

Reflection by **Nancy C. Townley**

*Nancy C. Townley is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church.*

I love to swim through waters that are clean and clear. I appreciate being able to see very quickly what is below me and a vision of my destination. I love clear waters! But there are murky waters – where you cannot see what is beneath you and your destination is obscured by various floating bits that get in the way.

Today's Gospel lesson was like that for me. It's been quite a week and I was hoping for a lovely clear passage of Scripture, easily identified and leading me toward Christ and his mission for each of us – but that was not to be. So much information in these passages. So I began by prayer – I admit that I always begin with prayer because I need all the help I can get. I often try to tell God what I want God to reveal to me. This time was different – I stopped talking and just sat quietly. I have no idea how long I sat, but I know that in that time, God opened the scriptures to me in a loving and gentle way.

This scripture is about courage and confidence in God's abiding mercy and love. In the core of this Gospel passage, Jesus reminds the disciples that what they have heard whispered in the dark of their fear – the love, the empowerment, the redemption – they are to proclaim in the light of the new day! Don't be afraid, he said. Keep focused on God and remember that God is always with you. Be faithful to God's word – that word is love; the kind of love that lifts people from lives of despair into abundant life of joy and peace; love that reconciles and redeems; love that is willing to go the extra measure for the sake of someone else. That's what it's all about. This love that Jesus brought is not little cherubs and pink hearts! It is powerful! It is mighty! It flashes in the sunlight and echoes from the rooftops.

Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Nothing is ever simple – we have to let go of our demands and quietly place our lives in Christ Jesus who came to reveal God's awesome, abundant, eternal love for us – love that surpasses our understanding. There's an interesting word "Understanding" – we know that some people will get it – get why we are able to move through trials, because of the presence of God – there are others who won't get it – it won't make any sense to them, they might employ the attitude of "it's all up to me, no one is going to help, definitely not this God who claims to love us. If God does love us, then

why do bad things happen?" You've heard those phrases most likely – but they are going to be saved for another time, another sermon.

Meanwhile, do not fear! God's power and love is stronger than any force – it moves beyond the bounds of death and destruction – it shines in the light and provides guidance and shelter during the storms. And it is a free gift for you. How about that! You came to church and you are leaving with a FREE GIFT! Not many people can say that. God's love is freely given – no strings attached – its God's to give and yours to receive. So turn your hearts in quiet to God who is waiting for you – waiting to hear your fears and your joys; waiting to hear your concerns and your celebrations. Come to the God of mercy, justice and love. Come, God is waiting.....