Connections 24 May 2020

**8 weeks**

We needed to go into the city for the first time since before the lockdown this week. I was reluctant to leave our warm quiet sanctuary – our place of safety – as Colin named it last week, but we had run out of printer ink so we headed out. I’d been warned by old Jock, a Scotsman who lives nearby and described himself as ‘just me and the cat’ when we talked recently, to expect it to be much busier and he was spot on.

I felt overwhelmed by the traffic and the rules and the number of people, although they were mostly friendly. Up until now we’d been ‘shopping local’ in Port Chalmers, although mostly I’d been waiting in the car and hoping John would be able to get all the items on the list. On a couple of occasions after we’d crossed the threshold to Level 3, I ventured inside but I felt very uncomfortable about keeping an accurate distance from other shoppers and I wondered what ‘pay wave’ might mean!

Over these past eight weeks as we’ve moved from late summer into late autumn we have discovered many unexpected blessings ranging from long phone calls with family, near and far, to long ranging conversations with each other, which have usually begun with ‘I’ve been thinking….”

We’ve seen sunsets, and light on the harbour and many more birds than usual in the treetops, on the harbour and in flocks.

We’ve enjoyed reading the Otago Daily Times over breakfast, listened to stories being read on National Radio, especially the latest, C. K. Stead’s ‘My Name Was Judas’read by Stuart Devenie, We’ve also watched some excellent movies on TV as well as some we could have done without! However, sadly, we’ve missed the ‘Listener’ arriving in the letter box on Tuesdays.

But most of all, we’ve appreciated the slower pace of life, and the stillness and peace of our new existence.

Looking back to the pilgrimage we made to Israel in 2007, I’m reminded of our peaceful time in Galilee when we walked along the lake shore, journeyed across the lake and sat on a grassy hillside in the sunshine. I wonder what it was like for the disciples at these times as they followed and listened, and thought about the future of their beloved ‘master’?

What we do know from reading the gospels is that Jesus frequently sought silence and solitude. Here are a few well known and loved verses:

“Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee…. ‘Come, follow me,’ he said.” (Mark 1:16)

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35) [Everyone was looking for Jesus, but after his time in prayer he told his disciples that it was time for them to move on to another village.]

“[Despite Jesus’ plea that his miracles be kept secret] the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:15-16; see also Mark 1:45)

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake.” (Mark 2:13)

 “Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed.” (Mark 3:7)

“Jesus went out to a mountain side to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him.” (Luke 6:12-13. See also Mark 3:13)

 “When Jesus heard [that John the Baptist had been beheaded], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.” (Matthew 14:13)

“Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” (Mark 6:31-32)

“After [Jesus] had dismissed [the crowds], he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was [still] there alone.” (Matthew 14:23; see also Mark 6:46)

 “Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?'” (Luke 9:18. See also Mark 8:27)

“Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.” (Matthew 15:29, ESV)

“Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.” (Mark 9:2)

“After his brothers had gone up to the feast, then [Jesus] also went up, not publicly but in private.” (John 7:10, ESV). [Jesus walked 90 miles from Galilee to Jerusalem, which gave him about *five days* in solitude.]

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.'” (Luke 11:1)

 “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.” (Mark 10:32.) [Apparently Jesus kept silent for most of the 22-mile hike. Luke says Jesus was “resolute” (9:51). He told them that he’d be tortured and killed in Jerusalem.]

“When [Jesus and his disciples] had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Mark 14:26). This was Jesus’ ‘usual place’ to pray when he was in Jerusalem. (Luke 22:39)

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.'” (Mark 14:3)

No doubt you will have your own favourites. Marcia Hardy