peter reminds us of the great spiritual power of the early church. And equally important is the fact that her new life occurred because of the faith of others. They prayed for her and urged Peter to attend to her. The reaffirming word of others gave her new life.

Following Jesus means following his teachings, seeing him as a window to the heart of God, seeing a model for our lives. It is hearing the voice of God and we are lifted up. We hear God’s word through the words of Jesus, through his life and teachings, through the things he did, through his death and resurrection.

A few years ago my wife and I were on a winter holiday in St. Martin. We were staying on the French side of the island. One day we were thanking the Administrator for the wonderful time we had. She spoke very little English. She had to carefully translate from her Parisian French. After we were finished she said, “Thank you for your warm words.” Her words had stuck with us. We like to hear warm words. They help us and heal us and make us happy. Hearing and speaking warm words makes a difference.

Warm words like – thank you – great to see you – you will be fine – I will do that for you – You have given me hope – lets do this again.

Think of some warm words – familiar words that come from the scriptures – words that may make a difference in your life ...

- In the beginning God
- Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.
- I will be your God and you shall be my people
- Here am I Lord, send me
- The Lord is my light sands my salvation, of who shall I be afraid.
- May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us.
- I will raise you up on eagles’ wings ...
- Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!
- I lift my eyes to the hills.
- Lord you have searched me and known me!
- Let not your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid.
- Come unto me all you who are weak and heavy laden
- Faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.
- For God so loved the world that he gave...
- Behold! I make all things new.
- Good and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

When we are lost, we need to find our way home. We need a voice we can trust, a voice that is familiar or with a familiar message.