

**Sunday May 18, 2025
Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Meditation: “In, or Out”

I could hear him before I could see him as I rode up the escalator from the subway platform at the intersection of Yonge and Bloor. Like everyone else that morning, I was on my way somewhere; I was on my way to school. When he came into sight, I could see all of the other people on their way somewhere filing past him, eyes averted. It was nothing new. This is how people, wealthy people, you know, people with their homes and families and food in the refrigerator and spare change in their pockets; this is how people deal with the seemingly countless beggars in downtown Toronto: you turn a deaf ear, avoid eye contact at all cost, and keep walking right past. They are not part of you. They are not freshly bathed, clean shaven, nicely attired, have no work to go to. The wealthy are in, and the beggars are out.

Although it didn't say so in the scripture lesson, it is likely that Peter didn't just go up to Jerusalem because he thought it would be a good idea. Peter was likely summoned to Jerusalem for associating with Gentiles. The early church, and I hesitate to use the term church because it was still a sect of Judaism rather than a separate institution. The early church was much like the one we know, filled with people who held strong convictions about what was right and what was wrong. The early church was made up solely of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. A significant percentage of these believers were of the opinion that if you wanted to be a follower of Jesus that you first had to convert to Judaism and be circumcised. The church was for Jews and Jews only. They were the inside group. The Gentiles were outsiders, and the insiders ought to have nothing to do with the outsiders. Peter had broken the rule.

I was used to the regular crowd at the subway station by then, so all I had in my pocket was a subway token to get home, and a quarter to make an

emergency phone call. He didn't look like one of the regular throng of homeless who frequented the subway entrance. Right then and there I decided that I was neither in, nor out. Brazenly I broke the cardinal rule of downtown Toronto, I made eye contact. Even more, I spoke to him. He said that he had just been released from hospital that morning and needed some financial help to fill the prescription that had been given to him. But over the course of an hour at the station, his need had become a crisis. What had started out as a financial need had become an existential crisis. In over an hour, nobody, not one person in a steady stream of people, had even looked at him, let alone spoken to him. The prescription was forgotten, what he wondered was, did he, as a person, matter? Did his life matter? It had become clear to him that he was an outsider, having nothing in common with those who passed him by, merely observing them.

Peter told the circumcised believers that God had sent him to the Gentiles, indeed as he spoke to the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit fell upon them as it had come upon the face of the earth at creation, as it had come on Jesus at his baptism, as it had come on them at Pentecost. God turned everything upside down. The outsiders were not outsiders after all.

I didn't have any money to give to the man at the subway station, but that didn't matter to him. What mattered was that I had stopped and spoken to him and treated him with human dignity. I had turned the rules of Toronto upside down for a few minutes and it made a world of difference to one person.

It's not just who is in and who is out that God turned upside down in the scripture lesson. It's our thinking that God turned upside down. The very concept of who is in and who is out is a human construct, not a divine construct. I wonder, please tell me, you've lived here longer than I, surely you know, who are the outsiders in Dorchester and Thames Centre? Who are the insiders?

We live in a society ruled by fear and scarcity. We seem to think that we never have enough. We are constantly trying to keep up with, or even one-up the neighbours. Or we constantly worry about whether we will have enough money to see us through our lives. In the church there are some who fear that there is not enough. We have to take care of ourselves first, and others with whatever is left over after our needs are met. But conventional wisdom is upside down to God's wisdom. God has already blessed us with more than enough so that we can serve the world. That is what God called the church together to do. What we lack is vision, imagination, and courage.

We live in a society where gossip and bad news, conspiracy theories and complaint are what we focus on. Everyone knows bad news sells newspapers or makes for good gossip. We complain about every little thing. This too needs to be turned upside down. Why do we complain when there is so much to be thankful for? We have life. We have food, clothing and shelter. We have access to medical care. We have families, friends and community. I invite you to allow God to turn your thinking upside down. I invite you to engage in a little experiment for the next month. Before you go to bed each night, take a moment to list ten blessings of your day, and at the end of the month, let me know what happened.