

June 2017

THE  **Britannian**
BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH

985 Pinecrest Rd., Ottawa, ON K2B 6B4

Telephone: 613-828-6018

Web site, Facebook, and Twitter links:

<http://www.britanniaunitedchurch.ca/>

Peter Bain, Editor

Leigh Bain, Assistant Editor

Editorial

Ἀρετή

I have a friend with a background in the classics who is a fountain of enlightenment. She brought to my attention an interesting concept from the ancient Greeks: “arete”. Often translated as “excellence in any form” or “moral virtue”, she had a more subtle definition: “doing what you are good at”. Another source describes it as “effectiveness”: people exhibit arete by using their knowledge, skills, courage, and talents to the best advantage in what they do. Arete is individual: one person may be skilled in one area and another person in another. It reminded me of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians *“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”*

I think of all the people at Britannia who are excellent in their own way. We all have our gifts and an opportunity to contribute. What is your gift?

Peter Bain
Editor

Minister's Message

It's Sunday after midnight and I'm reflecting on what a special place Britannia United Church is. A few hours ago I was participating in a memorial service for Valda Boland and that is what has me in a reflective mood.

Valda walked into our church about twelve years ago as a visitor, a stranger, and tonight we honoured her as a member of our family. That's what happens at Britannia. We live and worship in relationship. From the moment you walk through the door you feel it. People care about you. They take an interest in your life. You're given a place to belong, where you can deepen your faith and share your gifts, and be celebrated for who you are.

And this is what our world needs right now; a place to belong. Not long ago, I was talking to a young man who had little experience of church and no use for it. He asked me why someone would go to my church, so I told him what Britannia means to me. When I was done, he said "So it's about being part of a community...okay, I can see the value in that."

Yes, at its core the church is a community. It is a place "where two or more are gathered together". This lightens the load when we are working together, it heightens our joy when we celebrate together, and reassures us that no matter what comes our way, we will never have to endure it alone.

When Valda came to us, she was experiencing some personal heartache. She was lost and uncertain where she belonged but our congregation soon embraced her. She made friends quickly and, as she got to know our members, she received a lot of emotional support but she also saw the opportunity to reach out and help.

Tonight, I saw the reward of her work. Person after person expressed their gratitude and love for her, and this woman who once doubted her worth, was praised in poetry, story and song. She would be truly humbled to hear the tributes, and that was just one more thing that made her special.

Now I will admit that our church family occasionally experiences some dysfunction. We don't always get along, and we are not always as kind to each other as we should be, but when it comes right down to it, we're there for each other, just like we were there for Valda tonight. In the words of the song:

"Come in, come in and sit down, you are a part of the family."

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Jim

Father's Day Hymn Sing

On the table in the lobby is a suggestion box for you to write down a hymn that reminds you of your father, a man in your life that inspired you, or your father's favourite hymn. We will collect the box on June 11th after the service.

The Worship Committee

Audio-Visual System

Ole Jensen is looking for 2 more volunteers to help with the Projector and Sound System on Sundays. If we have 2 more volunteers then each person would only have to run the equipment once a month. Training, documentation and assistance is available.

Please contact Ole Jensen after the service if you are interested.

Garage Sale

The garage sale was a big success again this year. We raised over \$1200 dollars and the surplus went to The Big Give (<http://www.thebiggive.ca>) "*a unified day of giving extravagantly – everything is free!*" The sad part was that Valda didn't run her famous snack bar. However, others stepped into the breach and donated the baked goods we sold with the coffee. The sale helped everybody. I was glad to get rid of stuff cluttering up our house and see it go to a good home. One family came in near closing time and bought a whole table of housewares: plates, glasses, cups and saucers, pots and pans.

I am deeply indebted to everyone who set up the sanctuary, donated and sorted merchandise, helped with sales, handled money, kept us fed with coffee and muffins, and cleaned up. Events like this show Britannia at its best.

Peter Bain

Stewards

The Stewards are looking for some people to take on different roles within the church. Please speak to Helen Hutcheson or Verne Bruce to see how you can help!

Church Picnic

The church picnic will be on June 11th after the service at the Britannia Park Trolley Station. Please bring potluck salads and desserts, and the church will be providing hotdogs and condiments. Activities will be available for all ages.

SUMMERTIME

(Currently Wednesdays)

♪ **ACOUSTIC JAM** ♪

THURSDAY EVENINGS

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7 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

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Our Condolences

Britannia United Church mourns the passing of Norm Davis on April 9, 2017 and Valda Boland and May 5, 2017.

Congratulations

... to Shawn Baldwin and his fiancée, Kristen on their marriage.

Upcoming Events

Church Picnic June 11th after the service!

Strawberry Social June 28th

Scouts

The CJ Crew from the 96th Ottawa Scouts would like to send their sincerest thanks to everyone who helped them in their fundraising endeavours. Thanks to a grant from the Scriven's Fund and an anonymous donation, we are done with fundraising! Parents have only had to pay about \$600 for their scouts to attend the Canadian Jamboree! The Jamboree is a week-long camp being held in Nova Scotia. The fees cover travel to and from, food, activities and the camp itself. Again, Thank-you!!

Candice Armstrong, on behalf of the CJ Crew.

Wholly, Holy Void

I wonder through my inner world in awe of what I see.
Blessings flow like waterfalls or wind between the trees.
Creation stands at attention whenever I approach.
For God and I, together, command its power and scope.

This sacred land, now barren, once was overjoyed.
Nothing fills the empty space. My soul is wholly void.
Completely, wholly void

I did not know your presence while on this earth you walked.
Our paths were not congruent. Yet our destinies are locked.
I can know your presence now while walking with your friends.
They shared your path of blessing. By trees and rocks it bends.

That sacred ground, once barren, now stands overjoyed.
The empty space bears your name. It is a holy void.
The hole is wholly, holy void

Jamie W.L. Hill

John Bell

John Bell is returning for a one-day workshop on June 24, 2017. His new presentation is entitled “A Future Without a Blueprint”; exploring the changes Christians are likely to face in the future. As well, in the afternoon, John will lead us in “Songs that Matter”. We hope you will join us by registering online or by sending in the attached mail-in brochure. Please feel free to share this information.

Moving Forward in Song

Saturday, June 24th, 2017

Kanata United Church

33 Leacock Drive, Kanata

“The Future Without a Blueprint”

Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

(Coffee and muffins at 8:15 a.m.)

What changes are Christians likely to face in the future and how will we cope with these changes in a positive way given that most Christians are resistant to change?

“Songs that Matter”

Saturday, 1:15 – 4:00 p.m.

Churches don't normally sing about pastoral and political issues – depression, aging, refugee issues, multi-faith societies. These new songs will include several new texts set to known tunes; sung theology that helps enable a larger understanding of God's presence in the world around us.

JOHN L. BELL is an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland and a member of the Iona Community. He has produced many hymns and liturgies, lectures throughout the world and is primarily concerned with the renewal of congregational worship at the grass roots level.

Cost;

***\$95 - Early Bird Special
(Register before
April 30, 2017)***

***\$125 - Registration after
April 30, 2017***

***(Above rates include
lunch and snack)***

***Register online at
www.kuc.ca
or call 613-592-5834
for information***

News from the Shaao-Artins

Challenges Ahead for our Syrian Refugee Family – June 2017

This has been a hectic year for all the Shaao-Artins.

Abboud is still taking Quebec government French language training and a night business class at college.

Rim's parents, Raymond and Nadia, are still adjusting to apartment life and taking English courses in Ottawa.

Jack and Christian will soon be finishing the school year, enrolled now in regular classes, and are doing very well academically. Thanks to the hard work of Dara, they will again be attending summer camps in Hull during some of the weeks this summer. Also, thanks to Dara, they have been learning to swim, skate, skateboard and practice Tae Kwon Do every Saturday at Dovercourt centre.

Rim, a trained gynaecologist in Syria, has embarked on a great adventure: taking midwifery training at Ryerson. Acceptance into the program is still underway, involving a series of short stays in Toronto to attend orientation and undergo language and practical skills assessments. This undertaking has involved the great generosity of a new angel in Toronto, a friend of one of our Ottawa angels, who graciously offered a place to stay and meals to a nervous new Syrian Canadian who was leaving her family, travelling on subways and streetcars for the first time in her life and becoming quickly acquainted with an unknown host in an unknown city.

Rim has come through with flying colours, having gone through two interviews and having passed her first two pre-admission exams. She must now undergo another exam on June 15. Her very hard work over many months of studying medical texts in English, a language she is just learning, has borne fruit.

Over this summer, the family must make important decisions based on whether or not Rim is accepted into the program, which would begin in earnest in the end of August. When to move to Ontario, if she succeeds? How to manage that kind of transition, for the whole family (schools, studies, work, welfare and health requirements)? This will be a critical period for the family's success, and they need all your prayers and caring as they look towards their future.

None of this would have been possible without the continued support and generosity of all you folk, and of the Britannia United Church Local Syrian Refugee Fund created especially for the Shaao-Artin family. Please receive our heartfelt thanks, on behalf of Raymond, Nadia, Abboud, Rim, Jack and Christian, and we hope you have a lovely summer.

Marie-Therese O'Sullivan and Don Cullen
613-726-1863

After the flood, Noah told the animals to go forth and multiply. Two snakes stayed behind - they couldn't leave because they were adders.

Ascension Day

Following the attack in Manchester on June 22, David Walker, the Bishop of Manchester said the following in his Ascension Day sermon.

I've also been blessed, as so often before, by the core doctrines and the calendar of the Church, which has brought us this week, and tonight especially, to the story we have just heard, the Ascension of Jesus Christ at the end of his earthly ministry.

I've been asked many times in these last few days whether the evil that has been visited, first upon individuals and their families, and then upon Manchester as a whole, doesn't dent my faith. I've told and retold the story of how Jesus embraced pain and death on the cross. He is the God who knows human suffering from the inside. By his Ascension he is freed from the limitations of space and time. His face of compassion and his words of consolation are there for all who will turn and look towards him. On Earth he was present and made himself known sometimes to individuals sometimes to thousands; now in heaven he is personally known and recognised by millions and more as a constant friend, companion, saviour and Lord especially in times of acute pain and anxiety.

...

I was asked about what I had said to the thousands gathered in and around Albert Square, and to the millions listening and watching from afar. I couldn't remember. I had spoken from no script, and had had no message planned and prepared. I was simply trusting in the promise that Jesus gave his disciples before he took his Ascension leave from them, that he would send the Holy Spirit, and that this Spirit would guide their tongues when they were called to give witness to their faith.

Unless he goes, he tells his followers, the Spirit will not be poured out upon them. When they return that day to Jerusalem, they do so not in panic and distress as they had when he was arrested in Gethsemane. They go back to the city calmly, trusting, ready to wait for what will happen next, knowing that God will give them all that is necessary to face the challenges ahead.

The Haven

The Haven in Barrhaven is a Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI). MHI is a not-for-profit charity focused on providing safe and affordable housing in Ottawa. It is supported by many of the Faith Communities in Ottawa, including Baha'i, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim. All are expressing their concern that there are over the 10,000 under-housed or homeless in Ottawa.

The Haven is located just past Fallowfield, off Greenbank, within easy walking distance of the Longfields station on the Transit way. The 95 bus takes just 30 minutes to get to downtown. It will feature a mix of town homes and two low rise apartment buildings, multi-use community space, an outdoor children's playground and a community garden that promotes healthy living environment and community engagement. People started moving into the 50 apartment units in April and May. Other accommodation is to be occupied this summer.

The building of the Haven was started 2015. When finished later this year it will have 98-units and expects to house about 300 people in: 30 one-bedroom, 38 two-bedroom, 26 three bedroom, and 4 four bedroom units. Ten homes are designed to comfortably accommodate at least one member who has a physical disability.

The Haven will be a Certified LEED Gold Community. This certification is given to homes that exceed the building code with features to provide greater energy savings and lower utility bills. They have high efficiency furnaces, hot water heaters rated 95% efficient and several other energy saving features.

The total cost of construction is \$19.3 million. Action Ottawa provided 3.43 acres of land and a grant of \$10 million to build the 98 units. MHI raised \$500,000 during our "A Place to Call Home" Campaign, which will be allocated to The Haven. MHI will finance the remainder of the cost through a long-term mortgage.

This project has received support from donors including \$200,000 from the Ottawa branch of the King's Daughters and Sons and \$200,000 from an anonymous donor through the Community Foundation. The 75 member churches have, as of October 2016, cumulatively raised over \$500,000.

Last November the Ottawa Presbytery of the United Church launched a Campaign to raise money for the Multifaith Housing Initiative to support the Haven. Twenty congregations have been involved. Britannia was not one of them, but Presbytery has received money from Britannia towards the campaign. Thank you people who have been in a position to make donations to the MHI through your church envelope.

The final fund raising event for The Haven by Presbytery was a concert held in the Community Rooms of the Haven on Saturday May 13. It featured the Peter Woods and Evensong Ensemble with catering by Yasmin Syrian Cooking from the Heart. These are a group of Syrian refugee women who have set up a catering company.

Before the final event, the Ottawa Presbytery had raised over \$41,000 to support this project.

Sunday School 2016-2017

During the 2016-2017 Sunday School year, the children explored stories and themes from the Spark curriculum based on the Revised Common Lectionary. They learned about spreading love to others, forgiveness, humility and carrying out the work of God in their daily lives. Following a music session led by Valerie Baldwin, the children “listen” to a Bible story, engage in a conversation about it and enjoy a theme-related craft. On an average Sunday, about eight children participate in the Sunday School and Youth programs.

Our regular participants include: Audrey, Bethany, Brooklyn, Carlie, Charlotte, Chloé, Ella, Ethan, Eva, Jake, Mila, and Violet.

Appreciation is extended to the following persons who supported the Sunday School children during the year: Valerie Baldwin, Dan Ball, Eileen Ball, Lana Czelenski, Mary Lou Farrell, Diane Houston, Joanna Hughes, Helen Hutcheson, Franci-Lynka Keza, Sofia Malik, Heather Wallace, Erica Wyse, and Gail Wyse

Youth Group Spring 2017

The following students from Britannia United Church (and their friends) participated in the special activities for the youth throughout the school year: Bethany, Faith, Hannah, Jake, Kim, Klein, Lorry, Lynka, Rhyan, and Samantha.

Bowling

On Sunday, April 28, the Britannia and Woodroffe United Church youth groups went bowling right after the church service. We had 9 youth and friends from Britannia and 3 from Woodroffe. We had enough students to create two teams. Each team played two rounds, enjoying the friendly competition. The outing was complemented with pizza and soft drinks. A special thank you goes out to Dan Ball, Lana Czelenski and Don Miller who drove the kids to/from the Merivale Bowling Centre. Everyone had an awesome time!

Cupcake Making and Decorating

On Sunday, May 28, Britannia had 5 youth out to make and decorate cupcakes. They had a lot of fun together and particularly enjoyed the lunch from McDonald's. Appreciation is extended to Don Miller and Lana Czelenski for their assistance.

These beautiful and delicious sweet treats will be sold, for a free-will offering, following the service on Sunday, June 4. The donations will be added to the \$48.40 raised at the Garage Sale from the sale of our remaining bracelets and necklaces made by the youth last November, to support the United Church of Canada's Extreme Hunger Appeal for the people of Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Kenya who are experiencing starvation and extreme hunger.

Tribute to Valda Boland

from the Britannia Woods Community Food Pantry. BWCFP

The Monday team is in mourning as we have lost a dear friend and fellow volunteer, Valda Boland. Valda was one of our Britannia United Church volunteers on Mondays. She was a Newfoundlander and her lilting accent and interesting expressions will be missed by all. She worked hard as one of our "produce ladies" - she always jumped right in when the potatoes, carrots, onions, etc., arrived and set to work bagging them and putting them in the bins. She was always busy, finding the next job when the first was done. She had a gentle way about her and a great sense of humour. She was a great sports fan as well and was particularly proud of her two grandsons who played high level senior softball - at both the Pan Am games and the World Baseball Championships.

Valda had had some health problems lately but we didn't realize that it was as serious as it was. Her death came as quite a shock to us all, especially her friends at Britannia United Church.

Joan O'Connell, Co-ordinator BWCFP May 10, 2017

*When you remember Valda, please consider donating to the Food Pantry donations box.
Susan Aiken*

Surely you can't be serious

Timmy was a little five year old boy that his mum loved very much and, being a worrier, she was concerned about him walking to school when he started Kindergarten. She walked him to school the first couple of days, but when he came home one day, he told his mother that he did not want her walking him to school everyday. He wanted to be like the "big boys." He protested loudly, so she had an idea of how to handle it.

She asked a neighbour, Shirley Goodnest, if she would surreptitiously follow her son to school, at a distance behind him that he would not likely notice, but close enough to keep a watch on him. The neighbour said that since she was up early with her toddler anyway, it would be a good way for them to get some exercise as well so she agreed.

The next school day, Mrs. Goodnest and her little girl, Marcy, set out following behind Timmy as he walked to school with another neighbour boy he knew. She did this for the whole week.

As the boys walked and chatted, kicking stones and twigs, the little friend of Timmy noticed that this same lady was following them as she seemed to do every day all week. Finally, he said to Timmy, "Have you noticed that lady following us all week? Do you know her?"

Timmy nonchalantly replied, "Yea, I know who she is."

The little friend said, "Well, who is she?"

"That's just our neighbour" Timmy said.

"Who is she and why is she following us?"

"Well," Timmy explained, "every night my mum makes me say the 23rd Psalm with my prayers cuz she worries about me so much. And the psalm says, 'Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life.' So, I guess I'll just have to get used to it."

What Can We Learn from Psalm 23?

The fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally called “Shepherd Sunday,” with Psalm 23 as its focus, and it is typically paired with other readings that speak about the relationship of the Shepherd to his sheep.

While we cannot know for certain who wrote Psalm 23, it has traditionally been ascribed to David, the shepherd who became a king.

We often speak about how Jesus turned his world upside down by elevating the status of the lowly, by embracing those who were considered unlovable, and challenging the expectations of his community. But the story of how David became king, shows us that God was doing the same thing long before Christ was born.

While Saul was still the first king of Israel, God sent the prophet Samuel to the home of Jesse, to anoint the next king. One by one he met Jesse’s sons, starting with the eldest as the obvious choice in Hebrew society. Each one was described as tall and handsome, and each one is rejected as the future king. When he reaches the end of the line, Samuel is confused and asks if Jesse has any more sons.

There is one more. He is the youngest. He is the smallest, and he is such an unlikely choice that they left him out in the field with the sheep when the prophet came to visit.

Sure enough, as soon as Samuel saw David, he knew that this was the one God had chosen. He was anointed there and then, but it would be several years before he would ascend the throne.

David is considered one of the greatest of Israel’s kings. He was victorious in battle, but he also had the heart of a poet. He made a lot of mistakes, but he eventually dedicated his life to God and became the king God knew his could be, and Psalm 23 tells us that he never forgot his humble beginning as a shepherd tending sheep.

Psalm 23, is a psalm of trust, and with its peaceful tones and its images of sheep in a pastoral scene, it is easy to imagine it being written by a shepherd poet, meditating on God’s faithfulness. However, some modern scholars associate the psalm with the exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt and point out that several themes from that story are repeated in the 23rd Psalm. So what could have been the poem of a shepherd boy, may in fact, be the story of the whole people of Israel.

Two images dominate the psalm. There is the pastoral image of the shepherd with his sheep, but there is also an image with strong military overtones. These two images are worlds apart to us, they would not have been, in their original setting.

In the ancient near East, kings were referred to as the shepherds of their people, and the reference in I Samuel to the new king keeping the sheep for his father, tells us what kind of king David will be.

But there is another division in the psalm. It is subtle and may go unnoticed by us, but you can be sure that the first people to hear it would have taken note.

The beginning and the end of Psalm 23 speak about the Lord, but in the middle, the psalmist speaks to the Lord.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

This change in language happens precisely at the point of greatest danger, and speaks about the relationship about the author and his Lord. Trust in God’s protection and provision is not only something that the psalmist can speak about at a distance; they are part of his personal experience, and they suggest an intimate, personal relationship with God that allows the author to release his fear.

This is a God who is as intimately acquainted with the people, as a shepherd is with his sheep. The Psalm begins saying that with the Lord as my shepherd, “I shall not want” and the sense in the Hebrew language is that there is nothing else I might need. And again, when the psalm speaks about green pastures and still waters, the Hebrew language suggests rest for the body and also for the spirit. “He restores my soul” literally translates as “my life.” The implication is that the psalmist has been led safely through dangerous times, and is now being given food and water and rest, to restore his life and his spirit.

The King James version of the psalm continues, saying that the shepherd leads the sheep “in paths of righteousness.” This suggests that the Lord will teach us how to be morally upright, but the original Hebrew indicates that this has more to do with the nature of God. So we can follow God’s path, because God is moral and upright and worthy of our trust.

Through the centuries Psalm 23 has been one of the most cherished passages of the Bible in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Most often we hear it read at funerals or it is shared with people who are going through a terminal illness – because walking in the shadow of death is one of the darkest valleys we can imagine.

Sometimes the last verse is translated as “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” and this has come to symbolize the eternal nature of God’s love as presented to us in story of the resurrection. Christ, who is referred to as “the Lamb of God” is also called “the Good Shepherd” and so Psalm 23 reassures us that when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death, there will be something better on the other side. This has been the hope of generations.

But there is something more. The last verse may also be translated, as “I will dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life through.”

While Psalm 23 is most often heard at funerals today, this is a psalm that was memorized by children and recited as a daily prayer. As such, it has been more than words of comfort during the worst times of our lives; it has been a daily affirmation of our relationship with our God; a celebration of everything God provides; a reminder that God is with us in every moment of our lives: loving us, nurturing us, giving us comfort, setting us back on the right path when we go astray, renewing our life and our hope every day.

There is so much I could say about Psalm 23 that I could write a month of sermons on this one passage, and I have decided to spread the message over two Sundays. With next Sunday being Mother's Day, Psalm 23 is an obvious choice for a message about how we are encouraged to shepherd one another; providing for one another's needs, restoring each other's souls.

So today, I would just like to take a moment to reflect on the use of the psalm in our most difficult times of life, and I want to turn that moment over to someone with far more wisdom than I.

In 1981 the book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" was published by Rabbi Harold Kushner, and in 2004 he followed up with a meditation on Psalm 23 that answers the question "How do you live in a dangerous and unpredictable world?"

Speaking in an interview, Rabbi Kushner said

No matter how grievous a funeral was, no matter how tragic a memorial service was, if I just started to recite the familiar words of the twenty-third Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures ..." it tranquilized the congregation. It just made people feel calm.

Right after 9/11 — when everybody was asking me, "Where was God that Tuesday? How could God have let such a thing happen?" — the answer I found myself giving was, "God's promise was never that life would be fair. God's promise was, when it's your turn to confront the unfairness of life, no matter how hard it is, you'll be able to handle it, because He'll be on your side. He will give you the strength you need to find your way through."

I was paraphrasing the twenty-third Psalm: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." The psalmist is not saying, "I will fear no evil because evil only happens to people who deserve it." He's saying, "This is a scary, out-of-control world, but it doesn't scare me, because I know that God is on my side, not on the side of the hijacker. God is on my side, not on the side of the illness, or the accident, or the terrible thing that happened. And that's enough to give me the confidence." The twenty-third Psalm is the answer to the question, "How do you live in a dangerous, unpredictable, frightening world?"

Kushner went on to say:

I want to believe in a loving God. And when you see children dying, when you see innocent people suffering, and when you see young parents stricken with an illness, how can you believe in a God of love and compassion unless you are prepared to say, "Some things happen in the world that God does not want to happen." God is good. Nature is not good. Nature is blind. Nature is amoral. Fire burns and bullets wound and falling rocks injure and disease germs infect everybody, whether you deserve it or not.

I was inspired to write all of my books, starting with WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, by the death of my son, who was 14 years old and was born with an incurable illness. I asked myself, how did my wife and I get through that? You would think

that would shatter the faith of the average person. Where did we find the strength and the ability to raise him, to comfort him when he was sick and scared, and ultimately to lose him? And the only answer is, when we used up all of our own strength and love and faith, there really is a God, and he replenishes your love and your strength and your faith.

But people who have been hurt by life get stuck in “the valley of the shadow,” and they don’t know how to find their way out. And that’s the role of God. The role of God is not to explain and not to justify but to comfort, to find people when they are living in darkness, take them by the hand, and show them how to find their way into the sunlight again.

Why do people let themselves get stuck? Sometimes, I think, they feel guilty that they’re still alive and somebody they love has died. Sometimes, I suspect, they’re afraid. They’re afraid if they ever permitted themselves to recover, then they would lose the person not only physically but emotionally as well. And as a rabbi, I would try to explain to them, “No, that’s not how it works. When you have loved somebody, they have entered so intimately into the fabric of your soul that neither death nor time can ever take them out. They are always with you.”

I know that some of you know Psalm 23 by heart – I know because when I recite it at funerals as a prayer, people just naturally join in. I know that some of you recite the psalm every night before you go to sleep and it has been a constant source of comfort and strength your whole lives through.

This week, I would like to encourage everyone to recite Psalm 23 every day. If you don’t know it, Google it. We typically read it in the King James version, but find one that resonates with you. Say it daily, just for this week. Use it as part of a daily devotion. Say it as a prayer to start your day. There are six verses. Starting tomorrow, you could meditate on one verse each day in preparation for our service next week.

This may be something you decide to do your whole life through, or it might just be an exercise for this week. My prayer, is that it will deepen your relationship the Lord your God, reassure you of God’s presence, and fill you with life and hope, now and for always.

Amen

Newsletter submissions

We love hearing about your news, stories, poems, and jokes. Are you involved with another group or organization in the community? Please tell us about your activities and events.

You can send articles to newsletter@brituc.ca.