

Christian Perspectives: Love of Neighbour

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Summer has gone. The fall is upon us with all its business.

Kids and grandkids are back at school/university. Our churches are in the planning stages for the Christmas bazaar, a church supper, a rummage sale. Can we find teachers for the Sunday school?

Many in our area still put up fruit and vegetables from the garden for the winter. Then the gardens need putting to bed with nourishment for next year's growing season. Before we know it, it will be time to check out the snow blower and make sure it's in good working order.

Wow, yes, fall can be a busy time!

We are once again back into our routine with all that entails. Gone are the lazy hazy days of summer.

I am fortunate that I spend much of my summer at a cottage on Georgian Bay. That's when things slow down and I have time for reading. I am not looking for escape books but rather searching for a book that will offer some insight, some thought provoking challenges, in the context of where God is calling us today.

We seem surrounded by terrorist attacks, wars, millions of refugees seeking a safe haven. South of the boarder, we hear ideas such as a wall to be built to keep out illegal immigrants who are seeking a life, an immigration system to keep out Muslims; the United Kingdom draws back from the European Union. It wishes to close its doors to refugees coming in from Europe.

Early this spring, I heard Rabbi Jonathan Sacks speaking on the CBC program 'Tapestry' about his book, 'Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence.' As he spoke, I heard him say that it is not our job [as the three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we all believe in the one God] to convert, conquer or enforce our faith on others but rather live as a blessing to others. No simple task but these words were enough to send me out for his book to be my summer read and I wasn't disappointed.

It was a challenging read and, for me, needed time to absorb.

What I took away from it was that we are called to see all as our neighbors not just those who look like us, think like us, share the same beliefs, have the same values.

Prior to moving to the Mono area I worked in a community in Toronto where 90 different languages were spoken. There were different cultures and different beliefs. At first, there were challenges because of the differences, but once people began to relate to one and other as parents and neighbors, the barriers began to be broken down and trust started to build.

Multiculturalism is fairly new to this part of Ontario. We have indigenous peoples, we have immigrants and new Canadians and Canadian-born like me, all within our local community but still we are not the mixed cultural group that I would see, say on the Toronto subway.

I think here in this part of Ontario we are in a period of transition which offers both new opportunities and challenges.

In the gospel of Mark, we hear the words from Jesus 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your

God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.?

The second is this, ?You shall love your neighbor as yourself.?

And I would add that the way to love God is to love your neighbor as you love self. There is no such thing as loving God but hating your neighbor whether your neighbor is next door, or half way around the world. This is not an easy thing to do, it can be a tremendous struggle, a life time work as people of faith. Perhaps it is a life time of work to know what exactly it means to love even one's self.

This summer I was taken on a journey by a Rabbi. He took me into a world of ?Bad Faith,? then into a world of ?Siblings? in Genesis, and finally through the door to ?The Open Heart.? What a gift and privilege to have spent my summer with Jonathan Sacks.

The closing sentence of his book has left me with a gift and a challenge and within this troubled world may it be as gift and challenge for you.

Today God is calling us, Jew, Christian and Muslim to let go of hate and the preaching of hate, and live at last as brothers and sisters, true to our faith and a blessing to others regardless of their faith, honouring God's name by honouring God's image, humankind.