

Anglican Highway

Anglican Diocese of Kootenay Newspaper — A Section of the Anglican Journal <https://thehighway.anglicannews.ca/> MAY 2026

Ascension/Pentecost/Visitation

Pentecost by El Greco — The Ascension by Dosso Dossi — Visitation: Gólland Bal kyrka Wandmalerei Visitation — permissions Wikimedia.



“Why Bother to go to Church at All?”
PAGE 3

Welcoming Prayer
PAGE 4

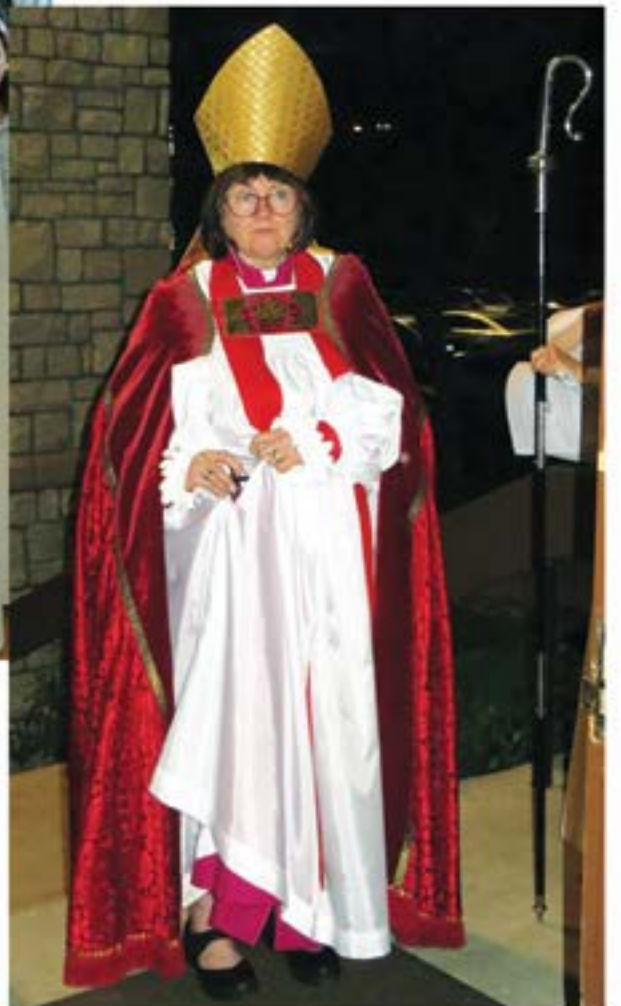
Leading and Following
PAGE 6





The Right Reverend Dr Lynne McNaughton

PHOTOSHOOT



Installation of Dr. Lynne McNaughton as the 10th Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Kootenay; Bishop Lynne at the 100th Anniversary of St Georges, Westbank; and Bishop Lynne at the 130th Anniversary of St Mark's, Kaslo.

Column


**By Andrew
Stephens-Rennie**

Canon Andrew Stephens-Rennie is the Director of Missional Renewal for the Diocese of Kootenay

I wonder how many of us, despite regular participation in our local congregations, wrestle with this very question: Why Church? Why, given the disorienting state of the world, do we continue to show up?

These are questions that I wrestle with on my own, but they are also questions that others ask me. What is it about the church that makes it worthwhile? At times this question is accompanied by incredulity; other times by deep curiosity. This thing that you do with your time, this place you go, the rituals you participate in, what does it do for you?

These are, of course, the kinds of questions born of our modern age. Ours is a time of self-actualization and self-fulfillment. In our culture, we tend to value more highly those things that contribute to our upward mobility and happiness. For much of the Twentieth Century, the Church attached itself to this same story. At some point in the post-war years, we baptized these metrics, as if this were a reasonable way to measure God's favour.

But the Church isn't as it was when

we were younger. The stories we told ourselves about success and favour have been proven bankrupt. We're left wondering how long the church will be around, and if it will be around for us.

So accustomed are we to Church as Institution and Service Provider and Social Circle that we've lost touch with some of its core mission: to transform us into the likeness of the Crucified Christ.

Week in and week out we tell the story of a transcendent God taking on human flesh. We tell stories of the God of lost causes, the God who sides with the poor and the rejected against the rich and the powerful. We tell the story of a God who journeys with people through wilderness and desert, and the valley of the shadow of death.

We tell the story of a God who embodies fidelity to Creation by becoming part of it, being influenced by it, telling stories of wheat and vines. We tell the story of a God who loves Creation so much that they'd rather die than see it come to harm. We tell the story of a God so committed to the thriving of Creation that they are willing to do everything in their power to invite others to join in this mission, or die trying.

This disconnect would be funny, if it weren't also sad.

Each week our churches rehearse the story of a self-denying, self-giving God. Each week we tell the story of the early church and the way these communities wrestled to wholeheartedly embrace the way of Jesus in their worship and the discipleship that necessarily follows.

At Pentecost we marvel at the God who blesses the early church with rapid numerical growth (3000 new members as the result of one sermon!), all the while underplaying the more mundane,

yet equally central parts of the story. Sure, God works through Peter's bold proclamation, but that moment is more tipping point than the moral of the story. I love a good sermon, but more than that, I love a good sermon that provokes us Jesus-followers to love our neighbours in the way of Jesus.

In these early days of the church, the disciples are still desperate, still uncertain what to do. And so they centre themselves in the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. They gather around the table, breaking bread, sharing in the joys and sorrows of life together. They commit themselves to prayer with and for one another. They act towards one another and towards their neighbours as Christ's very hands and feet, seeking justice and joy, compassion and peace in their neighbourhoods. They celebrate their freedom in Christ.

Taking Christ's example to heart, the place that these early Christians shine in is carrying each others' burdens. In those early days, the church isn't primarily a place for self-actualization and the pursuit of happiness (that's a modern invention). Instead, it is a place of care and compassion. It is a community where people minister to another and to their neighbours through acts of shared suffering.

To modern ears, shared suffering doesn't seem like the best growth strategy. Yet numerical growth is not the primary goal of the Christian life.

While growth may be a side-effect, it is the ministry entrusted to us in Baptism that is rightly our goal. As St. Paul reminds us, we who died with Christ have been raised with him to new life. Wendell Berry, a more contemporary prophet, suggests that in the face of

life's inevitable suffering, we practice resurrection.

That is to say that our shared ministry is to join Jesus in his cross-shaped healing work.

Not as transaction. Not as strategic plan. As an offering of love. Ask nothing in return, though be not afraid to invite others to bless as they have been blessed. "We love," reads 1 John, "because Jesus first loved us."

If ministry (and not growth) is the goal—if the goal of the Christian life is to proclaim and embody God's love in a hurting world—we don't have to look far. We don't have to look far to find those who our world and its dominant story of self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and self-importance has left in its wake.

So many have experienced the pain of being abandoned, of being left behind. So many have suffered loss. So many have experienced loneliness. So many of us have tried to keep up with the ever-accelerating pace of society and found ourselves unable to do so. Those things we thought would satisfy don't, and yet we're left feeling shame for our inability to achieve these things on our own.

This is where Christ, and this is where the Church is called to be. We are called to show up at the place where the scales fall away and the illusions fall apart. We are called to walk alongside, offering comfort, compassion, and consolation in the midst of that loss.

This is the proclamation of Christ and his cross: that consolation is to be found at the place of deepest suffering, when Jesus' body shows up with open arms and wide embrace, ready to welcome us home. ■

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for the Diocese of Kootenay

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Column

Create Lasting Memories



By Norene Morrow

Norene Morrow is the music director at St George Anglican Church in West Kelowna.



Musical notes, West Lawn Cemetery, Baltic, Ohio, Wikimedia

When I began writing this article it was the beginning of Holy Week, the time when we focus on Jesus' journey to the cross and his eventual death. Perhaps that is the reason why my thoughts turned to funerals and how we come to terms with our own death.

In our society, death is still somewhat of a taboo subject. Many are loath to think about it, much less speak about it. Death is sanitized with euphemisms to make us feel more comfortable. One does not die, but passes away, goes to a better place, is at rest. Thanks to the work of death doulas and others who provide support and education regarding end of life care, planning ahead and talking about death is becoming more accepted.

With this in mind, have you ever thought about planning your own funeral service? There are a few good reasons for this: It can empower one to take a significant role in shaping the celebration of their life, especially if that person has little or no family to make arrangements for them; it can take the pressure off surviving family members who may have little or no church affiliation; it opens the door for conversations with family members, especially if one has strong feelings about wanting a church service, a secular service, or no service at all.

I never had these conversations with my parents, but fortunately I knew what they might like. My mom was a musician and her faith was important to her so her service was held in church and included hymn singing, a choir, and her violin students playing special

music. My dad was also a musician, but not a church-goer so his celebration was held at the funeral home. It included a video montage of his life, stories from family members, and a few songs sung by his fellow barbershoppers. On the other hand, because my late husband, Allan Reed, was a priest we had many conversations about his wishes. When he died I knew which funeral home to use and how to shape his service. It included his favourite hymns, a Eucharist, a large choir, and friends and family taking on various roles in the service: reading, singing, giving the eulogy, the sermon, the prayers, and assisting at the altar. My brother-in-law, who is a woodworker, made Allan's urn.

When thinking about funeral music one must consider a few things: Does the church have someone that plays for funerals? Is there a choir to help lead the congregational singing or perhaps a soloist to provide special music? If hymns are chosen will people actually join in the singing? Attendees come from various backgrounds so they may or may not be accustomed to singing at funerals. Talk to your priest. Clergy are generally open to these kinds of conversations and some parishes even keep your wishes on file.

At one time, funeral music was fairly standard, often dirge-like or overly

sentimental, and not always uplifting. This no longer has to be the case. My goal here is not to judge one's preferences, but to get people thinking about what they want their choices to reflect. Following are some considerations for choosing hymns:

- Look for themes of resurrection, comfort, and celebration
- Hymns that paraphrase a meaningful psalm
- A favourite hymn or song of the deceased

Over the years, I have sung at many funerals and have come across some interesting choices that are not hymns, but rather songs that were favourites of the person who died. I remember singing "You'll Never Walk Alone" from *Carousel* and "Evening Prayer", from *Hansel and Gretel*, and even a few operatic arias.

Another consideration is the readings. There are standard ones that often come up at funerals, but that is not to say you can't choose others or even have a poem.

Ultimately, by making your preferences known and planning ahead you will be leaving your loved ones a gift, and that gift that will carry lasting and fond memories of you!



By Mary Ellen Davis

Mel Davis from Christ Church, Creston, belongs to the Spiritual Development Committee, which encourages people to grow ever deeper in relationship with God and to pray. As people across the Diocese pray, the ministries of the church will flourish! Amen.

Life happens, and in the course of a day there are many pain points. Some are small—a missed appointment or a frustrating delay. Others are much heavier—a difficult diagnosis or a strained relationship. In these moments, our bodies tense, our thoughts race or go blank, and we may say or do things we later regret. Our sense of peace quickly disappears.

Is there a way to pray right in the middle of these moments?

Welcoming prayer is a simple,



Father Thomas Keating
By Christopher - <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73892531>

contemplative practice designed for exactly this. It helps us turn toward God in the midst of daily stress, rather than waiting until later when things have settled down. It invites us to meet our thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions with openness instead of resistance.

The roots of this practice are found in the teaching of Father Thomas Keating, a Catholic priest and contemplative teacher. He observed that each of us longs, at a deep level, to feel safe, loved, and in control of our lives. Over time, we develop ways of coping that help

us feel this way. These strategies often serve us well—but only up to a point. Eventually, they fall short, and we find ourselves anxious, frustrated, or overwhelmed.

Welcoming prayer offers another way.

It begins with awareness. When something unsettles us, we pause and notice what is happening inside. Perhaps there is anxiety before a conversation, irritation in traffic, or sadness that lingers. We simply acknowledge what is present, without judging or trying to fix it.

Next, we "welcome" the experience. We pay attention to how it shows up in the body—tight breathing, clenched hands, a heaviness in the chest. Rather than pushing it away, we allow it to be there. We breathe into it. In doing so, we welcome God into that place, trusting that nothing within us is hidden

from God's loving care.

Finally, we let go. We might pray quietly: *I let go of the desire for security, for approval, and for control. I let go of the need to change this moment. I embrace this moment as it is, knowing I am loved and never alone.* Then we release the situation into God's hands.

This prayer is not about fixing problems instantly. Instead, it helps us pause before reacting, creating space for a more faithful response. Over time, it can gently change us. We begin to see what drives our reactions and to rely less on our usual patterns.

Most importantly, welcoming prayer draws us back to a deeper truth: that our lives are already held by God. Even in moments of stress or uncertainty, we are not alone. We are known, loved, and cared for—just as we are.

Welcoming Prayer: Consent to Go

Around and About the Diocese

Palm and Passion Sunday St. Andrew's, Trail

Submitted by Martha Fish



On Palm/Passion Sunday service at St. Andrew's Trail we had over 50 people from 3 congregations. Led by Fr. John Ruder, Rev Juliet Thondhlana, Rev. Martha Fish and Deacons Margaret Sherwood & Nicholas Bone.

St. Patrick's Potluck Holy Trinity, Grand Forks

Submitted by Juno Shenstone



On Saturday night, March 14, the people of Holy Trinity held a potluck, celebrating with bagpipes and Irish songs. Turns out, as Rev. Shenstone narrated St. Patrick's story, Patrick wasn't actually Irish! He was British. But much beloved.

Column



By David Burrows

The Reverend David Burrows is the Incumbent for the Parish of Kokanee: St Saviour's, Nelson, and St Marks, Kaslo.

Leading and Following: Moving Bravely into this New World



Eighteenth Century Compass and Starship Enterprise — Wikimedia

As we flip over the calendar into May there are many things that continue to be certitudes in life: the love of family, the continued unfolding of spring, even the continued celebration of Kaslo's May Days! In faith communities we mark Good Shepherd Sunday and transition into May celebrating the Fifth Sunday of Easter, reminded that Ascension is around the corner, as we hear the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me . . ." (Jn 14:1).

In all this celebration, in all of the festivities of our liturgical life, we are also grounded in the reality of our communities, our nation, and the world. I write these words during the tenseness of the passion, journeying through Holy Week, wondering indeed what life will look like in early May in Kokanee Parish, in British Columbia, indeed, in the world. Where will gas prices be? Will a war in Iran still suffocate our headlines? Will the toxic drug supply still rob vulnerable people of their lives,

their humanity, as front line workers respond with all their heart and soul to bring care?

Perhaps I was much more innocent and sheltered in my youth. I felt that my faith, combined with the words and actions of God through persons and through the church would continue to bring hope, love, and justice, such that the world would become all that it is intended to be — a safe, loving space for all of nature, and for a harmonious humanity living within it.

Now, with a more seasoned life, I find that the chaos of the world, and communities within it really hasn't changed much. The conflicts and struggles of the 1970s and 1980s have shifted to more complex challenges in our time. I find myself constantly needing to check my internal 'compass' as I navigate new challenges that are presented in today's society — AI, Social

Media, Geopolitics, addressing Mental Health and substance use in community to name a few.

In some ways, the distance in space and time between the gospel writers and ourselves seems too large a gap; passages in John seem to either miss the mark or serve merely as platitudes for folk that struggle to see the relevance of Scripture amid the daily struggles of society.

In these times, when I lament the disconnect between church and the world, I am reminded of the realities that traverse all of human experience.

For me, love, justice, compassion, courage, and humility need not only be contained within our structure of faith and faith community. We do not hold the monopoly of these realities. In fact, I believe we are called to uncover, recover, and celebrate where these realities are present — in and beyond the church.

Conversely, injustice, apathy, hate,

fear, and pride are present in the church and in the world as well.

Like all human constructs, communities have triumphs and failings; at best I guess we are combinations of the best and the hardest of our humanity.

We are called, through our leading and following, to follow a message and a way of life that emulates the goodness into which the Holy One invites us: a life of justice, love, humility, courage, and compassion. It is a hard ask for us in Christian community, as we sometimes become mired and paralyzed by the systems we've created to help sustain the model of church to which we aspire.

This world seems forever to be changing - not just this May, but with each sunrise and sunset, each season, each headline, each interaction.

May we step into this newness, of season, of uncertainty, following the One who calls us daily to die and rise, to embrace and serve, to love. May we have the courage to step out and lead when that is required, may we have the humility to follow where God's love demands.

YOUR RESPONSE NEEDED

The Diocesan Communications Taskforce is examining the various methods of communication used in the diocese; a report will go to the Diocesan Council in June. The Anglican Highway needs your help in determining its effectiveness as a means of communication in the diocese and beyond. Here is a chance for you to express your viewpoint.

Do you appreciate receiving the print version of the Anglican Highway sent to your home by mail?

Please include any remarks concerning what you like or do not like about the Anglican Highway newspaper. For example: do you find the views of the writers helpful in understanding what is going on in the Church and guidance given for your spiritual life?

Please e-mail your remarks to The Editor, John Lavender anghighway@gmail.com or send by mail to 9-3650 Passmore Old Road, Winlaw BC V0G 2J0

NEWS

Sale of Leathead Road Office

By Chris Parson's

The Venerable Christopher Parsons is the Executive Archdeacon for the Diocese of Kootenay



380 Leathead Road, Kelowna

For over a decade, the second floor of 201-380 Leathead Road in Kelowna has served as the office center for the Anglican Diocese of Kootenay. It has been a space of administration, governance, and prayerful planning. However, as the world around us shifts toward more flexible, missional ways of being the Church, so too must our physical footprint.

Following deliberations by the Administration and Finance Committee as well as Diocesan Council, the decision was made to sell the Leathead Road property. We can now confirm that the sale has moved forward, marking the end of one chapter and the beginning of an exciting new era for our diocesan ministry. At present we remain in the same location, but now as renters. Hope Bible Church (who were the renters) purchased the property from us and we have negotiated that the

office can remain for one year (for the cost of a dollar), and the archives may remain for 2 years (also for a dollars rent). The proceeds from the sale have been invested with RBC Dominion so as to maximize growth, with the interest generated being used toward a lease of another property. Now the search is on for a new location for both the office and the archives with the ability to lease a location using the money that has been invested.

What's Next: A Hybrid Future

Many have asked, "Where will the Bishop and staff go?" The answer reflects the "Missional Imagination" that has become our diocesan theme.

Rather than rushing into a new long-term lease or purchase, the Diocesan Office is transitioning to find suitable space that matches our administration needs. Many of us already know that most of the diocesan meetings take place online and, for the immediate future, staff will continue with this approach. Alongside the continued work and ministry will be the active search for an office space that meets the needs of not only the staff, but the ministry of our diocese.

Staying Connected

The move does not change how you reach us. Our digital presence and contact information remain the same:

Phone: 778.478.8310

Email: admin@kootenay.info

Website: www.kootenayanglican.ca

As we remember the history of this location, both as a parish church, and then later as Diocesan Office, we do so with gratitude for the years spent in Rutland. We thank those who contributed to the building of the Diocesan Centre which has been a valuable asset and now will continue to provide for our changing Diocesan needs. We look with great anticipation for where the Spirit is leading us next. ■

Nora Nitz, Citizen of the Year

Staff Writer

Tyler Harper wrote a feature article entitled "No hungry mouths: Nora Nitz is Nelson's 2025 Citizen of the Year." The following is a shortened version of the original feature article published in the March 19, 2026, issue of the Nelson Star.

"Few people knew about the Food Pantry when it opened on February 8, 2000. St. Saviour's Pro-Cathedral was considering ideas for a millennium project, and a small food bank was decided on after a priest at St. Saviour's said they were receiving requests for help from four people each week.

The initial space was small, and it opened without advertising. Eight people showed up the first day.

Nitz has provided food and support to thousands of people as the Food Pantry's manager. Her ongoing dedication to Nelson's most vulnerable residents has earned her the Nelson Star's 2025 Citizen of the Year, which has been handed out annually since 1964 to people who give back to the community.



Nora Nitz sorting produce at St. Saviour's Food Pantry. Photograph by Tyler Harper.

The Food Pantry had 2,936 client visits in 2025. It is open, just two hours weekly, from 9-11 am on Fridays, but might serve up to 50 people during that time.

Today the pantry is in a larger space than in 2000. But little else has changed. It relies on committed volunteers and food donations.

The biggest demographic is people

on disability, seniors, and single parents. Nitz says parents are spending most of their income on rents and can't afford to feed their children.

The pantry is well stocked, but they don't know what they will have on hand on any given week. They get vegetables, bread and pastries; there's plenty of cans to choose from; and every person gets a choice of proteins.

"Respect, dignity, trust: pull out a thesaurus," Nitz says. "There's so many words that try to encompass what we do here." ■

News & Views

From Around the Anglican Dioceses of Canada

What Does it Mean to Love Our Enemies?

Today I am not feeling very loving. Today, I am filled with rage at the state of the world. An innocent mother was just shot dead by an agent of the government, the despot over the border has said [insert the latest craziest thing you've heard him say here], and international tensions are through the roof. In the face of such blatant injustice, it feels like a daunting task to try to address the question of what it means to love our enemies. It also feels like it might just be one of the most important questions for people of faith to address at this particular moment in time. As cultural polarization continues to rise, it can feel like enemies are lurking around every corner. Are we a people who believe in the world of us vs. them? Or do we believe that Jesus invites us to a different way of life? And if we believe in Jesus' vision, how in the world do we go about loving our enemies, while at the same time standing for justice for those who have been marginalized by these enemies?

Luckily for us, the Scriptures provide a lot of help in answering this question. Jesus also lived in a world dominated by an oppressive regime. His instruction for loving our enemies was spoken into the context of a marginalized people living under the thumb of the Roman Empire, and that's what makes it all the more remarkable. The people who heard these words were held captive by the exorbitant taxes of the greedy Roman Empire. They were hoping for a powerful leader to come and deliver them from their enemies. And then Jesus tells them to pray for those who persecute you, [1] and do good to those who hate you.[2]

At first glance, Jesus' directives could seem to imply a kind of door-mat theology, [3] a theology of letting the enemy walk all over you as they see fit. At times, the concept of loving our enemies has been used to excuse the actions of oppressors or force people to stay in abusive situations. I can unequivocally say this is not what Jesus meant when he talked about loving our enemies.

The exhortation to love our enemies in the Gospel of Luke comes after the Sermon on the Plain. In this passage, Jesus stands on a level place, [4] and delivers a message banishing hierarchy and inequality. The Lukan Beatitudes are a beautiful series of blessings God offers to those who are poor, hungry, mourning, and hated. He follows up these blessings with a series of woes to those who are rich, full, laughing, and popular. When we hear these woes, we feel good. We want God to give those people what they have coming to them. We want vengeance. But then comes the love

your enemies speech, and Jesus flips the script. He says no; revenge is not the way.

There is a section concerning revenge in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells his listeners to turn the other cheek, to give away their clothes, and to go the extra mile. In each of these situations, Jesus is giving his followers a non-violent way to resist the dehumanizing actions of the oppressor. When you turn the other cheek, you are effectively saying to the one who hit you, "I'm not afraid of you." When you give the person who takes your coat, your shirt, shame is brought upon them when they see you naked in public. When you walk the extra mile, you force the one who makes you walk the mile to break Roman law. [5] Loving your enemy means helping them remember that you are human and that you are equals. When the apostle Paul expounds on this teaching in the book of Romans, he says when you do good to your enemies, you heap burning coals on their heads. [6] Jesus goal was to overcome dehumanization by shaming those in power through non-violent resistance.

When ordinary people stand up against exploitation, they are expressing deep love for all humanity, including for the oppressor. For the one who oppresses is just as much dehumanized by the harm they do as the oppressed is by receiving that harm. Pastor and theologian Melissa Florer-Bixler writes, "It is the work of liberation to create the conditions of a world where enemies are freed from enacting harm and victims are freed from receiving it." [7]

Over a decade ago now, I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Cornel West speak at the University of Winnipeg on the power of love in the face of great evil. One line from his impassioned lecture sticks with me to this day: justice is what love looks like in public. [8] Love in public transforms anger at injustice into action to protect that which is loved. The civil rights movement, Indigenous water protectors, and the clergy and ordinary folk who are protesting ICE in Minneapolis at this very moment are good examples of what loving our enemies looks like in our time. This isn't an easy path, or a popular one. Revenge is the way of the world, and it takes courage and hope to go in a different direction. Theologian Dorothee Soelle, drawing on Saint Augustine, wrote, "Hope has two lovely daughters, Anger and Courage. Anger so that what cannot be, may not be, and courage, so that what must be, will be" [9] Loving our enemies is impossible if we do not first name our enemies and tell the truth about the injustices we see.



In the days after Trump's second election, I found myself drawn to the Psalms. The Psalms are full of uncomfortable prayers that ask for the destruction of enemies. We tend to be wary of anger, afraid of the impact that voicing these rage-filled passages may have on our hearts and on the hearts of others. But these prayers are a reminder of the enormity of suffering, and that the world is not as it should be.

In praying with the Psalms, I join with prophets who pray for deliverance from their enemies, and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who called for the powerful to be brought low, and the rich sent away empty. The anger and powerlessness that I feel find an outlet. In praying these words, I do not become more violent; I become more honest. I give my desire for retributive violence to God, and in doing so, refuse to let that desire shape my actions to work for the kind of world in which enemies are an impossibility.

Jesus was in the business of forming a new kind of people: a people designed for liberation and freedom. Loving our enemies is not about conjuring up a good feeling about the people we see doing damage to the world. It is not about upholding the status quo or softening the demands of justice. It is about refusing to let the rhetoric of domination of empire have the final word. It is holding fast to the conviction that God is working to overturn all systems of oppression and usher in the Kingdom of God in which all things, including our social and political systems, are transformed and redeemed. This is the good news of Christ, and it is for the whole world. It is for victims and victimizers; it is for the oppressed and the oppressors. May we have the courage to love boldly as we work for the liberation of all.

[1] Matthew 5:44.

[2] Luke 6:27.

[3] Diana Butler Bass, Sunday Musings, The Cottage (Substack), February 22, 2025.

[4] Luke 6:17.

[5] This video by the theologian Walter Wink, explains these concepts in detail.

[6] Romans 12:20.

[7] Mark Florer-Bixler, How to Have an Enemy: Righteous Anger and the Work of Peace (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2021).

[8] Cornel West, Axworthy Lecture, University of Winnipeg, May 8, 2015.

[9] Dorothee Solle and Shirley A. Cloyes, To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

By Zoe Matties
Rupert's Land News

Unstoppable church growth

Dear Editor:

Unstoppable church growth is not easy, but it is not really a secret. In our discussions about how to grow our congregations, suggestions are often made about ways to make guests comfortable and want to become involved. I used to print on the bottom of my email: "If we want people to join us in the adventure of following Jesus, we ought to be the kind of people that people want to be with!"

But as I think it over, perhaps there is something even more basic than making our churches and ourselves attractive and accessible. I am not sure how to express this, but I think the sense of growing in a personal relationship with Jesus is an even stronger motivation than just being part of a church community.

I realize this may sound simplistic, and I hope not too pedantic, but my point is: If we bring people to church, they may or may not come back, depending on whether they like us or our particular ecclesiastical product. But I am pretty sure if we bring them to Jesus, we won't be able to keep them away from our church, provided our church is actually helping them to learn more about how to love and be loved by Jesus.

If people find Jesus in our midst, they will come to be with Him, even if the rest of us are still showing our imperfections. We may feel some social awkwardness in getting this personal with people, but what they think of Jesus is probably more important than what they think of our church.

Once we get a glimpse of the wisdom and compassion of Christ, we are apt to tolerate all manner of circumstances and people as long as it means we are learning to follow Him, remain in His love, and be guided by His wonderful purposes for our lives.

Jesus' church has not stopped growing since its beginning because disciples who love Jesus make the next generation of disciples who love Jesus and follow Him to the cross.

By Rev. Dell Bornowsky
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