

February 21, 2016 Lent II
Philippians 3: 17 –20a, 4:1

In the Moment

I like to take the shortest route whenever I'm driving somewhere. Commuting in Montreal has recently put this habit to the test. With all the construction for the new Turcott Interchange taking the right road and taking the shortest road are often in competition. Especially at rush hour and I'm not even talking about folks living in NDG.

On Wednesday I had a meeting at 7 pm at the Montreal Japanese United Church, L'Acadie and Jarry. When is driving north on the Decarie and West on the Trans Canada between the two 15's a good experience? It wasn't between 5 pm and 6:30pm, Wednesday. Even driving home afterward at around 9 pm was an exercise in traffic futility. Last Saturday's Presbytery meeting was held at Trinity United Church even further east. Again the traffic on the Trans Canada between the two 15's was a mess going and returning, and it was a weekend. But what are the alternatives?

This got me to thinking:

Is there always a right road? Is there always a wrong road?

For the apostle **Paul** and many casual observers today there is a right road and a wrong road in life. When self-indulgence, or over-striving slip in, they say we are on the road that runs toward ruin.

However many of us in our post-modern Christian world, have come to recognize that we travel both roads on a regular basis. What's more they are really one and the same road. The issue is the fellow traveller or more precisely the number of fellow travellers at any one time. In other words the challenge is the traffic. Paul knew nothing about traffic. The **either/or** of the past is now understood as the **both/and** of our traffic infested present. We know we are not and never will be all "sweetness and light". But we also know we have our moments.

In the travelling game of life we find ourselves criss crossing lanes, as we cheer and jeer according to our own needs and indulgence. We are critical one minute and

magnanimous the next. Before Christmas the Habs could do no wrong now they are disappointment city.

The Christian life is the same.

We are not all “pureness and light” 24/7, nor do we have to be. It is not all about our striving. At the Olympics they don’t add up all the hours of training and award medals on the basis of hard work. And believe it or not, **God** doesn’t dole out salvation based simply on what we avoid in life. People can be good without giving **God** a second thought. Rather, whatever road we happen to be on, the Christian life is about entering the present moment and becoming open to **God’s** guidance. Forget the traffic and go with **God’s** flow. The real challenge in life or in faith seems to be the ability to merge with the moment and grasp the greater picture, and see what **God** is offering us. When this happens, regardless of the traffic, life opens up to the infinite. And you know there is just a little helpful hint given here in Quebec. When we are slowing down to that bumper to bumper state, there is the helping suggestion to get in the moment, to go with God’s flow. It’s right there on the car in front of us and now we are close enough to see it. “Je me souviens” I remember. I remember to meet **God** in this moment.

We know that moment when we become present to the **Mystery and magnificence in the midst of life.**

Our Christian moment comes in the context of choosing **compassion and intensifying the humanity of our relationships** over the distractions of **rush hour traffic.**

The Application for Today:

“**The Christian moment**” can be any moment for followers of **Jesus:**

Regardless of the traffic, and sometimes because of it.

Luke 13: 31-35

We've heard the sigh of resignation; "**There is always a fly in the ointment**". There is the very Canadian saying recently made into a comic book and a pop song, "**It's a great life if you don't weaken**". How about this one, "**Family things often come with strings**". Maybe you can think of other saying along this line. I love to hate the observation of Henry Nouwen, "**Community is the place where the person you least like always lives**".

These sayings point to the perception that there always seems to be something or someone **blocking our bliss**: a difficult family member, an aggravating co-worker, traffic delays or construction restrictions. It seems like there is always something holding us back. There is always a price to be paid. There is always a string attached.

Well as much as I hate to admit it, maybe that is just the way it is in our world of human endeavour. It seems there is always a fox hunting the hens, threatening to break into the chicken coop. In fact we make jokes and cartoons about it.

This is the image in our gospel lesson today, **Herod** that fox is after **Jesus**, the mother hen. As the story goes – some Pharisees warn **Jesus** that **King Herod** is going to have him killed. Now **King Herod**, the puppet ruler for the Romans in Jerusalem and Galilee is connected to the Sadducees party. The upper class, political, religious party attached to the temple in Jerusalem. The temple and the monarchy stick together.

Jesus' new teaching about **God's** grace is upsetting this power alliance.

Jesus' teaching about **God's** love is offensive to the people in control.

Why? Because this new teaching bypasses them and their lucrative institution, the Temple. So logically in their minds, **Jesus** must be eliminated! **Jesus** must pay the price! **Jesus** is the fly in their ointment!

You see, **Jesus'** teaching about **God's** uncontrolling love undermines their authority and power. **Jesus** is teaching that:

God is NOT some legalistic judge filled with dangerous, righteous wrath.

God is NOT exacting payment for every infraction.

God is NOT some controlling parent always giving with strings attached.

Rather **God's** uncontrolling love creates and maintains the freedom to become self-actualized: To intensify our humanity: To become the best we can be: To live and love without recourse to the coercive power of the foxes of this world. **God** whose creative nature is uncontrolling love doesn't barge in and make things better for a few.

Let's look more closely to the details in our story. The predatory fox threatens **Jesus** the defenceless mother hen. **Jesus** as mother hen laments because her young are also exposed but will not accept her protection. The mother hen can't make her chicks come under her protection any more than **Jesus** can make Jerusalem come to his care. They have no coercive power and no means of self-defence. But this doesn't mean that they just gives up or hide. On the contrary they stay the course, they stay true to themselves, they keep doing their best. In the end the predatory fox gets the kill and the chicks are scattered.

But friends, this isn't the story we want to hear.

Too often we agree with **Herod** and the Sadducees. There is always a fly in the ointment so someone else should pay the price. We set **God** up as judge in these matters. With this construct, the problem is never with the foxes, it is always with the hen and her chicks.

When we believe there is always a catch, or someone in our way.

When we believe there is always a price to be paid, or a string attached.

When we interpret everything as, an issue of control our hearts become like Jerusalem stoning the prophets and killing the messengers of **God**. We limit our belief in **God's** uncontrolling love, and maximize our belief in a **God** who should kill for our cause. But with this kind of thinking **God** becomes just another bad guy along with the rest of the bad guys. **Jesus** laments, "**Jerusalem, Jerusalem...**" not in anger but in sadness, because Jerusalem NOT **God**, required **Jesus'** death.

Jesus teaches that **God** wants a loving uncontrolling relationship with any and all, NOT temple offerings that only the wealthy could afford.

Jesus teaches that **God** couldn't be contained in a building or a ritual.

God couldn't be confined to a time or a place.

You see, **God** actually, already abides in our hearts! That's billions of places! **God** actually, already is present to our every moment! That's billions of moments! **Jesus** teaches that **God** is always providing free grace, unmerited acceptance, and the opportunity for self-actualization through uncontrolling love.

God's loving presence is always in us and always available to us. And all that uncontrolling love should be more than enough to feed the foxes and protect the hen houses. **God** is closer than our very breathing, but **God** doesn't break in, to control us or to protect us, not even to protect **Jesus**. **Jesus** knew the answer is always uncontrolling love and he still stayed the course. He didn't need control.

We know deep down, on our best days that love and control don't mix. Eventually we learn to let our loved ones go their own way in life or in death. As a parent when we can let go of our hopes and dreams and expectation and can finally say *"I just want them to be happy"* and really mean deep down, we have finally embraced the grace of uncontrolling love.

When we sit at a loved one's death bed with all our needs and fear and holding on, and unexpectedly love tips the scales so that we can finally let go and send them into the uncontrolling love of God.

Whether our loved ones are children, or spouses or parents or friends, in the end we come to the saving grace of uncontrolling love.

Application for Today

Control is never **God's** answer. So, control shouldn't be our answer either.

Jesus knew the answer is always uncontrolling love and he stayed the course.

So can we.

Meditative Prayer

Follow your breathing inward to that prayerful place.

Let go of the distractions, the traffic in your mind.

Come into the spiritual moment, the now.

Sense the Mystery and Magnificence in the midst of life.

Become aware of God's uncontrolling love.

See it, feel it, hear it.

What are the control issues in your life?

The things that you think block your bliss.

The things you think you have to have or must do, or must protect.

Now with a nice deep breath let these control issues go.

Now, become aware of the old belief that God is in control of everything.

Notice that it doesn't make sense with the Gospel story.

With a deep breath let go of the old belief that God controls everything,

Now, open your heart to the uncontrolling love of God.

Allow it to flow all through you and fill your body.

Allow it to keep flowing out to others around you:

To your home and to the people who upset you.

See God's uncontrolling love flowing to places of war,
places of hurt, places of struggle.

God's uncontrolling love in all things.

All things in God's uncontrolling love.

Now let us pray as Jesus taught us saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
 and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.