

A LIFE WORTH LIVING, TOGETHER

A Sermon for Annual Meeting Sunday, February 5, 2017

St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

The Very Rev. Ken Gray, Dean and Rector

SHOW AND TELL

In this my first sermon for Annual Meeting Sunday I want to take you back . . . to 1942, and to a wonderful parish newsletter. The Rector of the day writes of his joy at being in ministry here and that the pews are free; we have no endowments; and that "God loveth a cheerful giver." Indeed some things never change; the ministry continues as supported in every way by faithful adherents, and there is no difference in this challenge in 2017. Any discussion of Christian ministry in a given place, including ours, must include a strategy for fiscal support which moves well beyond a fee-for-service model. We are particularly aware of this reality on Annual Meeting Sunday and are so, so grateful for the broad base of support we enjoy here presently at St. Paul's. If indeed God loveth a cheerful giver, so do I as your dean and the wardens join me in this enthusiasm.

VISION, NOT DIVISION

Likewise, we are gifted with a marvellous sense of community and shared endeavour here at St. Paul's. We do not all agree on everything but we share way more in common than do we differ in essential matters. There is always a tension between charismatic vision and shared priority; that said, we can accomplish so much together in part because of a generous spirit evident amongst us, and sensed by those new to our community.

Still less than a year into my tenure here you will have noticed my own unique sensitivities and priorities. These are well summarized in some words I found in a book I just finished reading, words which describe an ideal congregation:

Each congregation is an organism with its own internal ecology—and is also part of the larger community ecology where it lives and functions. Increasingly, it is also part of the global ecology and economy. So each church needs to ask how the earth and the *passion for creation healed* touch all aspects of its life—how this mission shapes its teaching, discipleship practices, community formation, and larger world witness.

FROM THE COVER of today's bulletin, *Howard A. Snyder, Salvation Means Creation Healed*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Christian faith is all about relationships, our relationship with God, our relationship with each other and summing up, our relationship with God in and through all of creation including humanity. Our past, present and future connects profoundly with rocks, hills, rivers, and with all things visible and invisible. Indigenous teachers, Rachel Carson, Rowan Williams, and my artist buddy also named Ken all agree, that life is interconnected. It's really that simple.

BUT, in our highly technical and specialist age, an era which seems to value expertise and deep engagement in isolated sectors of life at the expense of a more holistic view, it is the broad overview which best describes how things come together. Such is God's view of all things. Such an understanding explains my distress (and that of almost everyone I know) about the threats to democracy we see unfolding in the United States and elsewhere. If there is a unifying point is global discourse it centres around greed accessed through fear and the exercise of brute economic and social force.

Christian faith shouts from the mountains and through the insects beneath our very feet, *there is another way to live*, and that in some wonderful, local, intimate, intentional and faithful way, we embody such an attitude and practice here at St. Paul's.

FROM TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Throughout history, prophets have appeared to speak what was and still is missing from life itself. Isaiah comments on the religious practices of his day, specifically the practice of fasting, a process of self-denial designed to bring worshippers closer to the object of their worship, the one called by many names including *God*. Sadly, Isaiah's obsessed about the *practice* while forgetting the *purpose* of the sacrifice.

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
**Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;**

From Isaiah 58

Remembering Isaiah's complaint seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, let's come ahead to the early twentieth century to the influential African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman, whose words were set to song by Jim Strathdee:

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD
YOU PEOPLE COME AND FOLLOW ME.
IF YOU FOLLOW AND LOVE, YOU'LL LEARN THE MYSTERY
OF WHAT YOU WERE MEANT TO DO AND BE.

Moving from the general to the specific, certain actions are now proscribed:

To find the lost and lonely one,
To heal that broken soul with love,
To feed the hungry children with warmth and good food,
To feel the earth below the sky above!

For Thurman, Strathdee and myself, the *Gospel given* must become the *Gospel shared*. It is through relationships, including those of both friend and stranger, animate and inanimate, physical and emotional, temporal and eternal, that God's loving passion is shared. As we continue through Epiphany Thurman reminds us that:

When the song of the angels is stilled.
When the star in the sky is gone.
When the kings and the shepherds have found their way home.
The work of Christmas is begun!

JESUS

Ah yes, cast your minds back, to Christmas. The child was born; and the child grew in person and stature; and the child taught and modelled a life worth living; and Jesus called Matthew. And Matthew quotes Jesus:

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

and

‘You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Later today we meet to elect people to particular roles; we will agree on a financial strategy and commit to supporting it; we will consider how we care for each other and welcome the stranger and those in need; and we will continue to care for creation, together.

It’s an impressive role when you think about it. Faithful Christian living, in community, *in though not of the world*. It’s easier said than done, but it’s do-able, with God’s help and Christ’s inspiration.

We’re just human for sure; but we are wonderfully constructed humans, made in God’s image by a talented and capable Creator. Wow. We can see God in ourselves and in each other and in the stranger and in creation. For me that’s a life worth living, together.