

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Jesus Christ, our living word, may Your word to us this day, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, produce in us a strong conviction. Amen.

Asks Each of Us

(April 10, 2011. John 8:1-11; Psalm 130; Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 11:1-45; Romans 8:6-11. Wesley Memorial United Church, Moncton, 11:00.)

Children remind us

of the importance of story telling.

James was not very old

when I took him to his first movie.

The summer following

we were camping

in the National Park in Cavendish.

Every time I did the dishes

I told him the story

of that movie.

Stories are the first form of literacy.

This is especially true

of the first century Palestine.

While there were scribes,

the primary form of literacy was oral.

People heard stories

remembered them

and told them.

That is why there

are many reference in the scriptures

to people on whose life Jesus had impact

who told the story of what had happened.

TRUE STORY OF JESUS

The gospels

are the gathering

of those stories

in a written form.

One story though

had a problem getting into scripture.

That is the one

we heard today.

Depending on your translation

the passage may be surrounded by brackets

or it may be at the end of the gospel of John.

This is because

in many of the earliest manuscripts
the story was not there.

But because this is a true story of Jesus,
it could not be kept out of the Bible.

But why
was it in doubt.

That was likely because
the church was resistant
because of the way
it challenged the church
and its leadership.

When it finally made it
it was likely because
the church was comfortable
with how the story challenged people
to not sin again.

By the time
it was included in John
the church was controlling

the definition of sin
so having a story
which tells people
to sin no more
helped the cause.

But the reason

the story

was not originally included

likely had to do with

the passage focus

on self examination

and acceptance

of all sinners.

SELF EXAMINATION AND ACCEPTANCE

In his book, the *God Game*,

Andrew Greeley describes God's acceptance

God's love for us,

using the word exuberance.

. . . If you're exuberant, you're exuberant, and by all the signs and accounts Whoever is behind it all is nothing if not exuberant. Reread the parables of Jesus, stripped of their later allegorical interpretations; a father who forgives a spoiled brat of a son before the clever little fraud even has

a chance to deliver his phony speech, a farmer who plays loafers a full day's wages for at most an hour of grumbling effort, a judge who dismisses a capital charge of adultery against a woman who is patently guilty without even bothering to ask her whether she has any regrets--there, my friends, you have exuberance with a vengeance. Indeed the last story was so exuberant as to be profoundly shocking to the early Christians and hence was cut from many texts of the Bible, not the first time the Church leaders have tried to tone down Jesus' description of his experience of the Father.

This traditional passage of Lent

is a story

about those accepted by God

who are the people of God

examining their lives.

Paul describes this

as being ruled by the Spirit.

Ezekiel described the experience

as a valley of dry bones

coming to life.

In 1993 the *Globe and Mail*

contained an eulogy

by Janet Hunter

for Blue,

a Don from the S-Corner community

in West Kingston, Jamaica.

She met Blue

when she went to Jamaica

as a project Director with Global Ed-Med Supplies.

He had just recently been released from prison.

Blue as a Don

expected her to give him a protection payment

to keep thieves away from the community clinic,

which she was there to develop.

Payments to Dons

were the usual way of operating

in this community.

When government or business

moved into a community

they paid the local dons for protection.

Janet Hunter,

when she met Blue,

refused to pay the protection money.

She tried to tell him
that the clinic belonged
to the community
and he should protect it
because it was the community's.

This began a long process.

Slowly she tried to get him to change.

She told him of the clinic's long term goals.

She challenged him

to be a model

for the young people who looked up to him.

Finally he came around.

He helped with the clinic.

He built a ballfield.

Finally Blue started his own small business.

Through Janet Hunter's

challenging of him

to change his life

he changed.

The story of Blue's change

under the influence of Janet Hunter

is not an explicitly Christian story,

although Blue came from a devote family.

But this is a story Jesus would have understood.

He would have understood

Blue's self examination.

For us

the challenge is to examine one's life

and to make it one of the Spirit.