



Reflection for Downtown United Discerning: May 15-21, 2023

Text: John 20:11-18 Ascension
Theme: Acceptance and Release
Question: Youth

The sermon on May 7, 2023 drew on Ronald Rolheiser's work (he is a Canadian theologian). He sketches out the Paschal mystery of Good Friday, Easter, 40 days, Ascension, Pentecost as a five-part pattern of release and rebirth, which is repeated over and over in our own lives. A colloquial version might be: "name your deaths, claim your births, grieve what you have lost and adjust to the new reality, do not cling to the old, let it ascend and give you its blessing, Accept the spirit of the life that you are in fact living." It is a life-long work to really make this pattern part of our lives.

Two Scripture passages come to mind: Mary's "Let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:26-38) in response to the annunciation from the angel Gabriel, and Jesus' word to Mary outside the tomb (John 20:11-18): "Do not hold on to me." In both situations, something new is being offered, but the newness requires releasing a grasp on hopes and dreams for what has always been, and accepting a new reality which promises to be life-giving.

For us, the world is changing, and that is very clear when we look at our congregations' demographics. The time-honored ways of being church are not connecting well with youth. There are multiple facets to this, and it certainly invites us enter into this pattern of accepting current reality, and releasing what has always been in order to receive new life.

This week try to spend anywhere from 2 – 20 minutes per day in intentional silence, as we have outlined in the Guide for Discernment. Outside of this time, consider the following questions:

1. *What "deaths" are you being invited to accept about your congregations right now?*
2. *What shifts within you as you practice releasing what has been in order to accept what might be?*
3. *What might be a "birth" and blessing that awaits St Paul's and Wilmot?*
4. We recognize that as congregations we do not engage with youth as much as we engage with seniors. Yet we love the children, youth and younger families in our midst. We know we can't "get" Youth, but there may be changes we can make that would make our congregations more inviting, and express more clearly how we value younger people. *What needs to be true about us if we want to be the kind of church that invites and engages youth? What specific changes are we willing to make?*
5. *If we were rooted in love and drawn by love, what would we keep doing? What might we stop doing? What might we start doing?*

