

## CONNECTION

*A Chat for Faith Teams  
Accompanying the Devotional Series  
“In Everyone You Meet: Encounters with the Risen Christ”*

By The Rev. Dr. Walt Lichtenberger

## **Gathering Together - (10 minutes: 0:00- 0:10)**

*Introduce yourself around the table. Share your name and something about yourself that others may not know.*

*Light a candle and invite God's Spirit to be present.*

Opening Prayer: *Ask for a volunteer to pray the following...*

Gracious God, there are times when we feel disconnected from you. Remind us of your promise to always be near. Give us the wisdom to know and the vision to see your presence today. Help us in our learning to be kind, inquisitive, and responsive to your grace. Make us aware in our listening and speaking that you have gifted each of us with wisdom and experiences to share. Give us the courage that we need to welcome change and transformation. Through Jesus Christ, amen.

## **Introduction: (5 minutes: 0:10- 0:15)**

My father-in-law was an organist. For many years, at a variety of churches in Canada and the United States, Terry played for worship and lead choirs. He was a fabulous musician and a fantastic person.

Over the years of his music ministry, he acquired a couple of pipe organs. When the churches replaced their instruments with new ones, opportunities arose for the purchasing of the old equipment.

Unlike a piano, you don't just move an organ. It is usually not contained in one single unit. Organs come in pieces and parts. There are pipes or speakers, consoles and pedals, bellows and air pumps; and, there are lots of wires running everywhere. To an untrained eye, a dismantled organ looks like a scrap pile.

One of the organs that Terry reclaimed was in an old shed. He cut the bundle of wires that connected the keyboard to the rest of the console to help move it home. Although this sped up the process of transporting, it created a headache. He had to reconnect each wire properly. There was only one correct connection for each, and there were hundreds of them!

It took him months of hard, painstaking work. Eventually, when he successfully connected all the wires, Terry was able to play the organ. He brought the pile of assorted pieces and parts back to life - making memorable music.

In the Faith Chat: Restoration, we looked at God's work of restoration. Encounters with the Risen Christ restore us to life. Jesus reconnects the cut wires that prevent us from making music.

Now, in this Faith Chat, we will consider the connection itself. What does it mean to have our lives linked to the Source of all life? The Gospel of John uses the imagery of vine and branches. Connected to Christ, there is abundance, meaning, and purpose.

What is more, this connection makes us part of a community. We are not alone. Not only does God link with us, but we also join with others in a network of relationships. The branches of Christ's vine are numerous and spread out far and wide.

In Christ's Light,  
Pastor Walt

## **Reading God's Word: (5 minutes: 0:15- 0:20)**

### **John 15:4-5**

[Jesus said], "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

## **Responding to God's Word: (5 minutes: 0:20- 0:25)**

### **Initial reactions (5 minutes)**

What stands out for you in Jesus's words to his disciples? What initial questions emerge?

How does it make you feel?

What does it teach us about Jesus, God, and restoration?

## **Exploring Connection (45 minutes: 0:25- 1:10)**

*Choose one or more of the following options to generate group discussion.*

### **Option A: Digging Deeper into Scripture:**

At the time of Jesus, religious sensibilities understood illness and disabilities as signs of sin. There was a separation between the infected/afflicted person and God. It might have been caused by the person, their parents, or some demonic force. No matter the cause of the sin, it further isolated the person from the rest of the community who maintained purity boundaries.

The message behind Jesus's healing ministry in the gospel was that God desired connection with all people, including those who were suffering from disease and disability. Jesus crossed the purity boundaries and touched those labeled unclean to demonstrate that God continued to love them. This was, and remains, good news to all those who were excluded from communities.

If sin is understood as a disconnection between God and humans, forgiveness is a reconnection or reconciliation of that broken relationship. Announcing the forgiveness of sins was connected with Jesus's healing ministry. Through healing and forgiveness, Jesus declared God's connection with humanity.

These are additional readings from scripture to broaden the conversation on Connection. You are invited to read them and then answer the questions below.

“And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.”

— Matthew 9:2-8

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

-Matthew 5:43-48

‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’ ”

— Luke 13: 32-35

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

The [religious leaders] did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of [them]; for the [religious leaders] had

already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

-John 9:13-34

"Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry."

— Psalm 146:5-7b

### ***Questions for discussion:***

Which of the passages above resonate with you the most? How does that text relate to John 15:4-5? Which of the passages make the least sense to you? Why?

What do we learn about connection to God from the above scripture? What promises are made? What is not promised? What connections does Jesus expect that his followers will make and nurture? What connections with others are not consistent with the gospel? What does it look like to be connected to Christ?

When have you experienced connection with God? Was this experience what you had prayed for or was it different from your expectations?

## Option B: Connecting Bible Stories to Our Own Story

When Jesus spoke to his disciples about abiding in him it was on the occasion of his last supper with them. According to John's gospel, Jesus spoke these words after he ate with them and washed their feet. Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit so that they would never be alone, even as his earthly time with them was drawing to a close.

Imagine you were in that upper room and experienced the events of Jesus's last supper with his followers. How do you think you would have felt to hear him talk about connection to him and to his Father even in the midst of trials and struggles?

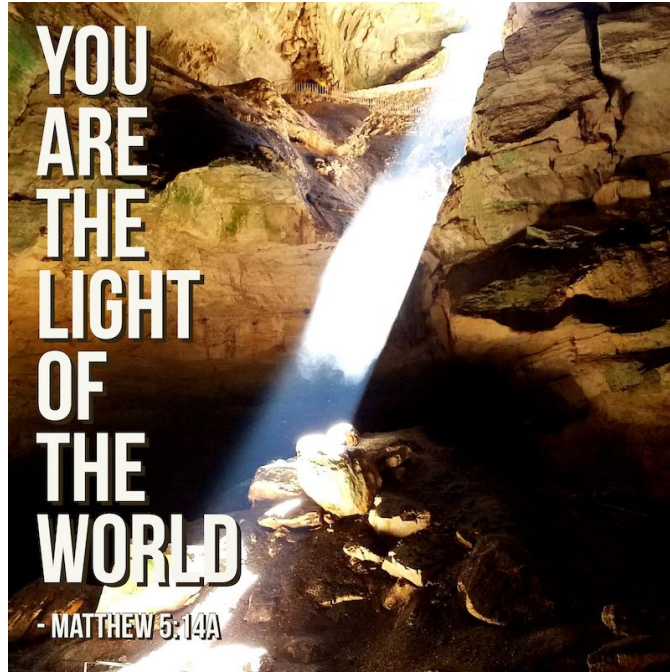
What does it mean to you to have God's promise of presence as you face separation and isolation from loved ones during this time of pandemic?

What does it mean for you to abide in Jesus?

## Option D: Inspirational Images







Discuss the Inspirational images above. How do you connect or disconnect with them? What do they say about connection? What images would you choose to go with these scripture texts?



## **Option E: Gleaning Wisdom from Experience:**

*Look at the following questions through the lens of your Faith Team. Allow for the recurring foci and conversations of the group to guide your conversation.*

Where do you experience connection in your life? Where is it most absent?

What issues are you dealing with that could be reframed through God's desire for connection?

What concerns you most in our community as a person of faith? Where are we most in need of connections? Why? What can be done about it?

### **CALL to ACTION (5 minutes: 1:10-1:15)**

*Based on your conversation as a group, consider the following questions:*

What action does God's desire for connection inspire in you?

How might you be able to share your time, talent, and treasure in response?

What might we do as a community of faith together in response?

### **Bringing Our Time to a Close (10 minutes: 1:15-1:25)**

**Sharing of appreciation for learning:** *Ask each person to name a single insight or learning that they will take home with them.*

**Salt, Light, and Prayer:** Go around the table a second time. Ask folks to share three things: 1) something positive from their week; 2) something with which they are struggling; 3) someone who is in their prayers.

**The Lord's Prayer:** Close with saying Jesus' prayer together (choose a version as a group)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

-or-

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Appoint someone to be recorder of the prayer requests. At the start of next week, the recorder can remind the Faith Team of the previous week's prayer concerns. This will allow for updates. Your Faith Team might also want to send a note to those for whom it prays.