



Monday Musing: April 27, 2026.
Bark...

When we're in the forest, Karen and I turn into tree huggers. Yup. The real thing. We hug the trees. We're especially fond of really old trees. We imagine what they've seen through their lives. We contemplate how old the tree might be, how many rings in the trunk might we count. We place our hands on the bark and notice the ruggedness of the biggest and oldest trees compared to the younger ones. And we wonder who else through the years hugged these trees.

Sometimes touching and hugging the trees, we get a sense of their breathing, with a heart beating, and always, always, we feel their strength. We love the trees. In some ways, they're like humans. And in other ways, absolutely not like us at all.

The bark, though, is fascinating and the crevasses between branches and the trunks amaze us for all that lives there, even what we can't see at all. And time. We've been talking a lot about time and who we are too now in our lives.

We have wondered about our own bark, that is, the outer layer of who we are now under which is a whole story, a history, that has shaped us, influenced us, taught us through our years. Researchers into trees tell us that weather patterns, like easy or hard winters, and other environmental factors can be seen when looking at the rings of the trees from the bark inward. Psychosocial researchers on human behaviour tell us that looking back through our years can reveal how we were formed too. What happened in our lives, our perception of events, and our responses, from infancy through young adulthood, are the most significant times for making us who we are today and shaping the lens through which we see the present. Those who were part of our lives, like parents and family, then extended family and friends, then teachers and peer groups, social group leaders, and church leaders, increasingly shape our beliefs, our understandings and relationships with the world. The lens through which we see things later in life, is formed in our earliest years – like the first years of a young tree growing and learning to be strong in a forest.

Karen and I have shared over the years where we were born, what it was like growing up, where and when, our homes, our families, the wonderful memories and the tragedies too. We've talked about how all of our years, our stories, have created and contributed to the outer bark of who we are today, how we see the world around us, and how we respond. What about your story? What does your bark look like? Why?

Our earliest years shape us, beginning our identities, and the lenses through which we see and then respond to the world around us with belief, disbelief, trust, faith, questions and doubts. We can notice this in who we are today, and then hug the child within us.

The same applies to those in the ancient world who we meet in our scriptures - even for Jesus and the disciples. Jesus was a Jew from a rural area of Galilee in northern Israel of the first century. He was raised in the Jewish culture, and faith; he learned it, probably from Mary, his Mom. He learned the Jewish scriptures, at least the Law and the Prophets as they were at the time. He preached repentance, that is, turn to God, follow God, and trust the kingdom of God was coming, it was so very near. Turning to God in repentance one received God's forgiveness. And this is what he taught his disciples, who were from the same area, poor fishermen some, who also had their own life stories. Love and forgiveness were the cornerstones of Jesus' teaching of God out of his Jewish background, his growing up years, and the lens through which he saw and responded to the world around him too. Love and forgiveness. How beautiful are they?

Prayer

Holy One, may we turn to you, may we offer to you when our lives have gone astray, may we be honest, may we know your love and forgiveness as by the Christ, and may we offer the same in our lives to others. May we come to be the love Jesus was living in the ancient world, their time and place, and by whose life we too can live to give glimpses of your realm today. Amen.

Scriptures this Week

Acts 7:55-60	Stephen is stoned.
Psalms 31	Our times are in God's hands.
I Peter 2:2-10	As a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and living stones?
John 14:1-14	Jesus is the way, the truth, the life.

Bible Trivia (noticings!)

Matthew's Gospel has Jesus saying he was/is the *fulfillment* of the Jewish Law and the Prophets, so turn to God, *follow* Jesus. John's Gospel says we are to *believe in* Jesus himself. Paul says the *Jewish law is incomplete* and not necessary for *believing in* Jesus and being saved by such faith. James says faith without works is dead. What do you make of these differences?

May you know peace in your hearts in these troubling times,
Rev. Dr. Deb Foster, Minister, St. Andrew's United in Markham
905-294-0351 minister@standrewsmarkham.com