

Squamish United Church
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November 13, 2016

How Shall We Live?

These are simply sermon notes that set the stage for a conversation the Rev. Karen Millard and the Rev. Nick Parker had following the election of Donald Trump. We felt it was a good opportunity to have a conversation to address some issues, fears and the grieving we were hearing throughout the world.

This morning we come to you to preach into a world that is truly broken. But the world is also full of God's grace and love.

Discipleship hasn't changed much in the last 2000 years. Following Jesus still means testifying to our trust in God in the midst of circumstances that test our confidence and our hope. So we keep going on, with endurance as a hallmark of what it means to be a believer. We will keep witnessing to the marvellous things that the Lord has done and will continue to do regardless of the ways in which it looks otherwise. We just have to.

I say all of this because I have watched strong people around me - brilliant people crash and despair. I get it. I walked into the office on Wednesday morning and I wasn't sure if I wanted to talk or not. I was trying not to look at social media too much because it was devastating. But the extroverted side of me had to say something and so I hoped the church office might be a safe place to have a conversation. And so I began...

I said to Nick - I wish I could say I was shocked. Everyone seems shocked. My gut was telling me all along that this was likely to happen. I tried to convince myself otherwise - and I had moments when scandalous tapes of conversations of grouping women emerged that maybe truly he had burnt his bridges but even then I wasn't convinced. And here is why.

- As a woman married to a new immigrant to Canada I can tell you that even in this blessed country of ours racism is alive and well. And when Donald Trump made comments that attacked my family and I posted my rage on Social media I was told to relax and lighten up and not take things so seriously by members of my American family and friends.
- The bigotry that I saw alive and well has also been in my face for several months now.
- As someone who has worked the front lines and is now the president of a women's centre as well as a woman who holds a position that is traditionally held by men I can assure you that woman are not on an equal playing field and violence domestic, sexual, verbal, rape and otherwise are alive and well.
- I was not shocked because I see hatred, division, arrogance and individualism as the things that rule the day - and I am afraid to say that maybe they are winning right now.

And if that is what I choose to focus on commit me right now because I am going to loose it.

Nick paused and pondered - which he rarely does and then he responded to what he sees happening. And so I asked him to share it with you and then we decided that perhaps we can have a bit of a dialogue this morning.

The world in the last week has not become more bigoted, racist and misogynistic A quote I have seen a lot in the last few days I think is very true "things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. we must hold each other tight & continue to pull back the veil."

How then do we live?

What we focus on right now is everything - so what do we do?
Do you see what and whom Jesus sees?

If your eyes are locked on only that which is temporary, you might miss observing the permanency of those things that last. If you only see obvious grandeur and splendor, you may overlook beauty in that which first appeared unattractive, even repulsive. If you focus only on the damaging, the destructive, the deleterious, you just might miss what is affirming, constructive, and encouraging.

What you see determines what you have chosen to see. That might give an impression of the obvious, but it's true. This is not an intentional optimism or a glass half full kind of philosophy. It is the true claim of the true hope we have in God -- our God who is still present and powerful when it looks like the church is powerless in the face of all that seems to be working against the Kingdom of God.

On Wednesday morning I tried to stay away from Social media but I wanted to know how some of my friends and family were doing so I took a moment to look and what I saw only rose my blood pressure and started to turn me to despair and then I stopped and I decided for myself and others I had to be a different voice. I stand up here and every time I preach I say "Chrisitanity is to be countercultural" - well folks this is our time. We may not be popular but we have an opportunity to speak and live differently these days. And so knowing some would see it as trite I spoke my truth I said I have to believe that "Faith, hope and Love these three remain and the greatest of these is love" I choose to live in hope, love and light today and believe that love will conquer all.

I don't mean to be trite I really believe it - not the kind of squishy, mushy gushy kind of love - fierce love in the face of hate and abuse and ridicule. Its time.

"As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." What things will we see? In our churches? In our denominations? In our nation? In our world? In one another? Because, what we see is to what we can testify -- to what we will give witness.

And what we see is what we will say. If you see women as objects, you will speak about them as objects. If you see African American people as those who matter less, you won't speak up for them. If you see God as judge and jury, you will speak about others as deserving of condemnation.

Our testimony, our witness gives voice to what Jesus sees, to whom God sees. God needs us to be the eyes of the Gospel when the world and those who have the loudest voices in it seem only to see the temples and towers and how they are adorned with beautiful stones.

And when we question how we will testify or where we will find the words for our witness, Jesus reminds us, "I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict."

Testify together to God's steadfast love and faithfulness that no one will be able to withstand or contradict. And perhaps in this act of unity, of solidarity, of shared testimony wounds might start to heal, animosity might turn to amicability, and disaster and despair might lean into a desire and determination for unbridled, unleashed, unabashed testifying of the true victory of our God.

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