

## THE HOPE WE SHARE

The Very Rev. Ken Gray, Dean, St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

In the Territory of the People

Preached at Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal

Sunday, October 16, 2016

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It is my pleasure to bring you greetings from the Cathedral Parish of St. Paul in Kamloops, from Bishop Barbara Andrews who you know already and from everyone in the *Territory of the People*. I understand that the Diocese of Montreal has long supported Anglican presence and witness in the Central Interior of British Columbia, a support I acknowledge and appreciate.

I was so grateful to welcome Dean Paul as preacher at my installation now five months ago. I am sorry you will be losing him but am so impressed at his commitment to his family. He is giving up much to return to London but for a wonderful and good reason. God speed Paul.

I feel some responsibility to paint a picture of cathedral life in Kamloops but my short tenure of six months and a very few days impoverishes my efforts somewhat, but I shall try. As a new dean I continue to research what a cathedral is and does in the Canadian Anglican Church, and am curious to know what unites or differentiates our two communities. Your community is older, larger and your building of stone. Ours is newer, smaller and built of wood. We are both attending to structural needs presently; we have had excellent support made good progress thus far; I hope the same is true for yourselves.

In his installation sermon Paul encouraged us to see our cathedral as a place of community engagement, a practice I have tried to establish

especially through LGBTQ support gatherings shortly after the Orlando Massacre, a prayer service during the Fort McMurray fires, and more recently through a significant four-week celebration of the Season of Creation which saw the production of art, community engagement talk shows, sermon foci on Science, Sabbath, Footprint Reduction and the legacy and influence of St. Francis. The season as a whole really underscored a single point, first named by an American theologian, Howard Snyder that *salvation means creation healed*. Such discourse has broadened and matured my own views on and experience of salvation considerably. The last time I was in this building in 1981 I was in a very different place theologically and spiritually. We plan to repeat the season in September of each year and would be pleased to help you folks assemble something similar if appropriate.

Going forward, and beyond the typical rites of passage and seasonal Sunday foci, we will shortly commence another season of *Out of the Cold* Ministry which provides nutrition, community and shelter for a rapidly growing constituency of homeless folks. This ministry continues with concern, not unlike that unearthed here in Montreal at St. Jax and in Victoria around Tent City. It is fair to say that most communities in BC are now riddled with and ravaged by Fentanyl and Carfentanil. I am concerned about our ability in Kamloops to respond to these growing crises but am pleased with how our steering group continues to prepare staff and volunteers. We shall see what happens as we continue to care about and for challenged populations.

Some years ago St. Paul's chose four words to describe our common life together: *Joyful; Rooted; Hospitable; and Responsive*. I see all of these in action amidst generous and faithful Christians and am so grateful for the

opportunity to serve in what is a dynamic and quite remarkable community.

Personally, I have inherited a proud scriptural interpretive tradition replete with stories which demand justice as a first order of business, self understanding and practice. I love today's Gospel story of the pesky and persistent woman who demands and receives a just decision from an unjust and recalcitrant judge.

I have several good judges in my congregation, and they tell many tales, from within church and society, of justice denied, justice offered, and justice redeemed. In the Central Interior of BC, our faith community legacy is wrought with injustices through residential school abuse. Such abuses are now admitted, and reconciliation continues, but there remains much work to do in forging a new relationship between First Nations and the descendants of settlers which includes myself.

In BC, where there are precious few treaties which creates both advantages and disadvantages, the next achievement in my view must be a restorative just re-distribution of land and power. The courts continue to acknowledge First Nations' existence, history, economic and cultural practice. Yet, especially in resource management issues, there is simply not enough diligence around meaningful consultation.

So the struggle continues which is why I appreciate the struggle of Jacob with his un-named assailant. As a person who lives with a disability, I know something of struggle, subtle though it may be compared with others, but frustration is an occasional companion. Years ago I was travelling in Yukon Territory and visited Skagway Alaska where the pilgrim

is met at the edge of town by a sign on a building named Peniel recalling today's Genesis lection:

. . . Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. (Genesis 32: 31)

It is so often in the struggle that God seems to appear. The struggle however often becomes the focus. Much seems hopeless and the courage of the persistent widow seems absent or in short supply. In such times, why not turn to the psalms where Psalm 121 is a paean to hope itself.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.

My question then goes like this: How and when and through whom shall such help come? I used to view God as interventionist and omnipotent. Well the first often seems slow to appear and the second not that evident. I don't think either term serves us well nor speaks to the truly disadvantaged. I have recently discovered the writing of John Caputo, an American post-modern philosopher who grew up Roman Catholic who argues not for the abolition of religion but again, remembering Bonhoeffer for a new sort of religionless Christianity. Here is John Caputo on hope and a precarious future.

If hope is always hope in a precarious future, we are at present in a particularly precarious position. Our unprotected exposure to the

promise and the threat of the future was never more acute than today. Our hope is always that the future is worth more, but experience proves that in fact it often turns out to be worse, sometimes even a monster, which is certainly what the word “inhuman” suggests. At the onset of the “age of information,” things appear poised to undergo a staggering transformation, affecting every aspect of our lives, opening up an amazing but frightening future.

So it seems logical that a precarious future will threaten the faith of the insecure, people like at times myself. Luke’s question to his readers: “(W)hen the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” It’s a great question. If we followers of Jesus Christ have caught the vision and reality of unconditional love, and have found a way to focus and express that same unconditional love in the challenge of daily communal living, then the Son of Man will smile . . .

So quite appropriately Caputo suggests that a smile, not a cynical superficial wink such as Donald Trump and his ilk produce ad nauseum, but a relaxed, confident, self-disinterested, beautiful reflection of love. Again Caputo:

At the end of life, just as in the beginning and the middle, the only thing to do is to say thanks be to life for life, for the grace of life. Thanks be to the stars for their loving anonymity. The anonymity of the stars is a sign not of their indifference . . . but of the depths of their mysterious love.

So, Caputo suggests, the leader and the follower converse, and connect, and enjoy each other’s company, and life and love itself. The world,

human and non-human alike are better off for it. God's grace is shared in the circumstances of daily lives. And Christ's sacrifice really has changed the world, forever.

Smile at me ... as I will have smiled at you until the end.  
Always prefer life and never stop affirming survival.  
I love you and I am smiling at you from wherever I am.