

Talking Back / Speaking Truth to Power: A sermon following the Charlottesville Conflicts and on the occasion of the first Kamloops PRIDE Parade  
St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC  
The Very Rev. Ken Gray  
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Travelling on a bus from Sooke to Victoria sometime in 1992 I was invited to join some sort of white supremacist organization. A well dressed, sharp looking young man with short hair and an intense quiet demeanor drew me into conversation about "people who were taking things away from people like you and me." When the shock dissipated, I said I wasn't interested and found another seat.

Global citizens including Canadians are revolted at what happened in Charlottesville last weekend. We probably say to ourselves that such things cannot happen om Canada. But they can, and do, in Alberta, Southern Ontario, and possibly closer to home. Melanie Delva is the new Reconciliation Animator for our national church. To those who suggest Canada is immune from extreme racism she says this:

Canadian friends: make no mistake - we have a racial violence problem in Canada as well. It may not look like flaming torches in the night or cars ramming into protesters, but it's alive and well. It looks like an Indigenous woman being killed by a trailer hitch hurled from a car. It looks like Inuit villages flooding and traditional food security disappearing because of climate change. It looks like bodies being pulled out of the river in Thunder Bay and the Canadian public looking the other way . . . It's happening here.

Oppression and violence are not limited to racial conflict. We gather today on the occasion of the first KAMLOOPS PRIDE parade. We gather today fourteen months after the Orlando Nightclub Massacre in June 12, 2016.

Stepping back in time, the ancient world had its own racial and cultural challenges, though to us they seem muted by distance and time. Even in the Christian Gospels, and in today's selection from Matthew, such tendencies appear, first in the voice and motivation of Jesus' disciples. In the region of Tyre and Sidon, an area of mixed racial composition, Jesus is heckled by a woman identified as Syrophenician. She embodies the tension around the place of gentiles in the early Jesus movement. Based on her ancestry and location, as they might say in medical circles, she is refused treatment.

And his disciples came and urged (Jesus) saying, "Send (this woman) away, for she keeps shouting after us." (Jesus) answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

We find here a voice of Jesus which is repugnant, and unbelievable in the One we know as Saviour and Reconciler of all. And then comes the surprise - she pushes back, hard, on behalf of her daughter, and speaks truth to Jesus from her powerless position. Paulo Freire encourages those who are oppressed to speak out and speak up. He taught his our poor to read and write and speak and complain and demand justice. They, and she, do just that.

She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Wow. What a line! Now if we are traditional anglicans we know these words well:

We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy table . . . But Thou are the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy . . .

Whoops, what's going on here . . . Where's the mercy?! Jesus . . . is either caught short and changes his mind . . . Or the whole episode is making a point through ironic hyperbole. The point is that all are indeed welcome, at last, and the woman's daughter is healing, remotely and immediately, all through faith. There's the good and great news.

Last week I spent time with the composer and hymn writer Marty Haugen whose song *All Are Welcome* we sing today. He has had more complaints about this text, from all sides, than any other composition. It seems people really have trouble welcoming *all people*.

Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.

In light of Charlottesville, and Orlando, and the recent criticism by Mr. Justice Murray Sinclair, of those who dispute the damage caused by the doctrine of Discovery, who claim that indigenous inhabitants were so scarce, I feel the need to speak more clearly; and I don't think I am alone.

When Kathie and I were in Halifax recently we passed the park where a group gathered to remove the statue of Edward Cornwallis. You might think that I wanted to wade into the crowd and raise my own voice. But I am shy, anxious and fearful around such gatherings. I quickly learned that Cornwallis in 1749 issued a scalping proclamation against Mi'kmaq people

in order to secure and fortify Halifax. In telling my story to Bishop Barbara, she became quiet and admitted that her blood boils when she thinks of what has been, and is done, to her people, over and over again.

Now you may say, Ken, you're exaggerating. Today's Gospel is just an exemplar story, a narrative to make a point. Well it does that and well. Humans it seems over and over again make any kind of difference central to their fears. Difference create categories which then become ranked, which creates suspicion, competition and tension and causes us to be afraid, of each other. That's not Gospel thinking and acting. I switched to the alternate psalm today for good reason. The NRSV text reads:

May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,  
**that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.**

In my paraphrase, I made verse two more prominent as a refrain.

**Make your way known on the earth**  
**Your saving power among us**  
You are gracious to us O God  
Our hearts are full of praise

May this be so, as the spiritual says, soon and very soon. I conclude with a prayer from Brian McLaren.

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with a holy anger toward injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.