

The following notes form the basis for a sermon delivered by Celia McBride on September 18, 2011 at Whitehorse United Church

LIVING IS CHRIST

FOR TO ME, LIVING IS CHRIST.

THAT'S FROM THE PHILIPPIANS READING WE HEARD TODAY. PHILIPPIANS IS ACTUALLY A LETTER FROM PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CHURCH OF PHILLIPI, WHICH WAS AN EARLY CENTRE OF CHRISTIANITY IN GREECE.

LIVING IS CHRIST. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? HE DOESN'T SAY LIVING IS JESUS. WE CAN ASSUME HE'S TALKING ABOUT JESUS BUT BECAUSE HE SAYS LIVING IS CHRIST THERE IS A MUCH DEEPER MEANING INHERENT IN HIS STATEMENT.

ANOTHER TRANSLATION READS LIFE IS THE MESSIAH AND THAT MAKES SENSE BECAUSE CHRIST IS THE ENGLISH TERM FOR THE GREEK TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW WORD MASHIACH (MASH-EE-ACH).

MESSIAH MEANS ANOINTED ONE AND THE FIGURATIVE MEANING OF ANOINTED, AS OPPOSED TO THE LITERAL, WHICH IS TO RUB WITH OIL, MEANS CHOSEN OR NOMINATED.

LIFE IS TO BE CHOSEN. LIVING IS BEING CHOSEN. TO LIVE IS TO BE CHOSEN. WHICH ONE DID PAUL MEAN?

TO LIVE IS TO BE CHOSEN?

WELL, IF WE'RE HERE, WE'RE ALL LIVING. DOES THAT MEAN WE'RE ALL CHOSEN? OR DOES IT MEAN WE HAVE TO CHOOSE TO REALLY LIVE?

I GOT REALLY INTO JESUS WHEN I READ A BOOK BY MARCUS BORG CALLED "JESUS: UNCOVERING THE LIFE, TEACHINGS, AND RELEVANCE OF A RELIGIOUS REVOLUTIONARY."

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED TO CHRISTIANITY BUT I WASN'T RAISED A CHRISTIAN. CHRIST CALLED ME AND IN MY LIMITED EXPERIENCE THIS IS WHAT THE CHRIST DOES. IT CALLS US.

IN HIS BOOK, BORG TALKS ABOUT WHAT HE REFERS TO AS THE HISTORICAL JESUS, JESUS THE REBEL, JESUS THE HEALER, JESUS THE JEWISH MYSTIC, AND HOW HIS TEACHINGS IN THE GOSPELS SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD AS A SACRED REALITY, AS A PRESENCE OF SPIRIT THAT IS WITHIN US AT ALL TIMES.

WHEN PAUL WROTE LIVING IS CHRIST I BELIEVE HE WAS ILLUMINATING THE JESUS EXPERIENCE OF THE INTIMACY WE CAN HAVE WITH GOD, WHEN WE CONNECT TO THE AWARENESS OF GOD BEING ACTIVE IN US IN EVERY MOMENT.

LIVING IS CHRIST.

BUT WE DO HAVE TO CHOOSE THAT. TO LIVE, TO REALLY LIVE IS TO CHOOSE TO BE ALIVE.

SEE THAT'S THE THING ABOUT GOD, WE GET TO BE ALIVE, WE GET TO BE IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AND WE GET TO BE BLOWN AWAY BY THAT. BUT WE ALSO GET TO SHUT IT OFF. SHUT IT DOWN. IGNORE IT. WE GET TO FORGET THAT GOD IS ACTIVE IN US AND THROUGH US IN EVERY MOMENT. WE GET TO DO OUR OWN THING.

AND GOD WILL LET US DO THAT. THAT IS THE NATURE OF GOD. GOD INTERVENES AND GOD LEAVES US ALONE.

BUT JESUS BECAME WHO HE BECAME, HE WAS GIVEN THE TITLE MESSIAH, CHRIST, CHRIST JESUS PRECISELY BECAUSE NOT ONLY DID HE HAVE THE AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE PROFOUND REVERENCE AND LOVE FOR THAT PRESENCE BUT HE EMBODIED IT COMPLETELY. NO SHUTTING IT DOWN, NO SHUTTING IT OUT. HE LIVED IT. AND IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT HE LIVED IT MORE DEEPLY THAN ANY OTHER HUMAN BEING EVER HAS.

JESUS LIVED IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. AND PAUL WAS STRUCK BLIND BY THAT. BY THE LIGHT THAT THIS CREATED AND WHEN PAUL'S SIGHT WAS RESTORED HE WAS CONVERTED.

AND HE BEGAN TO PREACH THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, AND HE WROTE THE EPISTLES, AND HE WROTE THIS LETTER TO THE PHILLIPI, WHICH ACTUALLY IS A LETTER OF THANKS FOR A MONETARY CONTRIBUTION AND YOU CAN HEAR HIS GRATITUDE, HE SAYS MY DESIRE IS TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST BUT I WILL REMAIN WITH YOU.

FOR TO ME, LIVING IS CHRIST.

HE'S SAYING AS LONG AS I AM ALIVE I WILL CHOOSE TO EMBODY WHAT HE EMBODIED. I WILL CHOOSE TO STAND FIRM ON ONE SPIRIT. AND HE TELLS THE PHILLIPI TO LIVE LIFE IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

AND WHAT WAS THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST? IT WAS A VISION OF PEACE AND JUSTICE AND WE TALKED ABOUT THIS LAST WEEK. THE JESUS VISION OF JUSTICE WAS EQUALITY. HIS EXPERIENCE OF GOD WAS AN INTIMATE REALITY, AN INTIMATE PRESENCE, WHICH HE CALLED ABBA, THE ARAMAIC WORD THAT CHILDREN USED TO ADDRESS THEIR FATHERS. HE EXPERIENCED GOD AS A LOVING FATHER.

LIVING IS CHRIST. LIVING IS BEING CHOSEN BY THIS LOVING GOD. TO LIVE. TO LIVE HERE. AND AGAIN IF WE'RE ALL LIVING HERE, WE'VE ALL BEEN CHOSEN.

CHOSEN FOR WHAT? TO LIVE GOD'S VISION. WHAT IS GOD'S VISION? PEACE AND JUSTICE. JUSTICE AS EQUALITY.

IN THE MATTHEW READING JESUS TELLS THIS AMAZING STORY OF THE LANDOWNER WHO HIRES LABORERS AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE DAY AND THEN PAYS THEM ALL THE SAME. AND WHEN THE LABORERS WHO WORK THE LONGEST COMPLAIN ABOUT THAT THE LANDOWNER SAYS TAKE WHAT BELONGS TO YOU AND GO.

JESUS TELLS THIS STORY IN ORDER TO ILLUSTRATE THAT IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST AND THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN? IT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD, WE DON'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR IT. ACCORDING TO JESUS IT'S HERE. IT'S NOW. AND IT'S A REALITY IN WHICH EVERYBODY GETS EQUAL PAY. YOU WORK 1 HOUR YOU GET GOD'S BLESSING. YOU WORK 10 HOURS YOU GET GOD'S BLESSING. YOU WORK 100 HOURS YOU GET GOD'S BLESSING.

THAT'S WHAT THE LAST WILL BE FIRST AND THE FIRST WILL BE LAST MEANS, IT MEANS THERE IS NO FIRST, THERE IS NO LAST. WE ARE ALL CHOSEN BY GOD. THAT'S WHY WE'RE ALL HERE AND NO ONE IS FAVOURED ABOVE ANOTHER BY GOD.

LIVING IS CHRIST MEANS TO LIVE IS TO BE CHOSEN BY GOD AND TO KNOW THAT. AND BY KNOWING THAT, REALLY KNOWING IT, EMBODYING IT, BEING IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, IS CHOOSING TO LIVE OUT GOD'S VISION.

SO TAKE WHAT BELONGS TO YOU AND WHAT BELONGS TO US IS GOD'S LOVE. TAKE GOD'S LOVE AND GO, GO AND LIVE, LIVE THE GOSPEL, LIVE OUT THE VISION OF PEACE AND JUSTICE. FORGIVE YOURSELF, FORGIVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR. WHY? BECAUSE MY NEIGHBOUR IS ME. I'M HERE. MY NEIGHBOUR IS HERE. WE GET EQUAL PAY FROM GOD.

AND IT SOUNDS SO EASY. AND IT'S NOT. I GET SO SCARED. I HAVE SO MUCH FEAR IT JUST PARALYZES ME SOME DAYS. AND SO I CALL ON THAT CHRIST LOVE, I CALL ON THAT POWER, I CALL ON THAT EXPERIENCE OF THE INTIMATE PRESENCE WHICH I FEEL IF I CHOOSE TO GET QUIET, WHICH I SEE IF I CHOOSE TO LOOK, WHICH I HEAR IF I CHOOSE TO LISTEN AND I SAY HELP ME. GIVE ME THE STRENGTH, GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO LIVE. TO LIVE THE CHRIST.

LAST WEEK I TALKED ABOUT THAT SAME PRAYER. HELP ME TO FORGIVE. SHOW ME HOW TO RESPOND WITH COMPASSION. IT'S THE SAME PRAYER. HELP ME TO LIVE THE CHRIST. I'M TERRIFIED! IT'S SO MUCH EASIER TO IGNORE THE CALL. BECAUSE THE CALL MEANS I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING. LIKE I SAID LAST

WEEK, IT MEANS I HAVE CHANGE SOMETHING. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT? THAT'S MY LIMITED INTERPRETATION, WHAT IT REALLY MEANS IS I HAVE TO LOVE.

THE CHRIST CALLS US TO RECEIVE LOVE. THE CHRIST CALLS US TO OFFER LOVE. WE'RE BEING CALLED TO DO BOTH. THAT IS WHAT THE TRUE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IS. THE INTIMATE PRESENCE THAT JESUS KNEW SO WELL, TRUSTED SO DEEPLY THAT HE CAME TO EMBODY IT COMPLETELY. RECEIVE THE CHRIST LOVE. OFFER THE CHRIST LOVE.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT? BECAUSE WE DON'T FEEL WORTHY OF IT MOST OF THE TIME. IT'S SO BIG. IT'S SO INTENSE. AND YET IT'S SO GENTLE, IT'S SO QUIET.

WHEN I WAS LAST IN NARAMATA ON THE COMMON LIFE COURSE I'M TAKING THERE -- SHOUT OUT TO THE HERB AND DOREENE WHAL FUND -- WE STUDIED THE STORY OF JOHN 21 WHERE JESUS TELLS THE EMPTY-HANDED FISHERMEN TO THROW THEIR NETS OVER THE SIDE AND WHEN THEY DO THEY HAUL UP THE MOST ABUNDANT CATCH THEY'VE EVER SEEN.

WE WERE ASKED A QUESTION BY OUR FEARLESS LEADER, TIM SCORER, WHERE DO YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THIS SCENE? ARE YOU ONE OF THE FISHERMAN? ARE YOU AN OBSERVER ON THE SHORE. AND THE ANSWER THAT CAME TO ME WAS, "I AM THE CHRIST." WHOA.

I WAS SCARED TO TELL MY FELLOW COMMON LIFERS BECAUSE I THOUGHT THEY'D THINK I THINK I'M JESUS. I DON'T THINK I'M JESUS. BUT THE JESUS EXPERIENCE OF GOD WAS NOT LIMITED TO HIM. THAT'S WHAT HE WAS TELLING US! HE SAID THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU. WITHIN YOU!

SO WHEN I EXPERIENCED THAT SENSATION OF I AM THE CHRIST WHAT I WAS EXPERIENCING WAS WHAT PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT. LIVING THE CHRIST. WE ARE ALL THE LIVING GOD.

I LOVE THAT SUFI STORY ABOUT THE SEEKER WHO WITNESSES INJUSTICE AND SAYS GOD HOW CAN YOU DO NOTHING AND GOD SAYS I DID SOMETHING I CREATED YOU.

WHEN LIFE BECOMES BANAL AND DIFFICULT AND FRUSTRATING OR WE BECOME NUMB TO OUR FEELINGS WE ARE FORGETTING WHO WE ARE. WE ARE FORGETTING THAT TO BE ALIVE IS TO BE ALWAYS, EVERY MOMENT IN THE PRESENCE OF THIS GREAT LOVE, THIS GREAT MIRACLE, THIS INTIMATE REALITY, THE EVERPRESENCE OF THE MOST WONDERFUL LOVING POWER ABIDING BACK OF ALL THINGS.

LET US BE THE FIRST TO REMIND EACH OTHER OF THIS, LET US BE THE LAST TO FORGET IT. LET US ECHO PAUL'S WORDS AS OFTEN AS WE CAN.

FOR TO ME, LIVING IS CHRIST.