

## Spirituality for Mission: Connecting in an Era of Disconnection

Thank you for this opportunity to be present with you in these challenging times for all – personally, nationally and internationally! The world of pandemic loss and grief that we have struggled with in the past several years has impacted every level of our understanding of who we are and who we are becoming in the vital relationships that we had been able to take for granted in pre-Covid times: our intra- and - inter- personal connections, with family, friends, with our communities and with God / Infinite Act of Understanding Love. Global and societal ruptures have relentlessly attacked the previously unquestioned certainties that have shaped our identity, personally and communally, over the decades of our lives.

This lecture discusses ways in which contemporary believers, seekers<sup>1</sup> or searchers experience and struggle with both “being lost” and “being found” in virulent times of isolation, despair and darkness. It focuses on the Ignatian understanding of “finding God in all things” and the experience of “being found by God” in all the diverse aspects of our efforts to live and love authentically. It addresses the importance of our ability to call on our imagination in such experiences and the discovery of resurrection faith-hope in the possible future, as well as the implications for a Mission Spirituality for our present world.

In sharp contrast to our present global, national and communal experience of bedrock loss and direction, is our communal gathering on this particular evening which is also a commemoration and recognition of BC’s well-loved biblical scholar, Fr. Dan Harrington SJ. In response to the question posed to him in the Jesuit Journal *America*, “**How can I find God?**” Dan responded by commenting that he found God “largely in and through the Bible.”<sup>2</sup> He commented that in his lifelong struggle with stuttering he found hope in and through the discovery that Moses also stuttered: “I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” (Ex.4:10)<sup>3</sup>

As a biblical scholar Dan took heart in God’s self-revelation to Moses. He described his lifelong experience that the “word of God” continued to come to new life in him. “God and I

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Haight, 2016, xii. “the term ‘seekers’ refers to people who may or may not have a comprehensive framework for understanding human existence but are looking for deeper meaning in their lives.”

<sup>2</sup> “How Can I Find God? Another Look. *America*, August 30, pp.11-13.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Harrington, “How Can I Find God: Another Look” *America*, August 30, 1997, 13

will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” (Exodus 4:11-12) This was how Dan “found God” throughout his life. He found God in the daily reality of his personal, professional and relational life.

In reflecting on Dan’s response and drawing on our own experiences of finding God, it is clear that we find God, or rather God, ‘Infinite Act of Understanding Love’, enables us to find ourselves. In what ways, familiar and unfamiliar do we find God in our personal, communal and ecclesial lives?

### **PART ONE: RADICAL DISCONNECTEDNESS: THE JESUS MOVEMENT:**

As Holy Week approaches, we reflect on the liturgical celebrations that draw us through the suffering and death of Jesus toward the high point of Easter: Resurrection. It is not easy for today’s believers to imagine the experience of those first disciples of Jesus on that day of Jesus’ torture and execution. What shock, despair and radical hopelessness they must have experienced as they tried to come to terms with the violent death of their leader! In their reaction to the shock of Jesus’ suffering and death they experienced not only the loss of leader and friend but of all that they had grown to hope for, both for themselves and their future in their companionship with him. They had no means of dealing with the horror of his death, the collapse of their dreams, or their lost aspirations for a different future for themselves. Their hopes and expectations along with the rivalries that had developed in their period of discipleship were shattered in this new reality of failure, loss and despair with which they were being confronted. Who were they now, bereft of belief in Jesus their leader and in themselves?

#### **We had hoped!! The Emmaus Experience**

The story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus was related by Luke, the teacher. (Lk.24:13-35) As they walked, they discussed what they had seen and the consequences for themselves and their future. Their experience of devastating loss, and of the confounding ignorance of the Stranger who had joined them, surfaced in their meeting and conversation. The Stranger listened and questioned their desolation and sadness as they walked. “We had hoped!” In his presence and attentiveness to their pain and in his questioning, the disciples began to reflect on and refocus their experience.

The Risen Christ's teaching and breaking of the bread at the table with the disciples both confounded them and drew them towards a new level of understanding. In his presence they found a new hope and purpose beginning to awaken them to what was surely an impossible experience. The transformation of the other disciples who had remained together was also taking new life.<sup>4</sup> These were the disciples who had chosen to join Jesus and become his followers.

During his ministry Jesus gathered disciples who were gradually initiated into his ways of preaching the rule of God by their lives together. On their return from Emmaus, the two disciples were shocked to discover that the community to which they returned had also heard and were confounded by stories of Jesus' appearance. It was this larger group of disciples continue a Jesus movement after Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

The subsequent communal conversations led the disciples to discover the new story that was to become their story – their Easter experience.

### **“Who did we think we were? Who are we now?”**

The disciples had no past personal experience to draw on that might help them to make sense of what they had seen or heard. Nor did they have the capacity to understand the apparition stories they were hearing. This new reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that was confronting them was beyond belief or comprehension. Their own human experience and their rational capacity to integrate these shocking new stories contradicted reason and opposed everything that they had seen with their own eyes on that dreadful day. Despair and hope fluctuated in the disciples' sharing of stories. “Who are we now?”?

### **The Jesus Movement**

In and through the subsequent telling and retelling of their shared experiences, the disciples began to deepen their understanding of Jesus' appearances in their midst. It was the sharing of stories that enabled Jesus' disciples and followers to leave behind their shattered hopes and to open themselves to a new personal and communal experience of believing, hoping and loving that was beginning to come to life in them. Gradually both these personal and

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<sup>4</sup> Haight, 67, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Haight, 67, 2016

communal stories and experiences of the followers of the Risen Jesus led to the growth of the Jesus Movement. The sharing of their stories of life with Jesus eventually took shape in the Gospels. “Today we know that the Gospels were constructed later from memories of Jesus. The stories of the Gospels also reflect the later experience of the communities in which they were composed.”<sup>6</sup> In the personal and communal re-visioning and reworking of their stories, a new level of understanding and appreciation of life itself was taking shape: its purpose and destiny and the beginning of an ecclesial community.

### THE EASTER EXPERIENCE OF THE DISCIPLES

Haight distinguishes between Resurrection – as an object of faith and hope - and the “Easter Experience” of the post-resurrection disciples that Jesus was “alive with God.”<sup>7</sup> After the crucifixion, the pain of the disciples’ loss and their hopes for their own past, present and future relationship with Jesus had been destroyed. It was their experience as Jesus’ followers that had previously given purpose and connection to their lives. What could they possibly hope for after all that they had seen and heard? Why would they stay together any longer? Was there any sense of purpose for them? How could they sustain any sense of mission? Yet a sense of mission was integral to and a gradual consequence of the disciples’ “Easter experience”.

### THE RESURRECTION

The devastating loss and the gradual awakening of the disciples to the reality of the presence of Jesus in his appearances, in his teachings, in the blessing and the breaking of bread. The understanding of Jesus’ new life came gradually. Luke tells the story in two stages: the first is Jesus’ resurrection to a transformed kind of spiritual bodily existence on earth and the second is his description of Jesus’ departure from this world and journey into heaven – the Ascension.<sup>8</sup>

A commitment to Jesus as representative of human existence and revelation of ultimate reality makes his resurrection a promise of the resurrection of all human beings and thus the

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<sup>6</sup> Haight, 2016, 63,

<sup>7</sup> Haight, 2012, 246

<sup>8</sup> Haight, 2012, 250-251

guarantor of an ultimate value to human life itself. The existential meaning or significance of resurrection reaches out and embraces all of human existence. Accepting this understanding gives life “an inestimable depth and consequence, nothing less than holy mystery.”<sup>9</sup> In face of this our ‘routine’ human lives can no longer be considered as ordinary. Although the Christian church affirms the significance of the Resurrection in the Creed, it is not a simple concept to grasp in the contemporary world of empirical research. “For many Christians, even those who joyfully sing ‘Alleluia’ on Easter, the Resurrection of Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel is simply too good to be true... The music may enable the mind to take over the subject of the music, even in its invitation to transcendence.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus’ disciples recognised that Jesus was living with a new fullness of life (John 10:10) that validated his ministry of the Rule of God, and his teaching. To accept the resurrection of Jesus is to accept the invitation to transform one’s understanding of what it means to be an embodied self in the everyday experience of living, loving and in the openness to the diverse levels of reality in which we live our own narrative. Resurrection confirms the very revelation of God that Jesus’ ministry mediated. “You are my beloved Son with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3: 22) Jesus’ resurrection means that God’s concern for all human life reaches through and beyond death itself, to all human beings. This means that the significance of Jesus’ life extends far beyond being simply an exemplary human life: Jesus defines the character of human reality.<sup>11</sup>

The Christian understanding of Salvation for all consists in the one activity of God, a power of creation that manifests itself in three “times”: in the beginning, as the grounding creative power of being itself; in the present, as the power of Spirit that embraces the human person and enables the freedom to transcend the self and for the community; and in the absolute future, as the omega point in whom all things will be made whole. We are still being drawn into the personal and communal possible as well as the unimaginable in our own personal, communal and ecclesial efforts to live authentically.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Haight 2012, 252

<sup>10</sup> Schneiders, 2013, 89. “Any relationship with Jesus is in reality imaginative memory or even pious make-believe.”

<sup>11</sup> Haight 2012, 253

<sup>12</sup> Haight 2014, 148

The assurance of eternal life, in reality, can only take place after death. This is the promise that the liturgical celebrations of Passiontide and the Easter Season affirm. Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead. This is the time of the Church year in which the invitation is offered, not only to Christian believers, but also to “seekers and searchers,” to take account of the “life, suffering and death experiences” that have had an impact on them, or those they love in the past year or more. Each person celebrates the familiar and affirming aspects of their lives, while in times of suffering and disillusion, they also struggle to live their lives forward in resurrection faith-hope.

The Easter season invites us to reassess and reorient our past and present reality into a Resurrection faith-hope filled future. To return to our original question, “How do I find God?” Surely it is in our readiness to be open to the diverse ways in which we, through new and unfamiliar experiences, move beyond our routine hopes and plans for ourselves. How do we find God in the unexpected happenings in our lives? Ignatius of Loyola, drawing on his own life experience reminds us that we can find God in all things.

## **PART TWO: A CALL TO SERVICE: FINDING GOD IN ALL THINGS: IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**

How do we make sense of our lives when we are aware of the sufferings of so many people and the disruption of their families and communities in the pandemic, and now when the possibility of another world war confronts us? Is this a situation in which the invitation of Ignatius of Loyola to “find God in all things” is not only realistic but may also have salvific consequences? We are aware that Ignatius of Loyola himself found God in all things: that is in his personal commitment to authentic living and loving that took shape in apostolic service, not only in his own life, but in the lives of his followers and in the world in which they served.

How did Ignatius come to the lifelong affirmation of the significance of the experience of “finding God in all things?” The young Ignatius, son of a noble Basque family had his life mapped out for himself from his early years.<sup>13</sup> A proud servant of his Lord, his future was to

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<sup>13</sup> Haight, 2016, 12. Ignatius “played the roles of Spanish courtier, royal fixer, convert to pilgrim and seeker, Parisian student, leader of a band of ordained ministers, founder and first administrator of the Jesuits in Rome, and finally, author of their Constitutions.”

be one of service of his Spanish King. When the French invaded the Spanish garrison in the city of Pamplona, Ignatius, “foremost among the defenders” was seriously wounded in the legs by a cannonball.<sup>14</sup> The crisis point for Ignatius was the radical change that resulted from his battle wound. In his *Autobiography* Ignatius describes his early self as “a youthful courtier, a swaggering caballero, and a soldier in the service of the Spanish king.”<sup>15</sup>

During his protracted period of recovery, he read all the books that were available to him, eventually moving from chivalrous romances to *The Life of Christ* and a collection of saints’ lives *The Golden Legend*.<sup>16</sup> The transformation of Ignatius took place during the reading of these books. “He was torn between two romantic ideals and (began) “to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him... He finally resolved to forsake his worldly desires and ambitions and to do great deeds like the saints for the love of God.”<sup>17</sup>

With the shattering of his dream for his future, came the opening up to a life of deep connection with God. The shattering of his legs along with his broken dreams meant that Ignatius found himself drawn to follow a radically new way of living, praying, of deep connection and of loving service of his Lord. The devastating loss of his planned identity of service led him along an unfamiliar and unprogrammed path. Consequently, he discovered an entirely uncharted future of understanding the meaning of *service*. He gave up his ambitions and position of privilege to become a penitent, pilgrim and founder of a new form of apostolic religious life.<sup>18</sup>

Ignatius’ commitment to find God in all things stemmed from his ability to engage with, to accept and to integrate his diverse life experiences as they took shape in the planned and unplanned aspects of his life. It was this radical openness to the call of Jesus in his own inner reality, as well as in the created world that he found God. He had a particular experience on the bank of the Cardoner River where he received a broader and deeper understanding of his faith and vocation.<sup>19</sup> “The eyes of his understanding began to be opened; not that he saw any

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<sup>14</sup> The *Autobiography*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> The *Autobiography* of St. Ignatius Loyola. P.4.

<sup>16</sup> Egan, “The Lives of the Saints”, by Jacopo da Voragine and “The Life of Christ” by Ludolf of Saxony.

<sup>17</sup> Haight, 2016, 5

<sup>18</sup> Ignatius’ apostolically active way of life was in contrast to the established monastic communities of Dominic and Francis at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Haight

vision, but he understood and learnt many things, both spiritual matters and matters of faith and scholarship, and this with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him.”<sup>20</sup> The *Exercises* which he wrote were the fruit of his personal experiences at Manresa.<sup>21</sup> Apostolic service continued to have a great significance for Ignatius and his followers in the early years of the Society and it continued to be developed as an authentic way of enabling followers to both connect and collaborate with God.

The gospel foundation of *The Spiritual Exercises* means that they have an inclusive rather than divisive potential. In nurturing a “common ecclesial spirituality” they have an appeal to all Christians.<sup>22</sup> The *Exercises* “consist in meditations and contemplations of the stories of Jesus’ ministry that are found in the Gospels.” They are “ecumenically inclusive, non-denominational, pre-theological and universally applicable... and capable of nurturing a common ecclesial spirituality.” It was in and through this understanding of radical connectedness that Ignatius was able to develop his foundational principle for a narrative spirituality that includes the story of each person, their way of serving God and their world. It is also valuable for effective communication and communion in prayer and spiritual companionship.

It is through the integration of Ignatius’ experiences and his power of imagination, that the doctrine of creation becomes a cosmic principle and framework in the *Spiritual Exercises* for God’s continuing dialogue with all of humanity. Particularly, creation provides the foundations for personal, communal and global connectedness. In his integration of creation Ignatius is enabled to formulate the seminal principle of “finding God in all things,” a formula that weds contemplative contact with God and with everyday behaviour in the secular world. “One who appropriates this creation theology into his or her life becomes “a contemplative in action.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Haight, 2016, 12-14. Haight describes the story of the construction of the *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatius’ conversion and mystical experiences in detail.

<sup>21</sup> Haight, 2012, 9. “Ignatius stayed at Manresa for eleven months leading an ascetic and prayerful life.”

<sup>22</sup> Haight, 2014, 151.

<sup>23</sup> Haight, 2016, 51ff.

The Ignatian foundations of service are consistently significant because service is seen as an authentic way of both responding to and collaborating with God. Those who are called to serve are most united to Christ when their actions issue forth from “a pure intention of the divine service.”<sup>24</sup> Ignatius encouraged his followers to emphasise the “more” the comparative *magis*, in their ministry.<sup>25</sup> However, this was not intended to inspire ministers to strain beyond their human limitations, but to open them to a greater awareness of their availability to collaborate with Christ. Over the centuries, the foundational commitment to mission and the focus of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* enables seekers, searchers and followers from all walks of life and with a wide span of service, to find God, the Creator, Son and Holy Spirit in and through the living reality of their lives.

### **PART THREE: SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSION**

Jesus’ resurrection includes the idea of an understanding of spirituality for mission, “of sending and being sent.”<sup>26</sup> All Christians are called to exercise mission by the testimony of their lives: “To live a Christian life after the pattern of Jesus is to give witness to others by their lives.”<sup>27</sup> The community of the People of God is called to service. “The whole purpose of the church is to serve and nurture the lives of people who want to relate to God by following the teaching and pattern of Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> The “rule of God” that was mediated by Jesus carried the expectation that through time his followers experiencing their own commitment to this rule and that they would continue to promulgate God’s values and general intention for human existence in the world as it was taking shape over the millennia..

Haight affirms that “The symbol of mission represents a spirituality that envelops the whole Jesus movement, and that spirituality was the power that moved it towards becoming a Church.”<sup>29</sup> A contemporary ecclesial spirituality essentially should still have its foundations in

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<sup>24</sup> Au, Wilkie “Ignatian Service: Gratitude, Love and Service”, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 40/2 Summer 2008, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Au, 2008. *ibid.* Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, then superior general of the Society of Jesus, noted that Ignatius possesses “a certain preference for comparative adverbs: the whole corpus of Ignatian spirituality seems to be summed up in the ‘greater,’ the *más/magis*.”

<sup>26</sup> Haight, 2014, 153

<sup>27</sup> Haight, 2014, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Haight, 2014, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Haight 2016, 156.

a following of Jesus. But this is not presently the case. The central place of Resurrection and Mission has been lost in the “historical fragmentation of the Christian churches.”<sup>30</sup> The consequential “shock waves” of this fundamental loss are still being experienced in ecclesial communities today because “a sense of mission was part of the Easter experience itself.”<sup>31</sup>

It is in the understanding of its foundation in mission that the community of church is functional, in service to others, to the community and to the world it serves. Haight comments that the Christian church is necessary but this or that form is not; from the beginning and during its whole history it has been changing and existing in many different forms. Four essential elements for an authentic Christian ecclesial spirituality are proposed. The first is that of mission.<sup>32</sup> The second is the idea of the Spirit of God which reflects the trinitarian character of Christian language about God’s relationship with human beings”<sup>33</sup> The third is “the relation between a sense of mission and the nature of the church.”<sup>34</sup> In the present era, the logic of Christian spirituality and, from the Christian viewpoint, the conviction that other religions are driven by an equally authentic spiritual experience. The fourth idea raises the issue of ecclesial spirituality, “Something that could help bind the churches together in a way that preserves particular traditions.”<sup>35</sup> A non-competitive view of the religions and of the notion of dialogue as the main quality of the active relationships between religions is fundamental to such an ecclesial spirituality.

For Christians there is the need for a rigorous theology of non-competitiveness among the religions, certainly between Christianity and the other religions. For this to take place the rule of civil discourse in a pluralistic society must be applied. To engage in missionary activity today is to collaborate on the basis of spiritual respect for other religions through encounter and through dialogue. To speak of the church’s mission in our contemporary world is to be prepared to enter into authentic dialogue with both the world of secular life as well as with other religions. For such engagement each perspective must be respectful of the position of

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<sup>30</sup> Haight, 2014, 151

<sup>31</sup> Haight, 2014, 152.

<sup>32</sup> Haight 2014, 152

<sup>33</sup> Haight, 2014, 152

<sup>34</sup> Haight, 2014, 152

<sup>35</sup> Haight, 2014, 152

other. The importance today of recognising and reconnecting with the life of the church during the early centuries is crucial in the present world of division and disconnectedness. It is a mandate for authentic contemporary witness to the foundational mission of Jesus: “We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

Where do we find hope, resurrection faith-hope opening up to new dimensions of authentic living and loving in our personal, communal and ecclesial lives? “Christian faith-hope refers to the fundamental openness of the human spirit. It is directed towards the future in the present. The power of the Spirit of God is active in the world, contributing to the reign of love in the world and giving “freedom an ultimate and absolute value.”<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

The opening of this lecture drew on Dan Harrington’s response to the question of where he found God in his life. Dan’s response was that he found God in and through the Bible, his own personal and professional ministry. In and through his Jesuit identity and ministry not only did he find God, but God enabled him to find his authentic self as it took shape throughout his life and ministry.

In the pre-pandemic period, as believers, seekers and searchers “Who did we think we were?” As we presently re-vision our personal, communal and ecclesial understanding in light of the relational and institutional gains and losses, the breakdowns and the lockdowns, the questions, “Who are we now?” “Whose are we now?” continue to surface. As we draw our thoughts together in this gathering, we might affirm that the question posed to Dan is surely also our question and response in our own personal and communal contexts:

- Where do we find God, Infinite Act of Understanding Love, in the day by day routine and unexpected experiences in the unravelling of our lives?
- Where does God / Love enable us to find our authentic selves as we live our lives of **resurrection faith/hope/** in and through our living “yes” to the Holy Mystery of our relational God, Father, Son and Spirit as revealed in and through the life of Jesus and our own lives?

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<sup>36</sup> Pope Francis, “A Big Heart Open to God,” 28. Quoted in Haight 2016, 156.

<sup>37</sup> Haight, 2014, 185.

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