

## **Attentiveness**

### Readings:

Luke 19:1-10

Attentiveness has struck me in a new way in this season of my life - it might be because I have been re reading "An Altar in the World" by Barbara Brown Taylor, or perhaps it is because I have been challenged to be diligent with spiritual practice, and without a doubt because I have had the gift and opportunity to be mentored by the Reverend Peter Short in a few different venues recently.

At the "Sowing Promise, Growing Leaders" leadership development event last week Peter like usual began with attentiveness. Peter's ministry is about attentiveness, his teaching, his faith, his life vocation is about being attentive.

That is likely why when I read the Zacchaeus scripture this week I read a story of being attentive. It is true that it is a story of grace and welcome but it began with recognizing who was in need. Jesus' whole ministry was about attentiveness, seeing what was happening all around him on his life path.

In the story of Zacchaeus Jesus could have been swept up in the crowd of excited followers. He could have walked down the streets of Jericho waving, and throwing out pithy comments. He should have been touching the cheeks of small children and offering hugs to the elderly. (and perhaps he was) But what we know for sure is that he noticed a little man watching from a tree.

Jesus noticed Zacchaeus because he was attentive to the needs of those in front of and around him. Something about Zacchaeus' wonder and striving to see Jesus told Jesus that this man needed or was ready to meet with him. Perhaps Jesus could see Zacchaeus was ready for the kind of life transformation the spirit of Jesus longed to bring. And so Jesus went right over to this little tax collector, one of the most despised people of the time and said "I must come stay at your house." And in the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus too became attentive.

I am convinced that both Jesus and Zacchaeus could hear the grumblers and nay sayers. I am positive they both knew that there were people all around them that did not approve of the way Jesus was doing ministry in that moment. But what Jesus and Zacchaeus did not allow was for that to change the transformative presence of the spirit's work. Salvation came to Zacchaeus in that moment because he was attentive to the life changing presence of Jesus. He knew in that moment he was to follow God's way - the way of justice and grace and love. By being attentive to God's spirit Zacchaeus' who life was transformed.

Attentiveness is the beginning of all life change. I found myself wondering earlier this week- what if our biblical leaders were not attentive to God's spirit presence? What if Moses hadn't

stopped to notice the burning bush. What if Jesus just walked by without seeing the disciples, or Zacchaeus, or the lame, the wounded and the hungry? What if his ministry became so focused on becoming the next superpower that he didn't have time to heal, and teach, and nurture and pray? What if he didn't take the time to hear to spirit say "You are my beloved?" What if he ignored it and thought it was just another fleeting musing.

Other than the fact that he wouldn't be Jesus - he would have missed his purpose, his calling. If he hadn't been attentive to himself and others there wouldn't be a gospel story. We wouldn't know about folks like Zacchaeus who were outcasts in this world and Jesus offered love anyway. We wouldn't know as followers of Jesus that The Holy is attentive to us that we might be attentive to one another.

Peter Short reminded us last week that the first tasks of ministry are always respect and attentiveness. I would offer, the first tasks of Christian faith and life are always respect and attentiveness. "Behind every face there is a soul at work." he said. Our task of life is to live into the soul God has created us to be. Our task as a Christian church community is to live into the soul and life God is creating us to be as Squamish United.

How different would the life of every person be if as we worshiped and worked together we were also attentive to one another always seeing each other as souls at work. How would we look and be different in this place if we all lived into who God has created us to be as individuals and as a congregation.

The others words of Peter that I heard repeated most often this week were "Never look down on a struggle for life." "Never look down on a struggle for life" and always remember "behind every face there is a soul at work." These quotes struck many of us as clergy this week because we recognized how often we fail to do this for ourselves and one another. It might be even be easy for us to see how we shouldn't look down on the homeless, or those struggling with cancer, or those who have just lost a loved one but what about the rest of our colleagues or those sitting next to us in these pews. And what about our own struggles for life? We all have them. That is why God calls us together as community - to live out love and grace for one another, to be attentive.

Perhaps we forget our purpose at times because so many of us ourselves are in the midst of a struggle for life. In this place we as individuals are struggling for life, and in a way we are struggling to live into and find the life purpose for this congregation. And that is the journey of life we face.

So more than ever in this season I want to encourage us to be attentive. I want us to be attentive to one another, to ourselves, and to the spirit at work in this place. I want us to notice where God is taking us, and I want us to take the time to allow ourselves to be transformed by it in a way that is life giving not only to us but to the whole community of Squamish.

As most of you know we presented our vision and mission to presbytery on Tuesday night. My colleagues are excited about our mission and vision plan. The number of people who came to me and shared how impressed they are with you as a congregation willing to risk, willing to

recognize that as a church we need to look at new ways of being. My ministry colleagues long for their people to catch this vision. They have also encouraged us not to dream too small - to recognize that others can see the spirit at work in this place. We need to be fully attentive to it so that we do not stifle God at work.

God's love, justice, grace, compassion, spirit and work is much bigger than our own. All we can do is be like Zacchaeus and seek it out with all our being that it might transform us into a new kingdom place.

I was reminded of one of my favorite songs this week and so I want us to sing it together now as a reminder of the strength of God's love when we are attentive to it.