

*“To love someone is to show to them their beauty, their worth and their importance.”*  
— Jean Vanier

Dearly Beloveds:

I hope this letter finds you safe and dry on your ark! This rain has been relentless and yet, ultimately, refreshing!

I have been thinking a lot recently about the recent deaths of two people who contributed, from a distance, to my own formation and prayer life. Jean Vanier and Rachel Held Evans died, one old and one tragically young. Jean Vanier gave up fame and fortune to open a home and then over 150 communities to welcome and nurture mentally challenged adults. These are known as L’Arche communities, meaning the ark! Rachel Held Evans was a theologian and writer who rejected an evangelical ultra conservative upbringing to embrace a God who loves ALL. She was known for beautiful prose which explained and presented an inclusive merciful and gracious God.

I came to know Jean Vanier through my study of Henri Nouwen who gave up his academic comfortable life in favor of accepting a call to be the chaplain at one of the first L’Arche communities in Canada. I then found myself not only drawn to the stories of these communities, to the people, to their joy, but also to Jean Vanier’s writing about identity and community formation. I offer here a few snippets of his wisdom:

*“We are not called by God to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”*

*“Love doesn’t mean doing extraordinary or heroic things. It means knowing how to do ordinary things with tenderness.”*

*“It is only when we stand up, with all our failings and sufferings, and try to support others rather than withdraw into ourselves, that we can fully live the life of community.”*

*“But let us not put our sights too high. We do not have to be saviours of the world! We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and in hope, called together to change our world one heart at a time.”*

*“A growing community must integrate three elements: a life of silent prayer, a life of service and above all of listening to the poor, and a community life through which all its members can grow in their own gift.”*

Imagine if we were to inhabit these principles which align with those which Jesus taught. Imagine if we were to continue to create the beloved community by loving each other so truly and joyfully as to radiate that love to all we meet.

Imagine if we were to return again and again to the simple truths which bind us: to sing and worship and care and pray and rejoice and grieve...together!

It seems to me that what Vanier said about L’Arche is translatable to Christ Church Episcopal: “The heart of L’Arche is to rejoice and to celebrate unity. We would like to be little signs of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of love.”

May we be the signs of resurrection life afloat and adrift on our metaphorical arks, welcoming all aboard!

Blessings to you this day, *Martha*

