

Scripture Reading:
John 4:5-42

Never Look Down on a Struggle for Life

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q49BbfgJbto>

My soul is thirsting for you O Lord, thirsting for you my god. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord, thirsting for you my God.

Never look down on a struggle for life are words my mentor Peter Short taught me. They are words that come to me every time I begin to judge, or condemn, and any time someone offends me with their words or actions. Oh I'm not so holy that they always arrive right away - but they are sure to be found. They are the first words that came to mind when I read this week's scripture. They are the words I had in mind when I envisioned people coming to the fountain for a drink of water this morning. No matter who you are, no matter what journey you take. Never look down on a struggle for life.

These words I hold close because in my few years of life I have learned that most perhaps all of us are in a struggle for life. All of us are longing for our thirst to be forever quenched. All of us no matter if we wear high heels or power suits. All of us no matter if we have holes in our shoes and live on the streets. All of us are thirsty, all of us are longing for new life.

This story is for all of us no matter where we are at.

- Are you thirsty? Outcast? Alone? - Come to the well - drink of the living water
- Have you experienced the gift of life Jesus came to offer? - Share the good news
- Do you wonder if it is possible to have your thirsts of life quenched? - Jesus says "The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."
- Do you feel unknown? unloved? - You are known by the God of unconditional love and grace who knit you together in your mothers womb.
- Are you a disciple who doesn't understand how God could welcome the outcast and the sinner? Do you wonder if we have gone too far? Are there people we should leave out? "What do you want?" "Why are you speaking with her?" the disciples asked. "Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.
- Are you beginning your journey? Can you not help but tell the story of how you met 'the messiah?'"
- Is the good news bursting forth from you?
- Or are you trying to keep it to yourself?
- Like the disciples have you stopped reaping the harvest?
- Or are we ready to gather others in and shine the light of truth that all may experience the love, care and grace of The Holy?

Jesus isn't selective like we are. God doesn't stop working when we do. I loved the images given in the spoken word script that I shared with you. We all long to be known. We all long to be seen - not just looked upon but really seen. For me that is the deepest comfort my faith brings. One of the characteristics of my personality is that I find it really hard to know and believe I am loved. I often feel I am misunderstood. That might surprise you - but it's true. The greatest gift of faith for me. The strength that the journey of my soul brings is that I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am known and loved by God. God never looks down on my struggle for life. God always desires hope - eternal life for us. Remember God so loves the world - This God-hating world is loved by God. We are loved by God.

And now as Disciples of Jesus we are called to live that love for others. We are called to welcome every person no matter what shoes they wear, no matter what food they eat, no matter what house they live in, no matter what time they arrive at the well to drink. We are to offer living water.

I want to tell you (cause I think it's time) that I believe we have an opportunity to live into this story. As a congregation we (no you) have been dreaming and visioning for decades about where God is calling you. In the last months I have spent many hours with a team of people from this congregation and from Sea to Sky community services working with those dreams and visions. We have developed a potential opportunity that I believe will share the good news with the community of Squamish in a way no other church is capable of. We have an opportunity to be an example to the community of Squamish, to other faith communities and to the United Church as a whole.

This dream and this vision is not about a fancy new building. This dream and this vision as I have come to understand it is about building a legacy of faith. This project is about building a center that will care for God's world in an inclusive and welcoming matter. This is about building a center that cares for 'the whole person.' Mind, body and spirit. We have an opportunity to be the woman in this story. The one who feels insignificant, outcast, unworthy, incapable of being loved and showing love - until she drank of the living water of Jesus. Until she recognized that God knew her, and loved her, and could use her to change her community and world.

Imagine with me for a moment. We have a sanctuary that is fresh and new, it is warm and welcoming both from the atmosphere and the people who are in it. People are attracted to this building and begin to pop in to check it out. They have researched us on our website, they have read the preachers' sermons, and they have discovered this church even has some amazing ministry happening. (As a side note in the last two weeks I have heard from 3 people that they have come or will be coming to check us out because they have discovered us on our website - I also was interviewed by the observer because they were impressed by what they saw). But back to the story. Every day of the week people are walking by this building, they are coming through its doors. At first they only head in one direction; towards their social workers office. But as they do that they notice a sign for a fabulous study group, yoga class, youth group or coffee house that is being offered. They soon discover that the little coffee shop in the corner

is hosted by the church and is serviced by some of the people who have been working in job and/or cooking skills. They realize this is a place they want to be a part of, this is a church they could support because they are living into who they say they are.

I believe God is calling us to live into our faith. To welcome what is new in a risky way. Perhaps we are being asked to put on a new pair of shoes. Unlike Mr. Flaherty I think we are being called to more than a resoling of our shoes. Perhaps even if it's a little uncomfortable we are being asked to walk in heels, or snow shoes, maybe put on some ice skates. My friend Carol often uses the analogy of the need to take the first step. Every step we take is risky. The only way that you can take a step forward is to become off balance for a little while. It is a 'step of faith'. If you are not willing to be off balance, you'll be rooted to the spot (in fear) and unable to move forward at all.

I have come to know that as a church you believe in caring for the community. I have come to know that you believe we are being called to something new. I have come to know that you think you know what that is, but you just want to be sure. Another of my favorite Peter Short quotes is "If you have to be sure don't do it." A life of Faith requires faith and trust. Just like taking a step we will have moments of feeling off balance. There will be days when we have faith like Peter and we step out of the boat onto the water. And then there will be days when we doubt like Peter and we look down and start to sink. And those are the days when the spirit of God through the community of faith will be called like Jesus to reach down and lift you up.

I don't want us to build a fancy something so that we are the shiniest building in town. I want us to build a ministry embraced by 'an inclusive community caring for God's world.' And I do believe that we have an opportunity to do that in a spirit-given way with this project.

I don't know if you read the crocus poem on the blog this week (if you didn't I encourage you to do so) but as I am completing the writing of this sermon I am recognizing that perhaps I should have realized why the crocuses were more evident to me this week than ever before. You see, as I preach this I know that many of you will agree with the dream and the vision I just shared- and you long for us to run like the Samaritan woman into the community and share the news. I also know that some of you are not as convinced as I am that this is where God is calling us. What I want you to know is that we are all on this soul journey together. And I do believe we are all doing our best to be faithful. So my desire is that we continue to journey together. And remember as we walk together even if we walk in a different way we are to "Never look down on a struggle for life." As individuals and community we are in the midst of discovering new life in this way. May we always seek to be honest, faithful and loving God and neighbor first and foremost.

Our souls are thirsting for you O Lord, thirsting for you our God. Our souls are thirsting for you, O Lord, thirsting for you our God.

Amen