

July 3, 2016

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May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, Oh God our Redeemer.

There are two parts of this reflection that I have found, given the lectionary readings for this Sunday.

Part I—what we call NT—talks about the challenges of forming a new religious group—Galatians and Paul's response to the Antioch Churches' attempts to change his missionary thrust; Luke's story of Jesus sending out his disciples as the vanguard to his own missionary work— (and I suspect a bit of OJT). Lots of prayers I am sure, underpin both these readings both thanking God and asking for help!

Part II—what we call the OT—In 2 Kings we hear about healing but also the praise and thanksgiving for healing but leaving out some, in this thanks which is worth mentioning. Finally, Psalm 30 which we read together, is all about thanksgiving and praise for being saved during tough times.

We are still struggling, we meaning the Christian Church, about many things. Our experience here on Gabriola reflects this and in the process I fear we can become internally focused. Through all the many re-formations that we Christians have experienced down through the centuries (thanks be to God we are not killing and torturing each other as we once did) we could learn much from Paul, through his letter to the Galatians. They by the way, sent a messenger asking for his advice and help.

This early church, founded by Paul was Gentile based (pagan—Christian). He taught them that this Jesus movement was open to all; male female, Gentile-Jew, slave-free. But now, this Jewish-Christian group from Antioch is telling them they have to follow the Jewish laws to be truly Christian(food, circumcision etc.).

Paul's letter is a study of rhetorical excellence (delicately persuasive). He writes knowing it will be read by both the church members of Galatia and the delegation from Antioch. Now, there are some subtle thrusts at the Antioch group (another talk). But key here for us today are his comments in the text we heard:

When transgressions occur (when we disagree) members should restore such a person(s) in a spirit of GENTLENESS. (I have this in capitals on my paper). Oh, that we would emblazon that on our hearts!

Then he writes: Bear one *another's* burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Here he is separating out the Law of Moses for the Law of Christ. Therefore Pagan-Gentile converts need not become Jews in order to become Christians. This is not an issue for us today but it was even more significant than the Roman Catholic /Protestant clash of the last several hundred years for this division could have been a show stopper! The growth of the Christian Movement could have resulted in a minor Jewish sect.

Earlier, in Galatians you may recall Paul writes: We are all one in Christ Jesus! which serves to transcend all differences. I think that saying belongs over the door of all Christian Churches.

Paul also uses the metaphor of harvest, which we heard in Luke's gospel today. He encourages the Galatians not to grow weary in doing what is right: For we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So, prayer and praise underpin this work.

We here on Gabriola can take heart in Luke's missional version of Jesus sending forth his disciples. There is an assumption that the 'harvest is plentiful.' In other words, God has already provided the people who need and who are even ready to hear the Good News. It is not our task to drum up potential seekers who might join us in this spiritual journey. They are already here. We are not living on a desert island.

As one writer put it, it is our task to be open to this growth; to work in a way that anticipates, rather than impedes such growth. I know it is hard to outward looking in times of transition but I suggest, even in times when we were not in transition, it was hard to grasp the old concept from Bishop WM Temple, who stated that The church is the only institution that exists for non members!

What if we spent some time in prayer—prayer that others may join us and prepared ourselves for that welcome. What would happen if this worked: there is an old saying be careful for what you pray for.

Why do I say this? Well, if these prayers were answered and let us say a new group of folks started coming—we might find our comfortable pew being filled; they might want to get involved, they might ask questions about why we do this and not that and have certain events and not others—different programs and projects???The place might be over run with children and young people!!

Now prayer often moves us to action and perhaps we may finding ourselves understanding what the 70 Jesus appointed experienced. Why 70? I don't know: the 70 elders Moses appointed? the seventy nations the sons of Noah formed

after the flood. I think the idea was to get or let in as many people who felt called to join in the journey, no passport needed.

David Lose writes, (Prof at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota) whenever we attend faithfully to *Jesus*' mission and accomplish '*acts of mercy*' in his name, the Kingdom of *God's* being announced, evil is being challenged and the promise of *God's* promise is affirmed.

Naaman, the General, comes to Israel, a country he lead the army in defeating. He comes to be cured of his leprosy because he has been told that a prophet there (Man of God—Elisha) can heal him. After some resistance he goes into the Jordan seven times (seven is a complete number—creation etc.). He is healed and goes to Elisha to say that he now knows that the only God is the God of Israel and offers the prophet a gift for being *God's* instrument of healing. The gift is refused.

At one level this is a healing story but at another it is also about thanking. Naaman rightly thanks the God of Israel and his prophet but he leaves out others who are not so powerful or perhaps even noticeable such as : the Israelite slave girl who tells Naaman's wife, who tells him AND his servants who suggest he should follow the prophets directions and go into the river Jordan seven times.

In our lives there are so many thanks to make. We thank God for successful healing though operations, the doctors but never forgetting the nurses and other support staff; the friends who encouraged us, the family who put up with us and the list goes on. God, I am sure, has inspired so many. All creatures great and small need to be included even our pets that deserve thanks.

And today, given we just celebrated Canada day, we are also thankful for the named and un named ones who have given much to keep Canada free and healthy; for those who work to keep the land, sea and air clear and productive for many generations to come. May all nations come to know the bounty we have this day and may it be preserved.

A closing prayer adapted by that written for Psalm 30 by Jim Cotter
Living Christ, look on us with eyes of compassion, call us with the word of forgiveness, again and again, to seven times seven, that we may at last hear and see and know ourselves loved beyond measure as we seek to truly be your Body in the world today. Amen

