

**When will I See the Face of God?
Psalm 42:1-3**

**Scripture Lessons: Psalm 42:1-11; Romans 1:18-23;
Matthew 25:31-46**

Corinna is a young Paraguayan deaf student who lives at a boarding school for deaf students operated by Helga Dueck. Helga told us that Corinna one day said to her, "Where are your parents?" Helga said, "They died." "But really, where are they now?" She told her that their bodies were in the ground, but they went to heaven to be with God. "How do you know; you can't even talk to God?" Helga said, "When I pray, I talk to God and I know that when I die, because I love God and God loves me, that God has prepared a place for me in heaven and I will go to be with God." Corinna said, "I can't go there. My grandfather would never let me go."

Tina, another student, said, "Corinna, when Helga goes to heaven, she won't need crutches any more. God will give her a new leg." Helga, who is now in her seventies, had polio and her one leg was amputated due to poor circulation when she was 14 years old.

Helga said Corinna was quiet for three days; then she came and said, "I want to go to heaven too." Corinna had a very bad temper. She would kick and bite and throw things. Helga told her, "When you love God and want to go to heaven, you must be kind and not do these things and then you can go to heaven and you will be able to talk and hear and dance." Corinna wanted to be a dancer. Corinna said, "I want to go to heaven." Helga said that since that day, there was a drastic change in her behaviour. It was a difference like night and day. She was a different child.

I begin with Corinna's story since the sermon today is to touch on the principles relating to how we see God. In the scriptures, God invites all persons to follow and obey his laws. Persons express their desire to know God in many ways. In the Old Testament times, God was understood as the one who created the world. He freed the Israelites

from their captivity. He preserved his people and did mighty deeds in relation to the earth and its population. Read text – Psalm 42: 1-3.

The New Testament expands our understanding of God. Jesus said, "In this way pray, Our Father." God is one who receives his children with the open arms of parental love. When the prodigal son returned to his father, his place was restored at the family banquet table. When we come to God in our sinful condition, we discover that God is open to accept, forgive and reveal himself in the fullest possible way to him.

1. How has God made himself known? The Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:19 & 20, "For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his nature, namely his eternal power has been clearly perceived in things that God has made. God has revealed himself in the created universe. Many of the Psalms point this out. Psalm 19, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God. The firmament proclaims his handiwork."

Recently Matthew, Miriam and I were walking the Millrace in St Jacobs. It is amazing the wildlife and beauty you see as you experience God's Creation, walking from the Mill back to the Dam. Janet and I always enjoyed walking it with our family and friends. As I walked with my grandchildren, suddenly Miriam garbed my arm and said "Grandpa stop. Did you hear that?" As we listened quietly we heard another beautiful song and as we followed the sound we saw a beautiful bird. That afternoon we experienced God's wonder in Creation. Water, water roaring over the dam, birds, beavers just to mention a few items. We experienced the presence of God as we walked together.

2. God has revealed something of himself in what he has put into each of us: our moral nature, our sense of right and wrong. In Asuncion, Paraguay, twenty of the Mennonite businesses hire ten chaplains to work in their businesses. They hold a one-hour Bible study weekly with their employees during business hours. The employees get paid to come to the Bible study. They provide family counselling, classes on parenting and child care. If an employee or his family is in the hospital, a chaplain will make a pastoral visit. They buy clothes for the employee's children

to go to school, as well as their school books.

The Funk family operates an air-conditioning business. The company is 13 years old, has 150 employees and provides 40% of the air-conditioning business in Paraguay and also do some work in Brazil. Air conditioning for Paraguay is essential since their winter is only two weeks long-the last two weeks of July. I heard one of their woman employees say, "I was away from God and didn't love God any more. But since coming to work for the Funk family, I have given my life to God. God lives in my heart. I find that I have more time for my family and I am happier.

Anebal was our bus driver. He was listening to the conversation with Siegfried Funk. Our group was so impressed that the businesses would invest this kind of cost and energy into their employees. The companies are tithing ten percent in order to provide these services of building character. They shared with us stories of persons accepting faith in Jesus Christ and how their lives have been changed. Anebal said they are building moral character within their employees.

3. Much of what we know about God comes to us through the Bible. Within this record of revelation, we find accounts of God's action, words and personal encounters. We see God at work in his way of relating to his people. Through his actions in history, he has been revealing himself.

In the Bible, we are privileged to hear what God has said. The prophets proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord." God, through the inspiration of his Spirit, used the prophets and other writers. They interpreted the events of history. The Bible is an unfolding revelation of God at work among his people, disclosing his words and deeds.

Jesus' words in the Matthew Gospel lesson today speak to us – "I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was hungry and you gave me food, I was sick and you visited me---"

Bonnie Klassen from Waterloo is the MCC director for South America and Mexico. She was in Cuba when Hurricane Irma hit the country. I

read her report recently in the Mennonite World Review. She talked about the tremendous destruction and devastation of the storm. She also talked about the resilience of the citizens of Cuba. Brethren in Christ Pastor Yoel and his wife Daily took in three neighbour women whose houses lost their roofs.

Klassen talked of one farmer who had 55 kinds of trees and plants. When the hurricane came he boarded up his windows because he couldn't stand watching his trees die.

The farmer, like many of the people she spoke with, is determined to rebuild. When the winds died down, the clean-up began. He cut down the big trees and he had a plan to process the fruit into jam. She said, "it seemed to empower him as he faced something so devastating and unpredictable."

MCC is working with a local organization, the Christian Centre for Reflection and Dialogue, to provide emergency food and shelter for small scale farmers. I have visited this centre on past tours to Cuba. MCC is also working with the Brethren in Christ Church in Cuba to assist congregations. These projects will focus on repairing houses and supplying emergency food.

Klassen told the story of one farmer she met, whose story is a sign of hope and resilience. The farmer grew roses as his main source of income. Hurricane Irma flattened all of them. He described straightening the flowers one by one. He did this carefully and gently, because roses are gentle things. Klassen said, "I am always looking for those signs of resilience. MCC's mission is to support that hope."

4. Information about God: Information about God is not sufficient. We cannot enter into fellowship with information. The Psalmist David said, "When shall I see the face of God?" That is a statement of longing, of searching. We experience God through the person of Jesus Christ. Only in this way, can God reveal himself in the deepest sense, translating the values so that persons can understand God now.

Paul Schrag wrote an editorial titled "Honorable Protests" in the MWR. He said, "few protests are remembered for 500 years like Martin Luther's thesis in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. Luther typically gets the credit for setting in motion the forces of individual liberty that would shape Protestantism and shift the course of history. But it was the Anabaptist who extended Luther's religious rebellion to the political realm. Their faith and action called them to insist that the church and

state are separate. They refused to take up arms, have their babies baptized. It would take centuries for their radical ideas to go mainstream."

He continued, "The National Football League players this fall may be historic or fleeting, but they are part of an honourable tradition of dissenters who seek positive change and stand on the right side of history."

Before every NFL game since Sept 24 some form of protest took place on the sidelines. A small movement that began a year ago exploded after President Trump lambasted players who knelt during the National Anthem, making a statement on racial injustice. By using crude words to belittle them the president belittled free speech and multiplied the number of protesters.

The NFL players showed the power of peaceful protest to raise awareness of a moral cause - racial injustice. One's conscience might be stirred by violence, by war, terrorists, police brutality or graffiti on the side of a place of worship.

Paul Schrag wrote, "it was fitting that protests spread across the NFL while a history of the Vietnam War aired on PBS. It recounted the pivotal role in confronting National sin. It showed footage from 50 years ago when members of Bethel College joining people of Faith standing at the forefront of the anti-war movement."

Eric Reid wrote, "times and causes change, but the voice of conscience remains. My Faith moved me to take action.... I knew I needed to stand up for what is right."

We have had to ask each other for forgiveness and we try to put into practice the teaching of Jesus Christ which we call the Golden Rule: Treat the other person the way which you would wish to be treated. Since we love God and Jesus Christ, God's Spirit has given us the courage.

When we sin and come to God asking for forgiveness. God sets us free. By Christ's shed blood, he heals us, forgives our sins and delivers us from the bondage of evil and those who do evil against us.

Conclusion:

I remind us this morning that God is calling each of us as his children to follow in his way. When we say Yes to God, we choose to follow the way of Jesus. The scriptures remind us what that means. In John 21, Jesus asked Peter the question, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." A second time Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." A third time Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" Now Peter was becoming annoyed with Jesus asking a third time. He said, "Lord, you know everything." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

The sacred texts that we reflected on today reveal that God has a special concern for the most vulnerable and marginalized in a society and that God expects those who follow as his disciples to act on that concern. May God give us the courage to integrate our Faith into our daily lives. There are times when we are convicted that we have sinned against God and as the scriptures remind us, we need to admit our sin and God in his grace will forgive us.

Let us pray:

Dear God, thank you for the gift of salvation and for forgiving our sins. We pray not only for ourselves but also for those affected by the devastating storms in the Caribbean and the NFL players in their struggles. We pray that we, your children, might continue to encourage one another. Give us grace to welcome those who you may send within our midst. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may be strong for your service. Amen.