

Reflection for Sunday September 11th

Wind of Change

Prayer: Breath of God, breathe your Spirit upon this humble gathering of your faithful people. As we reflect on the scriptures today, we hear a message about repentance, changing, finding something that was lost. Guide our words and thoughts to hear your message for us today. Amen

Called by Earth and Sky the hymn we just sang, I hope it was familiar from last week. Often the hymns hold the kernel of truth. The words are like a prayer, so I hope you see that.

*Precious this gift, the air we breathe; wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit, blow through this place, our gathering and our grace*

Do you remember the rousing Pentecost Hymn: Wind of Change by Ron Klusmeier:

*Blow away the cobwebs of our stubborn past.
Come send flying from us myths unfit to last.
Wind of change refresh us and disturb our calm;
teach us what true love is, take our hearts by storm!*

Have you felt the Wind of Change that is blowing through this place this year? You probably noticed me mentioning it more than once! The Transition Team has been reflecting on their work and the work of this community of faith over the past nine months. Together there have been many changes. We are working towards the goal of understanding our purpose here as Christians. Working together as a Shared Ministry strengthens this body of Christ. Do you feel us becoming stronger together?

The parables we heard in Luke call the community to open its doors and rejoice when the lost is found. If we don't look cheerful and welcoming, no one will want to come in and be part of this family of faith. The parables are also about hospitality that seeks to forgive and restore relationships.

Forgiveness and restoring relationship with God is a theme in all the scriptures today.

Actually the hard words of SIN and REPENTANCE stand out.

The scriptures talk a lot about sin and repentance!!! These are not words I use very often, but today is the day. I understand SIN to be a separation from God. My dictionary says:

Theologically, sin is the human condition of separation from God that arises from opposition to God's purposes. It may be breaking God's laws, failing to do what God wills, or rebellion. It needs forgiveness by God.

As followers of Christ we know the expectations or "rules" and when we bend or break them we feel separated from God. We can always repent and receive forgiveness.

My dictionary explains repentance: *The act of contrition; penitence; and contrition for sin. Its linguistic roots point to its theological meaning of a change of mind and life direction as a beginning step of expressing Christian faith.*

A change of mind and life direction. Turning towards God and Christ's ways instead of away. This is not complicated:

Sin – turning away from God, repentance turning toward God and the Christian way.

Jeremiah speaks the language of his people and it is still relevant today! He does not sugar-coat how difficult his adjustments were or promise that all will be well. His message is that God is ever present and that people are equipped not only to survive change and disruption but also to thrive in ways not known ahead of time. Jeremiah's ability to portray pain, emptiness, and abandonment and yet remain in faithful relationship to God, is a powerful message of persistence and hope to people who suffer. (Notes from Sharon Peebles Burch)

In Paul's letter to Timothy, (1 Timothy 1:12-17) Paul is confessing his sinfulness. He uses big words "*I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and a man of violence... I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.*" Paul praises the acceptance, the grace, the faith, the patience and the love that are in Christ Jesus!

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst!

The reading from Luke (Luke 15:1-10) also speaks about repentance, the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin both end with a joyous celebration for "*one sinner who repents*". The parables indicate how much God cares for one lost person, using the metaphor of a coin or a lost sheep. These stories emphasize the compassionate concern of a searching God.

When I first saw these readings for to-day, I was thinking about the people who have left. You know people who are not attending worship here for a variety of reasons. You miss them and some folk have asked me what I am going to do about it. I am not a trained sheep dog. Some folk have gone in a different direction and some have found another church community. Many of you do what you can to keep in touch. Also, we pray that they do not feel abandoned or excluded. Unfortunately we cannot keep everyone happy and satisfied. We do need to make changes and move forward. Hopefully the lost folk will come back sometime to see how it is here and there can be rejoicing at their return. Remember the parables are also about hospitality that seeks to forgive and restore relationships.

Change happens all the time and we adjust and the change becomes the norm.

Charles Cousar points this out in these comments:

"The second story depicts a woman who, having lost one of her treasured silver coins, lights a lamp and sweeps her house carefully until she finds the lost coin. She is overjoyed and calls her friends to celebrate the finding of the lost coin. No doubt her coin was a drachma, worth the price of a sheep or one-fifth the price of an ox. She thus invested a great deal in the party she has thrown for her friends. No other parable in the New Testament presents a woman as a metaphor or allegory for God. This would shock and surprise the audience, since God is depicted as a searching woman, who rejoices over finding her lost coin."

We have come a long way. We hardly blink at the idea of a woman being a metaphor for God.

More likely to compare the loss to the price of a computer than an ox!

We do not spend time discussing sin and repentance, even though it is a foundation of our faith.

We want to spend more time putting our faith into action. Our denominations are deeply committed to the expression of faith through social justice and intellectual inquiry. We have learned to question and discern what we believe for ourselves.

We are familiar with the phrase: “*be the change you want to see in the world.*” We are endeavouring to be a more inclusive and accepting society. The inclusion of all people, all ages, genders, sexual orientation, abilities and races.

How can you: “*be the change you want to see in this community of faith.*”?

Are you able to say positive things about the changes you see here and now?

Are you hopeful about the future together? Do you think this is going in the right direction?

When you talk about the church with neighbours or people you see outside of the church, do you speak positively or negatively?

What you say and do is critical to the future of this Shared Ministry. If you have faith that we are doing God’s work and following God’s will SHOUT IT FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP!!

We have good news to share. Let’s get on with it!

There is a warm and welcoming wind of change blowing through this place!

Blow away the cobwebs of our stubborn past.

Come send flying from us myths unfit to last.

Wind of change refresh us and disturb our calm;

teach us what true love is, take our hearts by storm!