

Scriptures:

Romans 6:1-11

Matthew 10:24-39

Tough Peace

It is in our Baptism that God blesses and calls us to new life. I was pleasantly surprised when I read the Roman's lectionary passage this week and discovered it was about Baptism. The book of Romans in a sense is all about baptism or at least about living the way of the baptized. And so after my initial excitement about the Romans scripture I then started to panic a little when I realized "oh no, I going to have to preach baptism is actually meant to transform your life?" After the 'barn burner' (as Nick likes to call it) I gave last time I was hoping I could just speak about a beautiful little sacrament. Kind of like at Christmas when we see the pristine nativity with the blond baby Jesus - that is what I was hoping to go for this morning.... alas. It is never that kind of thing that I feel God calling me to preach - so here we go again.

If we were to have used the Anglican liturgy for baptism it would to be honest have reflected the language of Romans a bit better because for Paul Baptism is about being dead to sin. As we discover the blessing of God we are freed by grace. However when grace abounds it does not mean you can do whatever you want. When you are baptized you are blessed by receiving and acknowledging the love of the holy. If you fully believe that, you will live in thankful response to all you have been given. Baptism gives you a new identity in Christ.

It is a little more obvious in the immersion baptism to see that you are cleansed for new life. That you have died to the old and been bore anew. The baptismal sacrament says that we share in the death of Jesus, and therefore share in the death of sin and therefore live the resurrection. We live in and out the abundance, grace and love of God.

So that takes us to the passage in Matthew where Jesus says 3 times do not be afraid and then he says I have not come to bring peace but the sword. How do we not be afraid of that? Karoline Lewis says "I resist this saying of Jesus. I resist it a lot, not only because it sounds so wrong. On so many levels. I resist it because deep down I know it's true. That's what happens when the truth gets told. When the truth is let loose. When the truth is finally uttered. Because when you are called to speak your truth, stand up for what you believe, a serene and untroubled reception is not always the result. Or, in the words of Angie Thomas, "Sometimes you can do everything right and things will still go wrong. The key is to never stop doing right."¹

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4927>

Living the life of a disciple will set you up against others from time to time because when you speak against common practice or human nature, when you speak against things that produce evil you will cause destruction and you may face persecution.

Last week we had a blessing, coming of age ceremony for my 16 year old niece. It was a beautiful ceremony in which a group of 15 mentors in her life offered her letters of blessing and hope. Of course there was a lot of advice in those letters and I participated in the giving of it. One of the things I felt I had to say was. "I want to share my a life verse with you and encourage you to take what you will from it. James 1:27 "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." You are entering adulthood in a time when the world is creating deep divides against one another in the name of religious and political powers. I think this verse is always a good reminder of what we are called to in faith. If our God and our faith is not calling us into love and care than we likely need to re-examine it. Jesus desires love and abundance for all. For you and for everyone else you encounter. Don't let someone lead you into hate or division because those things are not of God.

I would say the same thing to these baptized babes and to you as parents as you do your best to raise your child in the 'Jesus Way.' And by that I mean align yourselves with love and hope, peace and joy, welcome and grace. Always. That won't be easy but it is what this day is about. All we can do is our best and ask for forgiveness of God and one another when we get it wrong.

See the commitment you made today was to a commitment of love and peace. When Jesus says he brings the sword "It's not that argument or antagonism, is intended. It's just that peace is often hard to come by when the truth ends up actually being said. And Jesus is telling the truth to his disciples -- if you anticipate a lack of resistance to the truth of which I am asking you to speak, well, I have news for you. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a tranquil or quiet existence free from disturbance and discord. Rather, the Kingdom of Heaven disrupts. The Kingdom of Heaven is unsettling. The Kingdom of Heaven upends, ... The Kingdom of Heaven calls into question the rulers and systems that promise peace but in doing so wield a sword of terror and weapons of forced allegiance, armed with what they think is power. The Kingdom of Heaven comes with the demands on which true peace insists -- and never lets go of the kind of peace God has in mind."²

On Friday Lois Wynne director of Sea to Sky Community Services and I were in a meeting and we were talking about rentals and budgets and space use. And we confessed to one another that we find ourselves in a bit of a battle right now. You see when you go into a profession to care for people, and you build a dream of care for your community and then you have people telling you it is all about making money now, you feel your heart sink. We get it. We know. We are not as naive and most think we are. But we are called to bring peace, grace, and abundance to ALL. And so when we find ourselves needing to justify our purpose, remind folks of who we are and what we do and it is met with smirks and 'yah buts' over and over we remember its our call. And

² IBID

sometimes truth telling is the hardest work of all. The truth is for us as Squamish United Church and for me as the minister my message is “If its not gospel its not our work.”

“Most of us long for peace. Few of us wish for more war and conflict. And for peaceniks like us, this kind of talk from Jesus makes us nervous. Were we wrong about Jesus?... We live in a world where war is good business. Where corporations and governments profit from the conflict between police and poor, and from the resulting imprisonment of millions. Where the powerful know that as long as the weak are fighting each other, they're unlikely to turn on the ones holding the reins. Try to bring peace to any of those situations, and if their violence wasn't already directed at you, it will be soon.

This is what Jesus meant, I think. Claim that every human life matters, and those who profit from the ending of lives are going to get mad at you. Demand that leaders see humans the way God sees humans, and leaders whose position depends on grinding others to dust are going to react. Show up as the Prince of Peace, and the lords of war are going to scramble their jets.

It's not that Jesus likes violence, I don't think. It's more that he knows that in a world built on it, you can't avoid it. It's not desirable, but it's inevitable. The only choice, really, is between living with the violence that already is, and living with the violence that comes with trying to change it.”³

Sometimes standing up for what you believe in can be tricky. “Because when you stand up and speak out for what you believe, people start falling away.” Being a person of faith can be hard. I even used to find myself saying I was a counsellor when I was first ordained because it is not always easy to see how people can scrunch up their face when you say you are a minister. I was not lying, I am a trained counsellor, but now I tell the real truth.

So the reminder on this day of baptism is both one of blessing and challenge. If it is true your life is transformed in Christ you may find that you have to stand up for what you believe in from time to time in a world that may not see things the same way. I mean what if you were to start saying “I can't make it, I go to church on Sunday mornings?” Would it change your life? Would it change how you align yourself? Church on a Sunday morning messes with society today. Sunday is when you play ball or go for brunch or... you name it... Sunday is the day. Being a person of faith can get in the way. Just ask Ian Brown. Ian, thank you so much for choosing church this morning. I'm going to admit to you all that I asked 6 different musicians to fill in today. On Thursday Ian told me church would be his priority. My apologies to the garden tour but thank you Ian for choosing church. I know it wasn't easy. For Squamish today this place is not the priority, the garden tour is. Now let me say, I have hobbies that take me from church from time to time (In fact my husband Macky and our friend Wendy are racing in false creek right now - I would love to be there and if it wasn't for Nick being away and baptisms on the schedule I probably would be). But I got some racing in yesterday.

³ Caldwell, Quinn “Not Peace” stillspeaking devotional June 25, 2017

Personally, if I do not centre myself in Christ, take time to be with my people of faith and community I loose my way. It is so easy to do. Because being a person of faith requires I be a person who is a disciple that lives and shares Gods love. One commentator said How do you know you are living the gospel? “How do you know your doing it well? Not everyone likes it.” Even in the church we can get focussed on just ourselves and yet the nature of discipleship, the call of our baptized lives is to go out and care for others. Stand up for others.

“Believing in Jesus -- really believing in what Jesus says, what Jesus stands for, and then admitting it -- is risky business. Relationships will change. Relationships could very well end. That is, in part, what Jesus is saying. When you stand up for what you believe? Nothing will be the same. Ever again.” My understanding of the Gospel is that it “brings true peace to those who suffer, to those in need of healing, to those marginalized, to those demonized, to those oppressed; God’s true peace, realized and known in gladness and joy, fulfillment and contentedness, happiness and blessedness.”⁴

We as Christians and church today are being called to stand up and speak truth
“God’s peace expects justice. God’s peace asks for righteousness. God’s peace demands value for and regard of all. And God’s peace is what will save us all.”
So may we live that peace, may we teach that peace to our children, may we live as if being united with Christ has changed our lives and the passion and the resurrection did something to us. Something so profound that we can’t help but share that grace, hope and love with all the world.

Amen.

⁴ IBID