

**The Journey to the Edge- Week 4: "Light and Dark"**  
**The Reverend Judith M. Evenden, Crossroads United Church**  
**March 22, 2020 - Lent 4A, Ephesians 8: 5 - 14; Psalm 23**

Let me begin by stating the obvious: a lot has changed since last we met at Crossroads United as a community of faith! Last Sunday, those of us who gathered in the sanctuary had no idea where we would be today, even as we carefully tried to maintain a safe physical distance from one another. While in my own mind and heart I didn't imagine we would be able to worship together at Crossroads, I didn't imagine the degree to which we would have to be physically isolated from one another.

Today, as I offer these words to you via print and video, I am also mindful that they will not reach those in our community who do not have the technical supports that many of us now take for granted. To that end, let me suggest at the outset that if these words are helpful for you to read or hear, then please pick up the phone, call someone you know who doesn't have email and offer to share them. It might mean reading the printed word to them or holding your phone up to the speaker of your computer or tablet so that they too can hear my voice. Of primary importance during this time of separation is to refrain from complete isolation. We will all need to get creative as we strive to still be the family of faith named Crossroads.

When we started this Lenten journey four weeks ago, we were invited to consider this as a journey on the edge. In the three previous sermons, I talked about the nature of those edges, the realities of boundaries and borders, and our need for spiritual water as we go through Lent. Right now, that edge, those boundaries, the need for spiritual waters is acute. For many it is downright scary. None of us has been here before. None of us knows how long this particular wilderness is going to last. But I think we need to acknowledge that it will be longer than forty days.

The key question that arises, one that I named last week as well, is this: How are we called to be 'church' in this time? There is no handbook or course one can take as a minister on how to serve your congregation during a pandemic. Emergency responders have protocols, but faith communities only have each other. All of us, clergy, and lay folk alike, are trying

to reinvent how we live our lives while at the same time trying to keep each other safe from contracting this virus.

This requires of us all a constant reevaluation of what is important; what and where to spend our precious personal energy and perhaps even financial resources. Many are working hard to find ways to connect using the best that technology has to offer, while at the same time remembering that these tools can also get in the way. They can sap energy and quickly take up all of our time. We must also be cognizant of those for whom the only connection they will have during this time is through a phone call, a letter, or a friendly wave through a window.

At the beginning of this week, I know that many churches were planning to livestream their services today, an option readily available to them because they were doing that already. Some of you may have watched worship from some other place across Canada already today, or indeed from elsewhere around the world. You may have watched or be planning to watch the service that our Moderator, Richard Bott, recorded last Tuesday evening. (Information about all these and other opportunities are available on our web site and Facebook page.) The reality, I suspect, for many who are now considering doing livestream and recorded services, is that this kind of service is complicated and stressful to produce when it isn't your normal way of engaging with the world. And it may not be the best way to stay connected. And it should never be the only way.

Last Sunday the Crossroad Council, our leadership group, empowered a group of six of us "to find creative ways to continue our ministry" as Crossroads United during this pandemic time. One of our first concerns was how to bring us together as a worshipping community while we are physically apart. Even as we began those conversations, we were assuming that some of us, staff at least, could be at the church together. As each day passed, we recognized that this is not possible. While it will take some time to find a path that works, and in all likelihood it will mean several paths or points of entry, we wanted there to be something for you to see, hear, or read today, something that was accessible for many, while realizing it won't reach everyone.

My invitation to you this day is to create a 'worship space' wherever you are going to be during this time apart. Set in that space those things that remind you of your connection to this place, and more importantly the people who call Crossroads home. That might

include your photo directory, a bulletin, and your Bible. Perhaps have a candle you could light, remembering that we light the Christ Candle each time we meet in worship, recalling that it is but a symbol of the light of God that shines in each one of us, each and every day.

In this worship space you could take time each day in prayer, reading scripture or other inspirational words, and then take some time to think about and pray for people in this community and in your own families and communities. In that same spirit of connection, I have brought the Crossroads Christ Candle into my office, and I lit it before I started to record this sermon for you. In that way we can hold each other during this time that we are apart.

The scripture reading that I offer for us to reflect upon today, one of four assigned by the lectionary, speaks of darkness and light, of light overcoming the darkness. It is part of the letter that was written to the faithful known as the Ephesians. In this letter we read these words, from chapter 5, verses 8 - 14: *For once you were darkness, but now in the Creator you are light. Live as children of light for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to God. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

In our society, darkness often gets a bad rap. Like this scripture passage, we equate darkness with evil, with being wrong, with being dangerous. While that can and is sometimes true, darkness is just but one part on the continuum of light. We only come to know light because we have known darkness. Sometimes it is actually safer to be in the dark, rather than out in the light. I am sure you can think of many examples in your own life when this has been true. Sadly, the understanding that light is better than dark is often a component of racism, certainly in the minds of those who speak of 'white supremacy'.

Setting that aside for now, I wonder if the invitation that we just heard, to be light rather than dark, might be reflected in how we choose to see this time in our lives, this

part of, not just our Lenten journey on the edge, but of our human journey in the world. I wonder if we aren't being invited to press pause on all those activities which support the things that bring hardship, what one might call darkness, to others. Are we being called to shine a light on ourselves and on others, looking carefully for those things that are creating hardship, so that we might bring protection, safety, healing, and hope during these hard times?

On the first Sunday of Lent, I spoke about hope and offered a few quotes as ways of understanding hope. One was from art critic and author John Berger, who once wrote: "Hope is not a form of guarantee. It's a form of energy, and very frequently that energy is strongest in circumstances that are very dark." Then I offer these words of Kierkegaard. "Faith sees best in the dark".

Hope and faith are both energy that we can bring to life. Just as a candle burns within darkness, casting shadows where the darkness often remains, so too, I believe we are being called to bring hope and our faith to these troubling times. In reaching out in whatever way we can, we can make a big difference in small ways. We can offer a reassuring word to those who, on our behalf, are working to keep us all safe, are helping to heal those who are sick, and are supporting those who are grieving immense losses. They need our love, our compassion, our prayers, and concrete acts of appreciation.

During this edgy time of Lent and beyond, each of us will have to find our own path. But we need not do it alone, even as we isolate physically from each other. We can connect with each other now, and we can connect with our past. Many have walked hard paths like this before. Our scriptures are full of stories of struggle and pain, of feeling isolated and alone, of digging down deep inside trying to find hope, and turning to God in anguish and fear. So too, we find in our scriptures words and songs of hope, stories and poems of celebration. As we sit in the dark, scripture can also be a light.

Because I think it was a very helpful means of witness during this time, I want to share again, and leave you with, these words, this poem called **Pandemic** written by Lyn Ungar. She wrote it the evening of March 11th, the same day the World Health Organization declared the pandemic. And then, when I am done, if you are watching this as a video, I invite you to go to the next video, which I trust will be easy to find, and sing along with Kevin Guthrie, one of our music directors. He has recorded, from his home, the comforting

words of the Psalmist - the one who penned Psalm 23. This will be our musical reflection, a regular part of our worship together. If you can't do that, then read, read out loud for yourself to hear, Psalm 23.

But first, **Pandemic.**

*What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath —  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.*

*Give up, just for now, on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.*

*And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.*

*Promise this world your love —  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live. (Lynn Ungar 3/11/20)*

May it be so! amen and amen.

## Sung Reflection: Psalm 23 - Voices United # 747

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;  
he makes me down to lie  
in pastures green; he leadeth me,  
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again;  
and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness,  
even for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,  
yet will I fear no ill;  
for thou art with me; and thy rod  
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou has furnished  
in presence of my foes;  
my head thou dost with oil anoint,  
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life  
shall surely follow me,  
and in God's house for evermore  
my dwelling-place shall be.