

Dear Friends

I received many gifts from Bob Galston, the minister with whom I worked when I came to Charleswood 26 years ago. One of the things I inherited from him when he retired was the Thursday morning Bible Study, Seekers. Over the years Seekers has been an ever-changing collection of wonderfully inquisitive people who meet for 90 minutes once a week for fellowship, prayer, and far-ranging discussions that spring forth from whichever book of the Bible we happen to be reading. The constant thread on Thursday mornings, dating back to when Bob started Seekers in the 1980s, comes at the end of our time together. Every week, when we are ready to depart, we stand in a circle and hold hands and together recite "The Mizpah", a benediction of sorts from Genesis 31:49. Perhaps you have heard it here or elsewhere:

*May the Lord watch between me and thee, while we are absent, one from the other. Amen.*

*While we are absent, one from the other...* In our fifth month of being unable to gather together, safely and as a whole, it is almost inevitable that we are conscious of absence. The prospects of return don't even seem to offer as much promise as we would like. You can pass the peace but you can't shake a hand. You can be in the same room but a mask will hide your smile. You can listen to music but you cannot sing along. Restrictions are never fun (remember being a teenager?) but being restricted in the essentials of what makes us an embodied, incarnate, physical, animated, en-fleshed, community of faith creates an absence that cannot easily be filled.

*May the Lord watch between me and thee...* But before "the Mizpah" (a Hebrew word which means 'watchtower') makes reference to absence it speaks of presence. We may be absent one from the other but we are not alone. The presence of God ensures this. The presence of God connects us. The presence of God unites us.

The prayer that is "The Mizpah" says that God fills the space between us. Christian community, as dear and meaningful as it is to us, does not create the presence of God between and among God's people. It celebrates it.

Grace and peace,

Michael

P.S. Produce from The Healing Farm (our partnership with Operation Ezra and the Yazidi Refugee community) is beginning to ripen. And that means it is time for another Farmers Market, where goods from the project, sold by members of the Yazidi community, are available to members of Charleswood. Unlike last year, we won't be able to do this on a Sunday during church. However, it is going to be in our parking lot on a Sunday morning nonetheless. So please mark your calendars.

**YAZIDI FARMERS MARKET  
Charleswood United Church  
4820 Roblin Blvd.  
SUNDAY, AUGUST 9/20  
9:00 am to 12 noon**