

Scripture Reading:
Mark 1:21-28

Going Missional

We live in a culture and a time where it's hard to know who really has authority in our world. It seems to me that often as soon as we think someone has authority or is respected we suddenly see things turned upside down - secrets are revealed or they lose the respect of their followers because they do things differently than expected. I might even question if we respect authority at all anymore. If someone is a leader, our culture seems to look for flaws and create failures before anyone is given a chance to provide leadership.

Perhaps it is because we live in a pluralistic society with a multitude of life styles and most people, are feeling insecure with life. And so we are in a generation looking for a set of instant, 'quick fix' answers, or even some authoritative figure to tell us what to do. (but then we don't like it when the challenges we are given)

In times of upheaval and rapid social change people look for a 'messiah'! I think today's culture is looking for a messiah but just like in Jesus' time they may not appreciate the challenges that 'messiah' calls us too. (Remember when Obama followers were claiming him as the new messiah...how many took him off that pedestal when he began to lead?) If we are looking for answers in this time of upheaval perhaps we might consider looking to the life and work of Jesus.

In today's gospel the people of the synagogue were astounded by the authority from which Jesus spoke. "when Jesus spoke people found something powerful happening to their psyches. And the teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, Jesus taught them with authority...The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant."¹

The people are astonished not that Jesus taught, but at the authority by which he taught. We don't have the reasons why. We don't know what his voice sounded like, we don't know if he was an amazing storyteller expert from parables, we are not sure if he shouted or was dramatic, we just know he spoke with authority and that authority changed lives.

One such speculative re-imagining is offered by John Dominic Crossan:

'He was an illiterate peasant, but with an oral brilliance that few of those trained in literate and scribal disciplines can ever attain.'

I wonder what do you think Jesus taught? Tell what was his message?

¹ Revd Rex A E Hunt www.rexaehuntprogressive.com

At best, we can guess a credible Jesus taught about the kingdom or realm or domain of God, which was everywhere present but not demonstrable. He focused on some central themes like celebration, compassion, and inclusiveness."² (*Smith 2008:79*). But more than words Jesus lived compassion, inclusiveness, grace, welcome and love. His words mattered because of how he lived, how he offered opportunities for life to the dying, the outcast, the forgotten, the forbidden, the unloved. He helped open peoples eyes to see The Holy in the ordinary common life world and experiences. He shifted the power base of knowledge from the experts to the common people. It was a very different way of doing theology. It was fresh and new. Jesus acknowledged that God was at work not only in the Synagogue or in it's leaders but everywhere.

This is one of the prime reminders we find in the book "Going Missional" we are reading right now as a congregation. God is at work and all we as church are called to do is to align ourselves with that sacred, holy presence that is already busy so that we might see the kindom of God shine brightly in our world. (Not that we might see more people in our pews, or the presence of God just for us members, but for all the world).

"Increasingly, we are looking for inspiration that we can relate to, that is authentic. Inspiration that gives churches hope to build from who we are and from where we are at right now. This is precisely the beauty of the missional church concept. Missional celebrates the exemplary within the ordinary. God is active in every community, every house-hold across the country. To be missional is to tap into the common experience of God's activity. God is already active and calling the church to get into action."³ The concept of a missional church calls us to connect with community. I have to admit the missional church movement is something I have been following closely since it began. It fits who I am as minister and Christian, it is what drew me to participate in ministry with you here at Squamish United Church.

The shift of the church from inward to outward is a risky one and for some it will shake us to the core but if living into the 'mission of God' is what we are called to as church then we may have accept the wrestle to find where God is calling us.

Now, I have found that some people feel by the offering of this book I am saying we are not active in the world, caring for others and doing mission and that is not what I am saying at all. I would love to know where each of you is serving in our community. I would be inspired to hear how you feel your life of faith alters how you live and work because I know it makes a difference. But I also want us here at Squamish United Church to continue to discern who we are and who God is calling us to be as congregation. Not just as a building but as a people of faith.

And, I want you to know why I feel this joint building project we are embarking on is so important to the life of this church community as it gives us opportunity to serve the community of Squamish in new and creative ways. But, I also want us to know if we truly believe God is

² IBID

³ Stiller, Karen and Metzger, Willard "Going Missional" pg. xiii

calling us to “be an inclusive community serving God world” by offering opportunity to the people of Squamish in this way.

In the introduction of the book “Going Missional” the authors offer this statement: “The task of the Church is not to first discern a vision and purpose and then to obtain God’s blessing and anointing, which is what many of us have done for many years. It is instead to discover what God is already doing and then to get on board with that activity. This basic missional understanding has some potentially unsettling assumptions:

- God is active outside of the Church.
- God has not been waiting for the Church before initiating redemptive activity.
- And therefore, God’s activity is not limited to definitions and parameters often assumed by the church.

Once our vision is broadened, this new awareness of God’s activity becomes explosive and beautiful.”⁴ And so I am inviting us to ask. What if we believed God is already at work in the programs, staff and work of Sea to Sky? What if we saw this as an opportunity to align ourselves with work The Holy is already doing? What if we viewed this as a way to open up the flood gates of blessing for the community, for Sea to Sky and as a result perhaps even SUC? What if this was the mission God is calling us too? I am not saying God is not calling us to our own initiative and innovative mission but I do want us to discern if this is a part of it.

We have all heard the mandate to go be ‘fishers of men.’ Ched Myers suggests “Taking this mandate for his own, Jesus is inviting common folk to join him in his struggle to overturn the existing order of power and privilege”... (And) the first step in dismantling the dominant social order is to overturn the ‘world’ of the disciple...” (*Myers 2008: 132-133*). Jesus, opened up the world anew and invited folk to modify the way they saw reality. To see God’s presence active everywhere and to join in.

Throughout the last 500 years in the history of the church, people have wrestled with the clash between the Bible and modern science. And as a result people have discovered and many now believe that the church doesn’t necessarily believe what they believe nor does it practice what it preaches.

People have decided they can no longer live with the inconsistencies of preaching and living and so they leave and now the church could likely form one of the largest alumni associations of any organization in history.

And I want to ask is that good enough for us? Is that who we are? If not then why don’t we let folks know that isn’t who we are. Why don’t we live into the continued mission God is calling us to not so that we fill our pews but so that others may know the abundance of the presence of love and grace. “That is the kind of argument I imagine Jesus had with the authorities of his day. That is why imagining another possible way of being in the world, was, and can be, fresh news.

⁴ IBID

And if **we** can take this to heart, and see it as the good news that it is, we will appreciate why **those** in the audience that day were so astonished. ‘And the teaching made a deep impression on them...’⁵

We need to remember that caring for the community and God’s world as a church is not about making a name for ourselves rather it is about connecting people with the work of God. Mission is what the church is to be all about. Our book suggests: “There is a point in your journey as a Christian where you understand that the call to serve Christ is a call to change who you are, to bring out of you all the stuff that God wants to, to heal all the stuff God must, and to make you a person who is constantly aware that your personal journey must lead you to greater effectiveness (abundance).”⁶

In the next weeks I am going to invite us to take time to discern who we are as individuals and church. I am going to invite some of you to share what you are discovering as people of Christ following God’s mission. I am excited to see what we will discover in the next weeks that lead us into the lenten and Easter seasons.

As you go from here this week I invite you to notice God at work in people or organizations in the community that you may not have recognized in the past. If you feel able or led to share those with me in an email or letter in the next week I would love that. Let’s open our eyes to the work of the holy both inside and outside of this place this week. And as our eyes are opened may our souls be also. Amen.

⁵ Hunt

⁶ Missional pg. 25