

Scriptures:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

1 Corinthians 2:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

Bayanihan

Pudtol in Apayao Philippines is a stunning province. If you were to go there today I imagine you would be overwhelmed by the beauty of the miles of rice and vegetable fields, lush ferns, coconut trees and wild caribou cooling themselves in the rivers set in the midst of the mountainous terrain.

And yet the greater beauty perhaps is found in the spirit of bayanihan that is forever present. The origin of Bayanihan comes from the traditional practice of assisting neighbours in building and carrying one another houses to their property. For instance when you get married you might move your home to a new location, or if there is danger of flooding or war or wild animals, whatever it may be you might need to move your home and fortunately you are not alone because in the Philippines there is the spirit bayanihan - bayan meaning hero, bayanihan translates to collective heroism. Everyone in the neighbourhood comes along and pitches in. When it is time for the rice and vegetable to harvest the same collective spirit is present. They harvest for one another and share with those who assist.

That is not all however it goes farther than that. Some have more than others and so when your harvest is abundant the farmers will leave some of the vegetables for those who need it to go into the field and pick so they ensure their neighbours have food to eat.

Perhaps the Filipinos have read our passage from Leviticus today that said “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien.”

Perhaps they take more seriously the principles of the early church. Perhaps being in a place where life is a lot harder than it is for many of us they are forced to come together. Don't be deceived it is not that all people in the Philippines always get along. There are disputes and arguments just as we have but when it comes down to it as a culture they often put love first.

The scriptures we read today are hard to stomach if we really take them in. Hard to take because they are impossible to live. Listen to the list

- Don't judge anyone unjustly
- Don't hate anyone in your heart
- Don't take vengeance or bear a grudge
- love your neighbour as yourself

- Don't boast of human leaders we all belong to Christ
- turn the other cheek
- give to those who steal from you
- give to anyone who begs or wants to borrow from you
- love your enemies
- pray for those who persecute you
- be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.

Reconciliation and love are the foundations of the world Jesus tries to create. Jesus does not come to abolish the law but to create the kind of community in which the law imagines. The type of kingdom community of integrity and love where people are not taken advantage of is God's community.

Jesus wants his disciples to "realize that following him will mean meeting up with those with whom you would rather not come in contact, with whom you might consider your enemy. Love your enemies. You will come across those outside of your immediate circles with whom the principles you learned from Jesus you'd rather not share. You will meet others for whom you'd rather the Kingdom of Heaven need not apply."¹

Jesus continues "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?"

Good question. How is loving those you love a mark of discipleship? Following Jesus means blessing the unblessed, welcoming the stranger, loving those who are different from you, those you don't agree with, or maybe even don't share the same values. The law of our gospel is we are to "love the lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind and love our neighbour as ourselves"

Discipleship means we are a part of sharing God in the world. That is how we participate in resisting evil. No matter what is happening around us, and no matter who resists us our call is to be the salt and light. That is all we can do.

In a time when our world leadership seems to have a goal of creating enemies out of anyone who is not exactly like us we are called back to the roots of our faith. Pastor Cornell West says "Justice is what love looks like in public." When I hear that I hear that we as followers of Jesus must be instruments of truth and justice in a world that is rejecting God's way. Our role is to be truth, to live truth, to live love.

Paul reminds us in Corinthians that we don't belong to the world leaders we belong to Christ and therefore we belong to God. When Paul writes he is speaking to a church divided over human leaders and principles. One commentator I listened to this week translated the message of Corinthians to be (and this hit me as a hard truth so listen) "the church that is divided amongst itself has lost the claim to be a Christian Church. We all belong to each other because we all

¹ Lewis, Karoline http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3158

belong to Christ.” We are called to love and be on side with one another when the road is easy, when we all agree. NO we are simply called to love.

It is not easy to love your enemies, it is not easy not to judge. In fact only a few months ago I preached a sermon in which I stated we were not to judge. The first piece of feedback I received when I walked out the door was “that is not true, we have to judge, some people are wrong.” So let me clarify. Firstly, it is not me saying don’t judge, it’s Jesus, and that is why I need to figure out how to listen to that message. When scripture says don’t judge, it does not say accept wrong doing, rather it calls us to a different way of living than the way the world calls us to judge. It will not be easy. It will never be easy to live the kingdom. I will mess it up and you will mess it up. Of course I judge people, from time to time if I am honest I have even hated people in my heart. I wish I could say I have never held a grudge but seriously..... get real God. I’m human. Of course we will do all of those things and Jesus knows it. He lived life in this world. He was condemned, ridiculed, falsely accused, people lived out and held up his religion inaccurately. He gets it. I get it. I spoke with some colleagues from across the country on a conference call this week and we had a conversation about how do we preach today. What are we saying. We talked about how world politics especially south of the boarder is effecting us. Each one of us spoke of the heartbreak and burden we carry when people are claiming hatred, segregation, and racism as foundations of our faith. It is soul wrenching for me. And yet, we all came around to the truth that all we can preach today is the gospel. And this is the gospel. This is the kindom truth we are called to. It is the only way Gods light will be seen and present.

The world today as a whole is rejecting God’s ways and just because the majority may not agree that does not change our call. Our role as Christians is to live and speak truth.

Jesus said ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Bayanihan is how we are all to live. Each and every day of our lives. It is my prayer for us as we enter into Lent, as we enter into a time of discernment about shared ministry and who God is calling us to be as individual and collective congregations that we will live into the gospel. We are not here to be people of business and profit we are here as Gods people, people of the way. May we collectively be Bayan - hero’s of love for one another every day. So that we and all we encounter might experience the kingdom of God here and now.

Amen.