



Scripture, Eucharist, and Community on the Road to Emmaus

A Pastoral letter to Algoma from
Archbishop Anne
August 17, 2023

Dear friends in Christ,

On August 24th, at St. James Cathedral in Toronto, I will have the honour of attending the funeral service for our former Primate, Archbishop Michael Peers. He is being remembered for so much during his time in office, but also as the Primate who gave the first heartfelt Apology to the Sacred Circle in 1993 for the Anglican Church of Canada's role in residential schools thus setting the course for the journey of reconciliation through, 'listening, truth telling, repentance, and healing with Indigenous peoples both within and beyond Canada' to continue (Anglican Church of Canada – Truth and Reconciliation).

During the long weekend in August, I was able to attend the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association reunion at Algoma University, reminding survivors in attendance of that Apology and recommitting myself to the ongoing work of reconciliation and healing.

Over the last couple of weeks, a number of family members across our diocese have said their final farewells to beloved family members. Three

were much loved members of their parish families also, and are being remembered as good and prayerful people who made a lasting contribution to their faith community and to the wider church through their involvement at the deanery, diocesan, or provincial level.

As these four men are commended to God's care and keeping in funeral services we give thanks for them and for their faithful witness and service in our church, assuring their loved ones of our prayerful support and practical help in their time of loss and sorrow.

Dale Sparkes (spouse Sharon) was a member of Gathering Table in Thunder Bay-North Shore Deanery. He was passionate about social justice issues and he and Sharon were leaders in the Food Cupboard Ministry. He served for a number of years as a parish warden, the deanery lay steward, and a member of the Diocesan Executive Committee.

The opening line of Jim Collins (spouse Michele) obituary says, "For Jim, every day was seen as a gift from God, and he was thankful for every detail, every offering." His home parish was All Saints, Huntsville in Muskoka Deanery where he served as a parochial lay leader. He loved to read and study the Scriptures and over the years facilitated Bible Studies in the parish he attended.

In January 1975, Din Oosterbaan accepted the position of diocesan treasurer for the Diocese of Algoma. He stewarded the diocesan finances for 22 years, retiring in 1997. With his love of figures and budgets, Din had still more to offer the church. In 2001, he became the treasurer for the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario – a position he held until 2019. Din's primary parish was Holy Trinity parish in Sault Ste. Marie, Algoma Deanery, but he was a man of many parishes and could often be found at Bible Studies at Emmaus with Rev. Holly, online with Rev. Susan, every Tuesday at St. Luke's for the noon Eucharist. He loved a good church supper and a deanery meeting where he could ask a question on a single budget item. Din's funeral will be held at St. Luke's Cathedral on Friday August 18th at 10 am with the Dean presiding. A luncheon will be served at Trinity Centre (352 Northern Ave) across the parking lot from Holy Trinity Church at 12:30pm.

Their departure from us leaves a big hole in their families and faith communities that won't easily be filled. Even as we honour them we are

most grateful for their generous hearts, keen intellects, and willing hands that knew no bounds when it came to giving.

One of the post resurrection stories that always resonates with me at a time like this, when we grieve the death of loved ones like +Michael and Dale and Jim and Din, and others we miss deeply, is the story of the apostles on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24: 13-35)

When St. Luke wrote this gospel story he was writing for a community that, like so many other communities, like ours today – had to face the death of loved ones. With death there often comes feelings of shattering loss, despair, isolation, anger, and bitterness. And sometimes even despair.

In his finely told story, Luke has proposed three elements of how a community, a family can find its own inner healing when faced with death, as the apostles did when faced with the death of their beloved leader, Jesus Christ.

In the coming days, I invite you to read again the story of the Road to Emmaus and look for these three elements in them.

The first element in Luke's story is the Scriptures. When the bewildered, distressed, and grieving disciples were talking on the road to Emmaus, a stranger approached them and after their exchange of news, he opened the Scriptures to them, telling them all about himself.

In our grief, the first step to healing is to turn to the Scriptures and find comfort in what we read. "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25) Our funeral liturgy is filled with the comforting words of Scripture like that one and we find solace in hearing them over and over again. The familiar words of Scripture are often some of the final words a person can easily remember and repeat before they die. +Michael and Dale, Jim and Din believed in Jesus. Death for them will not have the final word and we can celebrate their lives in hope because Jesus is their resurrection and life.

The second element that Luke gives for healing is the teaching that the distraught and grieving disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. In the Eucharist we get a glimpse – we always do, that we are not

alone either, in life or in death. The One who gives himself to us in bread and wine also abides with us and invites us to abide in him.

The final element that Luke gives us in coming to terms with death is community. You will notice that right at the end of the Emmaus story the disciples turned around and went back to their community in Jerusalem. The healing of the grieving heart can be found by immersing oneself in the community – the community of one's family, one's church, and the neighbourhood. My own experience is that it is particularly within the context of a faith community that we are safe to freely share our hurts and our pains and exchange them for hope and joy. In community we begin to live again.

The Scriptures, Eucharist, Community. Three elements from the Road to Emmaus that +Michael and Dale and Jim and Din cherished in their own journey of faith.

The Scriptures, Eucharist, Community. Three elements that still work today to bring healing to the grieving heart. May all who grieve loved ones this summer find comfort in the Scriptures, recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread and discover the joy of Christian community.

In resurrection hope, I remain your bishop in Christ,

+Anne