

## Thursday in the Thirteenth Week after Pentecost September 3, 2020

After Jesus teaches at the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the harvest in the fall, he hides to avoid the wrath of religious authorities in positions of power and privilege who pick up stones and intend to hurl them at him. Then Jesus leaves and continues to walk on the Sabbath. Along the way, Jesus meets a man who was born blind.

### **Read John 9:1-17. What catches my attention in this reading from the gospel?**

The Teacher walks away from danger and continues his work of showing the generosity of Creator and the Great Spirit. The Teacher takes dirt from the ground, spits in it to make mud, and then puts this paste on the eyes of one of the vulnerable in the community. The man was born blind so he relied on the generosity of his extended family, members from this city, and strangers who practice hospitality as they pass by him. The Teacher gives this man a great gift. After a lifetime of blurred shadows or total darkness, he can see.

The Teacher once again seizes the moment to increase the understanding of those who have walked with him, watching what he does in his care for people and listening to his words of hope. The disciples demonstrate that they have much to learn in changing what they think and do. Like many, the disciples think in terms of cause and effect, seeking to blame either the man himself for having done something terrible or to blame his parents for causing harm to someone, to someone's property, or to part of Creator's creation. For the Teacher, the point is to do what can be done to honour Creator and the Great Spirit while we still have time and the means to do so.

The people in the city are amazed and very cautious about what happened. Some rejoice that the man born blind now sees. Having undergone cataract surgery at the end of June and the beginning of July, it is amazing to see with such clarity without the need to wear glasses. Sometimes, it is painful to accept so much light into my eyes that I have needed to wear sunglasses indoors. Colours are so much brighter and even different in colour. I celebrate the dedication of researchers and medical professionals in making sight available for ordinary people now and in the future. However, some of those who had known the man born blind wonder if the one with new found sight is actually the same person who was born blind. The one with new found sight is a new person, energized by what has happened to him. It is sad when others get locked into perceptions and convictions which do not accept significant life-altering positive changes in another's life. The one with new found sight will need others to release him from all that they think and do which holds her or him back from establishing a new life and giving to the community in new ways. Some in the city are so uncomfortable and anxious about the one with new found sight that they go to the religious authorities to understand what to think and do in their relationships with the one with new found sight. It is even sadder when those with religious authority can not celebrate this awesome event nor honour the Teacher who brings new life to the one with new found sight as well as to those who will develop new sets of relationships with the one who experienced healing. Those with religious authority are so constrained by their own beliefs and privilege that they point out that the Teacher acted outside what they consider to be acceptable on the day set aside to honour Creator and the Great Spirit. Although the one with new found sight identifies the Teacher as

One sent by Creator and the Great Spirit to speak their words to people who have lost their way, the one who experienced healing becomes fearful. Those with religious authority have the capacity to exercise their power and maintain their privilege. The Teacher has been able to slip away from those who had picked up stones to hurl at him but had put himself in greater danger.

**Read John 9:1-17. What is God saying to us in this gospel reading?**

The Teacher walks into the city, finds someone who was born blind at the side of the road, and introduces that person to new life in all its fullness.

The Teacher then speaks to those who journey with him, reminding us that life is short so seize the moment to honour Creator and the Great Spirit when opportunities present themselves.

On June 28, 2020, the Reverend Sheilagh Ashworth drew her last breath and began her journey into a New Creation. She entrusted her daughters Madeleine and Sarah into the care of her sister, extended family, and a community of friends. When Sheilagh served as an Associate Priest at Trinity Anglican Church in Aurora, her daughters were toddlers. Over the years, Sheilagh provided spiritual direction at the neighbouring Parish of Lloydtown. Her teachings illustrated compassion for the most vulnerable, the need to care for Mother Earth for generations to come, and patience in making this world better for everyone. Sheilagh opened herself to learn about how to connect with Creator and the Great Spirit so that she could help others of all ages to do the same. Relationships were important to her, whether these be relationships between individuals, relationships among extended family members, relationships among people in the community, or relationships between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples. Sheilagh supported Water Walkers around the Great Lakes and more locally around Lake Simcoe. Sheilagh motivated others in her Parish to explore the wonders of creation and to organize family-friendly walks in the woods. Sheilagh brought people to learning events and facilitated conversations which built relationships and increased knowledge about issues facing Indigenous Peoples. Sheilagh connected with children and youth in her parish and in community in order to build relationships and learn about injustices experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Over the past nine years, Sheilagh motivated others to walk or run as individuals or families in order to bring safe, clean water to Pikangikum First Nation, a fly-in community north about 100 km northwest of Red Lake. Former Chief Gord Peters was shaken by the deaths of youth and young adults in his community so when he was asked by two engineers in Toronto how to help provide hope for youth, he said that safe, clean water would be beneficial particularly to the most vulnerable in Pikangikum. One of the ways to raise funds was through the Schomberg Country Run. Since 2011, over \$900,000 was raised through a collection of churches through the Pikangikum Water Project. As a result, 24 of 484 homes were retrofitted with clean water cisterns, wastewater cisterns, and upgrades in plumbing. 5 youth were trained in doing this work. The two engineers and the PWRDF continue to support Chief Dean Owen and the Council with funds still available for this work. This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Schomberg Country Run. Since Pikangikum First Nation has the funding which this People need, Sheilagh recommended that Toronto Urban Native Ministries receive support from the proceeds of this year's Schomberg Country Run. Many Indigenous People come to Toronto from all parts of Canada in order to begin the next part of their respective journeys. Some are resilient in dealing with systemic racism and more personal

episodes of violence. Others need a great deal of support in reconnecting with Creator and the Great Spirit in the quest for healing. On the team at Toronto Urban Native Ministries, the Reverend Leigh Kern with Metis heritage is the Anglican member. A number of video clips can be found on the Toronto Urban Native Ministries website, including a powerful and compassionate sermon by Leigh Kern for Indigenous Sunday in June 2020. With the pandemic this year, the Schomberg Country Run can still be completed as participants where masks and practice social distancing either individually or with others in their social bubble on September 26, 2020 as in the past or any time between September 16 and 26 on this route. This year, the Schomberg Country Run can be a Virtual Event so that participants may run or walk on a route of their own choice. My wife and I will walk each day over the 10 days on the traditional lands of the Saugeen First Nation and the Unceded Chippewas of Nawash on the Bruce Peninsula. Anyone from the Lutheran and Anglican Mission of the Bruce Peninsula or Trinity in Aurora can sponsor my wife and I by email at [davidapfranks@gmail.com](mailto:davidapfranks@gmail.com) or by cell phone at 905-715-9997. More information can be found on the website for the Parish of Lloydtown, including a link to EVENTBRITE where registration forms can be found and donations made to the Schomberg Country Run to support Toronto Urban Native Ministries.

**Read John 9:1-17. What is God asking us to be and do in this passage?**

On our walk in life, Creator and Great Spirit provide for our needs and introduce us to opportunities to participate in healing moments for ourselves and with others, both Settlers and Indigenous Peoples on this part of Turtle Island. Seize these opportunities and help to discover new life. Celebrate when healing happens, no matter whether these steps forward are small or huge leaps towards wholeness. Honour the Reverend Sheilagh Ashworth in what she was able to accomplish in such a short time.

David Franks