

Sunday, May 19, 2019

Acts 11:L1-18

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

A New Commandment

Victoria Day weekend marks the first of four long weekends of summer. The other long weekends are Canada Day, the Civic Holiday and Labour Day. But this holiday weekend is usually associated with opening cottages or camping, getting started on yard work- planting flowers or small gardens and if possible, for farmers to start to work the land. This weekend marks the end of winter as the risk for frost is past and warmer sunny days lie ahead.

This May long weekend was set aside in Canada as a commonwealth country to honour and celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday which was May 24, 1819. Queen Victoria's reign began after the deaths of her three uncles and her father in 1837 and when she died in 1901, her reign of 64 years was one of the longest in modern times. However this has now been broken by Queen Victoria's great great granddaughter, Elizabeth II as she continues to reign in her 66th year. But why do we have this holiday? Canada is a part of the British Commonwealth and this Queen was reigning when Canada became a country and we are still connected to the Queen for she is our head of state.

For many however, this weekend is a time to relax a little that is except for students who have projects to prepare or papers to write and even though the temperatures will rise the school year still is functioning. But in our church year there is no mention of this secular holiday nor is there a need for we continue to celebrate Easter and the wonder of Christ's resurrection.

After he rose from death Jesus appeared and spoke to many people. He was determined that the disciples would carry on his ministry but they needed to understand just like us what our purpose is as faithful followers. Like the disciples, we need to be reminded of His teachings: to stop doubting and believe; that Jesus' resurrection brings hope to all people not just some; that Jesus our Good Shepherd will lead and guide us if we follow in faith; and that what we need to do most of all is love others.

Jesus knew that he would soon be ascending to the heavens but wanted to ensure his followers of their task on earth. He wanted to make sure they understood their job and how they were to pass on the good news of His resurrection and the gift and promise of eternal life through the forgiveness of sins.

And Jesus wanted people to remember what he taught and now he was preparing a to-do-list for his faithful followers to follow until they in turn are called home by God.

Jesus teaching was to love one another as he has loved and shown this love. For when we love others in His name we will experience the Spirit of God and receive new life and new hope in him.

There is a story of a ship which was wrecked during a storm at sea and only two of the men on it were able to swim to a small, desert like island. The two survivors had been good friends but did not know what to do so they agreed that they had no other recourse but to pray to God. However, to find out whose prayer was more powerful, they agreed to divide the territory between them and stay on opposite sides of the island.

The first thing they prayed for was food. The next morning, the first man saw a fruit-bearing tree on his side of the land, and he was able to eat its fruit. The other man's parcel of land remained barren.

After a week, the first man was lonely and he decided to pray for a wife. The next day, another ship was wrecked, and the only survivor was a woman who swam to his side of the land. On the other side of the island, there was nothing.

Soon the first man prayed for a house, clothes, more food. The next day, like magic, all of these were given to him. However, the second man still had nothing.

Finally, the first man prayed for a ship, so that he and his wife could leave the island. In the morning, he found a ship docked at his side of the island. The first man boarded the ship with his wife and decided to leave the second man on the island. Why did he leave his so called friend there? He considered the other man unworthy to receive God's blessings, since none of his prayers had been answered. But...

As the ship was about to leave, the first man heard a voice from heaven booming, "Why are you leaving your companion on the island?"

The man replied: "My blessings are mine alone, since I was the one who prayed for them," the first man answered. "His prayers were all unanswered and so he does not deserve anything."

But God spoke and said, "You are mistaken!" "Your friend on the other side of the island had only one prayer every day " And it was his prayer I answered, If not for that, you would not have received any of my blessings."

The first man did not understand. "Tell me," the first man asked the voice, "What did he pray for that I should owe him anything?" "He prayed that all your prayers be answered "

What does it mean to love one another? Praying with a deep faith in order to receive God's blessings. Praying out of and for love of others in order that change might occur. Change which is up to God but asking God to make a difference in the lives of other persons. Praying for those whom you love and knowing that the blessings of our prayers are not because of our prayers alone. We pray because our prayers will be answered through and by the love we have in Jesus.

Just what are we to do if we profess our faith in the Risen Christ? We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This includes even ones who are unlovely. Jesus loved the unloved and the unlovely. We are to love others as God loves us. This then enables others to know that we belong to God in Jesus Christ and we have faith in him. Let us love one another.

Let us come together in prayer.

Jesus our Risen Christ, you taught us to love one another and sometimes this can be difficult. Yet we try and try again. We pray that you would help us to share and show love so that others will know that we are your disciples. Help us to love others without counting the cost and to do so in faith. Hear these prayers of our hearts. SILENCE. Amen.