

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Canada Day Weekend

July 2, 2017

Scriptures:

Genesis 22:1-14

Matthew 10:40-42

You're Welcome

This week has been a week filled with celebration and commemoration. Yesterday we celebrated Canada's 150th. And a week ago Wednesday was National Aboriginal Day. A day of pow wows and parades, raising up the history and culture of First Nations peoples. In preparation for Canada's 150 many reminded us that Canada was not born 150 years ago. "First Nations people were living here, in developed and widely differing cultures long before our ancestors knew this place existed. Our foundation as a nation comes at the cost of running First Nations peoples off their lands, deliberately trying to eradicate them through the spread of disease and starvation and then of course through residential schools in which the aim was to erase the 'Indian out of the Indian'. Our celebration must be mixed with commemoration of all that has gone before and that which continues to happen." I recognize I do not acknowledge as often as I should that we are on Squamish Nation Territory. Life and story is complex even here in Canada and when I look at today's gospel story of welcome I wonder how we with the history we hold might become better at being people of welcome. People who acknowledge that we are called to welcome all and our history has not always lived that out. Perhaps the welcome we offer today needs to be one of confession and vulnerability acknowledging that when we have not welcomed others we have not welcomed God.

And yet, in light of today's passage in Genesis where we see a faithful follower of God willing to slit his son Isaac's throat because God asked him to I wonder how these two stories align. Debra Bowman wrote last week "I have to wonder...how does this shape our history of war and genocide and even a benign neglect that leads to the starvation of millions? I'm not saying we shouldn't be obedient to God. I am wondering if sometimes we can convince ourselves God wants something done when actually we're acting out of our own motivations. And some of those motivations are self-serving rather than God serving."

Debra continues "So here we are this Sunday right smack dab in the middle of the complexity of God's kingdom. Yay – Pride parades, where everyone is included. But wait, no they're not. The lamb and the lion still aren't ready to walk side by side. Yay – we're making progress addressing racism – but wait, we're not. Black lives still don't seem to matter and First Nations people are vastly overrepresented by numbers in jail, and those missing and murdered. Yay – Canada, the great experiment is turning 150 – but wait, at what cost?"¹

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/debra.bowman.9235/posts/10156413261522468>

Perhaps the reminder is that even in our confusion, in our times of feeling we're right in the centre of so much discord and disharmony and so many voices competing for a piece of God's righteousness, we must remember that there is enough of God's goodness to go around. And perhaps the words of Jesus today remind us that we too are the ones called to spread it around.

"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me... and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

"More than any other Gospel, Matthew underlines the ways in which Jesus not only represents divine power and presence, but democratizes this power -- and the responsibilities that come with it -- in ministry with his disciples. This discourse as a whole makes clear that God's power is now at work not only in Jesus, but in and through his disciples... The identification of the little ones, in need of a cup of cold water, instead elevates the least powerful member of the community of disciples into a position equal in importance to that of prophets and righteous ones.

At the beginning of this discourse, Jesus sends his disciples in mission without any means of support or defence -- no gold or money, no bag, no change of clothes, not even a staff or sandals. They are completely dependent, first on God and then on the hospitality of the communities that receive them. Their vulnerability and dependence is the key to the success of the mission... The theme that binds these relationship into a unit is "welcoming," which is at the heart of every relationship in these verses. Jesus is not merely pointing in a general way to the importance of welcoming or hospitality, already an important value among the communities in which he ministered.

He draws attention, rather, to the specificity of 1) welcoming prophets as prophets, who expect opposition and violence at the hands of the powers; 2) welcoming the righteous as those who work for justice, usually risking their lives to do so; and 3) offering a cup of cold water to the little ones "in the name of a disciple" (10:42). These acts of welcoming come at a cost that surpasses food, water, and shelter. They bind those who offer welcome integrally with those who are welcomed. These acts are not "one off" events, but constitute the defining feature of the mission,"² and how God would have us live.

"The rawness of Jesus' words here should not be lost on us--simply a cup of water in the name of a disciple--and one's reward is vouchsafed forever. The reward is not simply for the preachers and prophets among us but also for those whose calling is simply to pour the drinks and play the host(ess).

It is one of the great temptations in mission to think of it only or even primarily in terms of great missionaries of the past. We are drawn to heroic figures and their visible exploits. But as Paul

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2134

especially was fond of reminding us, the body is comprised of interdependent parts that cannot function alone (1 Corinthians 12), even if some members are given credit out of proportion to their value to the whole. That is to say, the great missionaries tend to be over-recognized rather than overrated, and their support teams who make the mission possible through prayer, planning, and financial support are so often undervalued...

The divine mission is as much about the unnamed people who provide a thirsty servant a cold drink of water as the familiar names that dot the pages of church histories. ...It may be an unconscious prejudice of historically clergy-dependent traditions that we tend to discount the roles of such people as somehow less missional. This would be a mistake and Jesus' words represent a kind of prophetic rebuke. To understand God's mission, and how the church reflects that mission, we need to celebrate the cupbearers of cold water. Those who hospitably receive the Lord's emissaries may be just as influential if not more so in the spreading of God's Kingdom. "None of these," Jesus tells us, "will lose their reward" (10:42). Jesus concludes his mission instructions with an implied invitation to all those "anonymous" saints who occupy our churches: you may not be the ones going, but never forget you too are sent."³

So today as we remember and we celebrate when we think you have no role in God's mission to bring the kingdom of grace and acceptance to the world remember. "One simple act of kindness can change the world." And so we should live.

Amen.

We Come To The Lord's Table

Our Loving God invites us to this table.

We are so happy to hear God's voice,

We are excited to share this Holy meal.

God has prepared a feast for us;

The table is laden with good things

– the bread of life, the cup of salvation.

We are so thankful to receive the Lord's gifts,

We are so blessed to enjoy the Lord's Presence.

All are welcome at this meal;

All are loved and all are invited to receive God's abundance

³ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3333

and enjoy it freely.

We meet at this table with all of God's children;

Those born of earth and those born of heaven; And together we sing eternity's praise song:

Glory to God, the Holy One

Glory to God in the heavens

Glory to God on the earth Glory to God now and always For God's love is never ending.

We remember and celebrate how God made His love known to us.

Jesus lived among us, and taught us to love God,

and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. But, His clearest, most powerful act of love,

was His choice to lay down His life so that we might find ours. On the eve of His death He gave us this sacred meal

to remind us of all He did and said; While He and His friends were eating,

He took bread and blessed it,

Then He broke it and passed it around: This is my body broken for You;

Eat it as a way to remember Me and My love for you.

After the meal, He took wine and blessed it, Then He passed it among His friends:

This is my blood poured out for You;

Drink it as a way to remember Me and My love for you.

And so now again we eat and we drink,

And we proclaim Jesus' life and death, His love and mercy;

And we open our hearts to this Lover once more.

Communion is received.

Thank You, God of our hearts,

For this meal and the love it expresses;

For Your sacrifice and the intimacy with You that it brings; For Your commitment to reconcile the world to Yourself.

We have shared the bread and the wine,

We have experienced the love and compassion of God, And we have remembered the mission of Jesus,

which we are called to continue;

May Your love, Your friendship and Your undeserved acceptance fill us, change us and inspire us

That the world may grow into a place

where all of God's children know they have found a home For all eternity. Amen.