

*Monday, January 18*

Welcome to Meditation. This week marks a special time together as we celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Every year in the last 25 years of ministry, I have had the privilege of celebrating this week in various cities across the six provinces in which we have lived during this time. However, it is only recently I became aware of the longer history of this call to prayer for the Body of Christ.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began through an International Missionary Conference in Scotland where missionaries gathered to make sure that competition between missionary works around the world would be lessened or eliminated. The goal was to present Christianity to those who had never heard the Good News about Jesus. The reality was that there were competing Christian denominations and missions. So at this conference held in 1910, they decided to not only work on their short term conflicts on the mission field. They decided to call the whole church to pray for Christian Unity, to call Christians to love the family of God, the body of Christ, as the Scriptures call us to do so.

We celebrate 100 years of this ecumenical work, which is considered to be the beginning of the ecumenical movement. No matter what you feel about the ecumenical movement, that is, the organizations such as the World Council of Churches, the Canadian Council of Churches and our local St. John's Council of Churches, we are called to pray for one another in the Body of Christ, in the family of God.

There is always a Scriptural theme for each Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and each day in the week. This year the theme for the week comes from Luke's account of the Emmaus road conversations. These conversations were between one unnamed man, another named Cleopas and Jesus walking down the road to Emmaus after Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. The two men didn't know it was Jesus, but Jesus said to them that they were witnesses of all that was happening to him. And so are we today. The churches of Scotland chose the theme for this week as "You are witnesses." We are encouraged to tell our stories of how Jesus has

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encountered us just as he encountered those men on the road so long ago. I have been so blessed on our Monday interchurch prayer time as I have heard the stories of how other Christians have come to make their allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Let us all cherish the journeys of fellow believers across the face of our planet. I'd like to end with the Scripture that tells us of those two that met with Jesus without knowing it, and then a brief prayer. Luke 24: 13 – 17, 32:

<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

Then Jesus explained about himself from the Scriptures and it is recorded after his explanations and words: <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Lord, so open the Scriptures to us that we might cherish all the various expressions of the Christian family across the face of the earth, open our hearts anew to You, and grant us that unity and peace that we need to carry out your mission here on earth. Amen.

*Tuesday January 19*

Welcome again to Meditation. This week we are focusing on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I am deeply grateful for this time to pray for one another in the body of Christ. A hundred years ago, an international missionary conference wanted to pray against competition between the various mission works and for agreement in the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today and every year since 1910, we have been praying for the same thing, around the world. This year we focus on the Emmaus Road experience and the encounter two men had with Jesus on that road after his resurrection.

Let us hear the Word of the Lord from Luke 24:13 – 19a:

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<sup>13</sup> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup> As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup> but they were kept from recognizing him.

<sup>17</sup> He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup> One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

<sup>19</sup> "What things?" he asked.

Today we are focusing on simply being aware of the need for prayer in this area of building up the body of Christ and not tearing it down. It is easy to point a finger at where the Church has fallen down on what she is called to do. It is easy to point a finger at individuals who have sinned and disappointed us and sometimes much more than that. But today and this week we are reminded to pray for one another. We do have many faults and sins. All of us do. We are not all that we are called to be as Church leaders, as church members, as church adherents.

I believe when we speak of other Christians and other Christian organizations, the Spirit of Jesus asks us, "What are you talking about?" It's not that Jesus doesn't know what we are talking about when we speak ill of other Christians and other Christian organizations. He knows all too well when we speak words of ill will and harsh criticism. What He is asking us is to be aware of our tendency to criticize and even curse other Christians, rather than care for them, pray for them and thus pray for ourselves as the body of Christ.

So rather than allowing ourselves the luxury of finger pointing, we need to ask God to change our hearts, to deal with our own sins first, and bless other Christians, not curse them. Now this does not mean we have to agree with sin and evil deeds. It does mean that our major orientation will become one of loving and caring for those both inside and outside our particular denomination or affiliation, rather than running them down.

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It also means we should ask forgiveness where we hurt others and harmed them with our words. This is a bold action, not for the faint of heart. But this is the way forward in our city, province, nation and world.

Let us pray: O Lord, we ask you to make us aware of the times when our thoughts and our words are tearing down another believer or another part of the body of Christ. Help us, we pray, in these days, to build up what you are doing here in this city and beyond. Help us to speak in ways that encourage and promote your love and to express these ways here and beyond, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*Wednesday January 20*

Welcome again to Meditation. This week we are focusing on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I am deeply grateful for this time to pray for one another in the body of Christ. We have been looking at the Luke 24 passage on the Road to Emmaus where the two men encountered the resurrected Jesus.

The overall theme of the week comes from Luke 24: 48 "You are witnesses of these things." "These things" refers to all that Jesus did for us in his death, resurrection and invitation to accept the life he gives us, repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached in his name for all nations." Today's theme is "Bearing witness through celebrating the faith we have received."

Often when we speak about how we celebrate our faith, it is the distinctive ways we celebrate that comes up. Some of us have Holy Communion every Sunday, some four times a year, some not at all. Some of us have organ music and traditional hymns, some of us have rock bands and relatively new music. Some of us say the Lord's Prayer every week and the Apostle's Creed. Some of us hear only new prayers said from week to week, and do not have a Creed to say together regularly. Our leaders sometimes wear special garments, others never do so. Some of us mainly baptize infants and children, some of us only baptize adults and teens by immersion.

So we tend to think about our differences, not our similarities. We tend to see the things that hurt us and divide us as newsworthy. The media helps us to pursue this negative point of view. But the real news about the world

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wide Christian movement is that God is touching every culture, every language, and every country of the world with the Good News about Jesus Christ. There is a message going out to everyone who will listen that has been passed onto us from others who have received it from faithful witnesses. We have received the Good News that as we want to join Jesus' team, change our ways for his, then we have new life and new hope, not only for ourselves but for our city, our country and our world.

Part of what we are doing this week is acknowledging how much we have in common with our Christian sisters and brothers around the world. Today is a day that we celebrate the common faith that we have together. Yes, we have many differences. Yes, the church and its leaders continue to sin in various ways. But God has put us together as a family. And as every family has challenges and difficulties, and are called to work together on those challenges and difficulties, so is the body of Christ called together to work on those challenges and difficulties.

We need each other. For generations we have maligned one another and hurt one another. I do not believe this has been God's will. Today we celebrate what we have in common, the Good News that Jesus Christ gave himself for us. He created a way to have family and relationship with God the Father when we could not create it for ourselves. Let us celebrate this fact, given because of the greatest gift of the life and sacrifice of our Lord for us all. Just before we pray, please be aware of the Festival of Praise led by Dr. Douglas Dunsmore at St. James United Church tonight at 7:30 pm on Elizabeth Avenue. All are welcome.

Let us pray. Lord, help us as we come celebrate what we have in common in You. Motivate us and encourage us to come against those actions and attitudes that divide us, thereby harming Your Body. Thank you for this week, which gives us the courage to address these important family matters, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Thursday January 21*

Welcome again to Meditation. This week we are focusing on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I am deeply grateful for this time to pray for one another in the body of Christ. We have been looking at the Luke 24 passage

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on the Road to Emmaus where the two men encountered the resurrected Jesus. Yesterday we were encouraged to consider how much it cost Jesus to make us a family, for us to become His Body, His Church. Today we are encouraged to consider how much it costs us.

Nothing in this life worth pursuing is costless. Even the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ costs us our lives, if we take it seriously. On the road to Emmaus, the two men were explaining to Jesus what they had understood had been happening in the news. Then Jesus gives his response in Luke 24: 25 – 27:

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Cleopas and his friend had explained what they had heard in the news about Jesus. They had expected Jesus to have been the Messiah and that Jesus was going to kick out the Romans and establish a new Israel with new military might. So they were downcast when this Jesus died, rather than doing what they had expected.

In fact, Jesus tells them, they had not understood the Scriptures correctly. Had they read Isaiah 53 with the Messiah in mind, as an example, they would have seen that Jesus had to die. They would have seen the spiritual kingdom and the spiritual family that Jesus was starting through his death and resurrection. So he quoted Isaiah and lots of other Scriptures that many of us still know today and explained that suffering was a part of God's plan.

Many of us have a difficult time with this truth. Some of us even teach that if you are right with God, you won't go through suffering, but will only experience health and victory. Such is not our experience. God uses our times of suffering to draw us closer in our relationship to God. God wants us to not be afraid to grieve, but embrace our losses, and to bring them to Him. We have experienced much pain and much loss in our lives, whether we are younger or older, whether we have spent our whole lives here in Newfoundland, or whether we have moved around. God knows what we have gone through.

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Now we have not been tortured to death, as our Lord was. Although some on the mission field and in some countries around the world have suffered such deaths for the faith. But we have tasted of the pain and loss that humanity normally suffers on a daily basis. In the midst of such pain, and loss, we are encouraged not to deny what we experience, but to bring it to God and to bring it to the family of God. It is in the community of the Church that we can experience others helping us with our load, with the heaviness of our loss and pain. It is in small groups, often Church groups, where we can bring the crushing burdens we carry. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ, it says in Galatians 6.

We need to bring the reality of our lives into a safe place, with those in the Body who love us and will listen to us. This is the way of healing, the way of bearing the suffering we experience. We were not designed to bear our pain alone. We need to bring it to God and other believers. I hope your local parish or congregation or assembly has groups that allow you to be open and honest about your pain. If not, ask about what might be done to create such a group.

Let us pray. Lord, help us to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the Law of Christ. We suffer due to our own poor choices and others'. We suffer and need You and others to help us admit that and carry that. Bring us the strength and courage to face that which we find so difficult to face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*Friday January 22*

Welcome again to Meditation. This week we have been focusing on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I am deeply grateful for this time to pray for one another in the body of Christ. We have been looking at the Luke 24 passage on the Road to Emmaus where the two men encountered the resurrected Jesus. Let's hear again the last portion of that conversation as it is recorded in the Holy Scriptures:

<sup>28</sup> As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. <sup>29</sup> But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

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<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. <sup>32</sup> They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

<sup>33</sup> They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together <sup>34</sup> and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." <sup>35</sup> Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

The Bible has been used, abused and quoted extensively over the centuries by Christians. We have often used it to divide ourselves from one another and to hurt or harm each other. Every Christian knows that this is not the intended purpose of having the canon of Holy Scripture. It is not our place to say what is Scripture and what is not. It is not our place to say what is fiction and what is history. We do, however, need to recover the use of the Scriptures that builds up the Body of Christ, and helps us to see our common faith at work in the world today. We don't know the physics of how Jesus disappears in this particular account, nor do we know how the resurrected body of Jesus works in coming through locked doors in the Gospel of John accounts of the resurrection. We do know these two men had a surprising encounter with the risen Lord. We do know that they, or others that heard them, recorded this account for our benefit.

So we listen to the Scripture together. We recognize that we won't be able to agree on every detail. But what comes to mind is that famous phrase, "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and all things charity." Of course, this brings up many questions, including who originally said this famous phrase. But we do need to hear Jesus speaking, as Cleopas and his friend did on the road to Emmaus. We need to hear the Scriptures, and receive them as from Jesus himself. We need to place ourselves underneath the Word and be lifted up by the life that is in the Bible, pointing to the Life of the One who made sure we have the Holy Writ.

Today again we celebrate what we have in common. Many of us read the same Scriptures every week in the Lectionary across many denominations and traditions, across many countries and languages. We have together a



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precious heritage and a wonderful God. We need to turn back to building up one another through what we have received rather than tearing each other down. This is a great challenge. We must be faithful to God, to Jesus, to the Scriptures. We must hear how God feels about the Church. We must hear how Jesus feels about the Body of Christ. Should we not seek to honour the Church and hold one another in the same way God chooses to love and care for us?

This can be maddening, as parts of our natural family can try us and test us. Sometimes our family does not behave the way we would like. Sometimes a family member will do or say something that we regret, and that wounds us. Similarly other parts of the Body of Christ say things that we do not believe are true or helpful. Yet God establishes us as a family and asks us again to work on being the family God wants us to be.

We have a great resource in the worldwide Christian movement. This is not a movement we have started. It started with God. God worked with his people Israel. The culmination of this work was in Jesus the Messiah who brought it to the twelve and then thousands on the day of Pentecost, and it has been increasing ever since then. So we are stewards of Jesus' message and life. We are to look to the Scriptures to proclaim what He asks us to tell others. And so we do.

Let us help each other to teach and live as Jesus taught us. And make sure you are aware of the closing service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at West End Baptist on Topsail Road, this Sunday evening, January 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. And if you've missed any of this week's messages, you will find them at St. David's Church web site: [www.stdavids.nf.ca](http://www.stdavids.nf.ca) I'm Jonathan Dent.

Let us pray: Lord, we take one week out of each year for the last 100 years, to hear again your call to work together for the common good of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Help us to hear that call clearly and practically, in Jesus' name. Amen.