

September 27, 2020

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



Reading: Proverbs 22:1,2,8,9,22,23, James 2:1-8, 14-17

The Message: “Soul-Fit”

[Video](#)

One of the things I learned in the first 8 weeks of this pandemic is what happens when I have no reason to move.



I used to bike everyday when I ministered in Oakville. Often I managed to keep riding until January and started up again in March. I have a selfie of myself coming home from church on a Sunday

and I walked home from a funeral home 4km in a blizzard. I could walk or bike to church and to many of my parishioners' homes.

But this pandemic ... It wasn't until Erin Furlong started offering Essentrics online, the exercise class she offered at both campuses of our church, that I was able to get back into the swing of keeping my body fit.

The author of this week's NYT Canada letter, a cyclist reporter, notes that the emphasis on cycling during the pandemic has been reflected in a change in clothing. He notes that in Ottawa, people in actual normal clothing have been seen cycling. When I was cycling around Oakville, making pastoral calls, or going to the cemetery, I guess I looked pretty strange with my work clothes on and my briefcase in my basket.

It would be interesting to know whether this time of Isolation has changed how people address soul fitness.

When I biked to church, I was on my way to help people to get fit spiritually, to provide resources to develop resilience to withstand crisis, loss.

I am in this virtual space, and perhaps you are here as well, to get soul-fit. We are looking for spiritual resiliency, emotional endurance perhaps with an energy and commitment that compares to the cyclists who finally finished the Tour de France last week.

And the scriptures give us examples of what we need to get our souls in excellent shape.

The Book of Proverbs, an example of biblical wisdom literature, contains little bits of advice that are gathered together.

Sometimes when I'm meeting with families to plan a funeral, they bring along bits of paper with sayings on them, wise words that have inspired their loved one and are so comforting to those who grieve as they remember. The teachings in Proverbs are wise words like that. Sayings that raise questions of values, moral behaviour and the meaning of life.

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.
Good deeds are better than silver or gold.
Whoever sows injustice will find calamity as their harvest.
Whoever shares bread with the poor will enjoy a harvest of blessing.

Words to live life by -- and in doing so, you are exercising your spiritual muscles.

The Letter of James is also considered wisdom literature. The author is also concerned with teaching us how to patiently persevere during times of difficulty by living according to what we have learned from Christ. We can be truly mature in our faith by living what we say we believe. Living godly and prayerful lives is the author's desire for us.

Soul fitness is a way to encounter God, to honour God in everyday life

What does it look like to be soul-fit this year? How can we continue to become spiritually fit as individuals? I commend both Proverbs and James to you as good books to read right now. Wise words for our time. But hard to live out as individuals especially right now.

You will notice that they both repeat instructions to care for the poor. If we are to be fit spiritually, it seems we need to find creative ways to be an active part of a spiritual community that has a concern for the poor. We can't really do that on our own.

You are doing that by joining with us in virtual worship. Perhaps you haven't been a regular part of a worshipping community before. Perhaps you never missed a Sunday. We work hard to bring worship to you because we believe that it is essential for you to engage with scripture, to think about the wisdom scripture offers, and to express that in prayer and the music of the faithful.

But how, you ask, is that expressing a concern for the welfare of others? Well, I hope that you have found a way to support your church financially during this time. Your offering allows us to support our ministry to the community and the world. A tangible way of expressing concern for others both within our community and beyond, taking care of brother or sister, the entire community. It touches my heart that our givings to The Compass, our local mission to the poor, are up even though our offerings to the church and to our national and international mission and service fund are significantly down. Perhaps you can exercise your spiritual muscles this week by spreading the wings of your generosity.

Spiritual fitness matters to God; so we should be paying attention.

James writes, "Abraham's faith was brought to completion by works ."

Faith isn't complete unless you can see it.

What does it look like for you to be faithful? It looks different at different times of your life. You have exercised different spiritual muscles -- practised your faith in different ways.

There isn't just one way for you to move forward.
Sometimes faith will look like
patient waiting,
the fierceness of a parent's protectiveness,
plodding on,
praying with words or praying with action

The wisdom of the Bible invites people to experience faith in different ways. Right now there seem to be fewer choices but greater needs. I pray that you can grow in faith by being connected to Christ First.