

Scripture Readings:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Mark 1:21-28

Breaking Evil

Last week I found myself at a very powerful conference. 21 speakers spoke for 21 minutes about the things they believe God is calling out of the church. The theme was “Rising from the Ashes.” We acknowledged that Christianity (along with the majority of religion) in the 21st century is struggling. We listened to the powerful gospel truth over and over and over again. We were challenged and refreshed and filled with hope for the days ahead. Testimonies spoke to lives, calls and faith. Over the next weeks you will hear more about this and today I feel led to speak out of much of what I heard and experienced at this conference and even more so out of the life experience in our home this week. In Deuteronomy we hear that God will call out prophets from amongst us. I believe we are called to speak truth, and at times we are called to testify and be prophetic about it. As we live and worship in the next weeks you might wonder who are the prophets of our times? We might even wonder if we are called to be prophets ourselves.

In reading commentary this week I was reminded that each Gospel writer tells a different first story of Jesus’ ministry. Today we read Marks first story, an exorcism. For some reason this was the story that Mark wanted to start with. This was who he wanted people to see of Jesus first and foremost. We would do well to remember that this Gospel starts in the wilderness with the heavens ripping apart.

For Mark Jesus is a boundary breaker, which an exorcism confirms exponentially. Jesus reveals a boundary breaking God. We see this throughout scripture. “Each and every boundary we try to put in place, we think is in place, even that which we perceive as impenetrable, God bursts through. Political, social, religious, ethic, racial, sexual, gendered, cosmic, even...God’s ability to shatter death.”¹

“As a result, Jesus the Exorcist seems the only logical first ministry act for Jesus in Mark -- not a sermon, not a miracle, not even a healing. But stepping into the realm of opposing supremacies, the world of other spirits, the potent power of possession and saying, “God is here;” breaking through the barrier that holds at bay the unclean, the evil of the universe, the places and spaces where it seems God could never be, the very presence of the opposite of God.”²

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3511>

² IBID

That is the God I want to talk about today. The God of boundary breaking. The God of justice in the face of injustice. It may or may not be surprising to you that we heard a lot about racism last week. We Canadians had a few moments of thinking perhaps we are not in the same place here in Canada. Well let me be honest the others in our group thought that more than I did. It is true that we do not have current national stories like that of Michael Brown and Ferguson, Missouri but we have many stories of violence and injustice, just fewer guns. We in Canada have a appalling history when it comes to our First Nations peoples. We have a horrifying history with Japanese people. We continue to choose who is worthy in our culture over the other. For example, I can give you a lot of first hand accounts of people I know in this town and region who are making lower wages than their caucasian peers.

This is a global problem and this week I have been faced with it in a way that has me discouraged, challenged, disappointed, saddened and outraged. A few of you have heard this story from me already but it is one I cannot help but share not only because it hits home but also because I am weary of a world that chooses who is worthy and as Christians I believe it is our responsibility as followers of the Christ to respond to the injustices people face.

Last Sunday 44 Philippines National Police Officers from the Special Action Force were massacred in an ambush by muslim separatist forces. As I reported this on Facebook and to my colleagues I received the response over and over “where is the news on this?” “where can I find it?” “How come we have not heard about it?”

In Canada one police officer is killed in the street by an extremist and the whole country mourns (And for that I am grateful); 17 people are killed in Paris France and the whole world responds (And that moment gave me hope); Until 44 Filipino Police Officers were gunned down, tortured and massacred and it barely makes a global news bite. Why is that you ask? My harsh response is it didn't happen in Paris, it didn't happen to people who matter.

Now you might find yourself getting defensive when I say such things but it is what happens every day in our world. In the beginning of January nearly 2,000 were killed in Baga, Nigeria. In Darfur civilians continue to be attacked as militias continue to fight for control. Wars are fought and people are attacked every day in the name of God and religion. In the United States every 28 hours a black person is killed by a cop or vigilante. Closer to home while our Aboriginal population makes up 4% of Canada's population, 23.2% of those in prisons are Aboriginal.³ Non-Caucasian workers are hired in our restaurants and hotels because they will usually work for a lower wage.

Last week at the Christianity 21 conference I heard speaker after speaker call the church to act and notice. To live differently. The final speaker Kristen Howerton spoke on White privilege and we all took notice of some of the standards we don't even recognize until we open our eyes. Did you ever think about the fact that when you purchase flesh tone band-aids or nude nylons ladies

³ http://www.wawataynews.ca/archive/all/2013/3/7/first-nation-prison-rates-mount-blame-pointed-feds_24225

that perhaps that is rather bias as to what flesh tone and nude are? Do you take for granted that you can walk down the street late on your way home from anywhere and not get checked on by the police? (It happens to Filipino friends, likely because they look aboriginal). The truth is, unlike my darker skinned brothers and sisters when I speak to a cause no one thinks I am speaking for all people of my race. If I get stopped by a police officer at a road block my skin colour will have no influence on his/her actions. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazine featuring people of my race...and the list goes on.

This is not an issue happening somewhere else in the world. It is happening in our world. I want to take a moment to tell you a little more about the tragedy that didn't even make our news this week. I am telling you this because I am angered and saddened by it, and I am telling it to you so you might know what your Filipino friends, nannies or companions might have been grieving this week. I also feel like we need our eyes opened from time to time. (Before I go any further let be honest and let you know that the Police Officers that were murdered this week were the officers of *Macky (my husbands) unit, and so we are in a very thin place and this is raw so if emotions come that is why). Tagaligtas means life-saver

*Here is a photo of the 44 Special Action Force members that were ambushed this week. In the Philippines there are muslim separatist forces that are attempting to take over a region of the Philippines. On January 25th the police were sent in to arrest a terrorist and bomb expert wanted by the US FBI. He was being hidden by Members of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) a break away group from MILF.⁴ Even though a peace treaty had been previously signed, officers were attacked, surrounded and targeted until they ran out of gunfire. Macky has spoken to some of his friends who have spoken to survivors and we have heard stories of gunmen standing over officers telling them to call and say goodbye to their loved ones and then shooting them. We have seen photos of officers dying while the look at photos of their children. I watched a few videos of the brutally disfigured bodies, and you could hear laughter of the attackers in the background. *Macky's good friend and one of his paddlers was one of the few with a bullet proof vest on so apparently he stood up and distracted the gun men while others got away. But he was injured and captured and those that escaped hid and watched as they grabbed Noel put a paper target on his back and shot at him yelling "Allah be praised." He is being deemed a hero by the survivors.

So what does this have to do with us? What does this have to do with our scriptures? Where is the gospel and the hope? I believe these kinds of attacks we hear of, these injustices that are sadly becoming common dare are the evil (or demons) of our day and time. I believe that means somehow, somehow we as people of faith are called to take notice and respond. Let me remind you of how we began. "Jesus is a boundary breaker... Jesus reveals a boundary breaking God. We see this throughout scripture. "Each and every boundary we try to put in place, we think is in

⁴ http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=292_1422289440

place, even that which we perceive as impenetrable, God bursts through. Political, social, religious, ethic, racial, sexual, gendered, cosmic, even...God's ability to shatter death."⁵ I am praying that God may burst through and shatter the despair in the hearts of the families and friends of the lost. I am praying that God may burst through and shatter the destruction that religion does in the name is God. I am praying for love and light to burst into our world.

February is Black history month. I want to encourage us to take note this month and perhaps learn from our history. Karoline Lewis writes "What you do reveals who you are. The last few months have certainly reminded us of this truth. The many manifestations of the meaning and ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give testimony to someone who knew, deeply, this truth. But more than walk your talk, your actions are revelations of your true identity -- who you are at your core.

Jesus and the prophets before him herald the good news that God is here.

This is the good news. This is the meaning of the heavens being ripped apart, a suffering Messiah, death on a cross, and an empty tomb. When all looks like God is absent? God is present. Your God is here. Alexie Torres-Fleming and others claimed last week that it is in Michael Brown and the unrest of Ferguson that we find the crucified Christ. Let us realize also that in Patrice Vincent, and Cpl. Nathan Cirillo we see the crucified Christ and this week In the face of 44 fallen Filipino hero police officers we see the crucified Christ. Because Christ is there whenever injustice and evil break in. God is there ripping open the heavens calling out for peace.

You might say "as far as I can tell, God is nowhere to be seen." And you have every reason for thinking that doubt, voicing that disbelief. In fact, it makes profound sense. I know because at times I think and feel it too. Where is God in the midst of all this?

God is found in our responses. "Where is God in all that possesses me? in my depression, my addiction, my disease? in my loss,

my grief, my sorrow? in my own attraction to other gods (Deut 18:20) asks?

And the prophets respond "Your God is here. Your God is here. Your God is here." I preach this and I say it because I have known it to be true in the depths of life. Your God is here. I say it because I have seen The Holy in others who have journeyed with me. I saw God when millions arrived in Paris to stand up for justice and truth and we will see it more and more as we too look around and speak against the injustices we see. We will see and be the face of God to others when we befriend the unfriendly and welcome the stranger. Efreem Smith said "The church is really the church when the marginalized are put front and centre again, when they see the kingdom of God through and in us." The people of Jesus lineage, and those who walked with him were radical, multi-ethnic, oppressed, marginalized, broken people. When did the church become a place for people who try to look like they have it all together. When did it become predominately White middle-class. The purpose of the church is to love well. To love all well no matter who they are or where they have come from. Jesus even loved the monsters, and because of that love they were transformed, healed, exorcised. Brian McLaren stated to us last week

⁵ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3511>

“Christianity in the 21 century must acknowledge, heal, engage with, confess the crimes and atrocities it has committed in the 1st 20 centuries....Christianity must realign itself less with the institution and more with the healing, love and goodness of God.”

Our God is in the business of breaking into the Chaos. Our God is in the business of emancipation and liberation. Alexie Torres-Fleming began her talk last week by reminding us that “the church has largely been on the wrong side of history.” We can change that. We can walk with Jesus and remind people “God is Here” even in this hard and broken world. Desmond Tutu said when we are silent in injustice we choose the side of injustice. The prophets are calling to us to risk justice and solidarity with all. And as you live that love and justice others too will realize “We are not alone. We live in God’s world.”

May we live and be the voice of love, justice, grace and abundance for all even in this difficult world. Amen.