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Squamish United Church

May 2nd, 2010

Readings - Easter 5

**Psalm 148**

**Revelation 21:1-6**

**Acts 11:1-18**

**John 13:31-35**

### **People Of Promise**

“Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples - when they see the love you have for each other.” John 13:34-35

Our faith, our God, the Jesus we know they are all about promise. Promise of life for all of creation. Promise of life for you and for me.

Is that what it means to be a Christian? To be a person who lives love, welcome and promise for all - no matter what the barrier, boundary, faith or theology?

In each of today's scriptures God is breaking down the walls that the people of faith have place around them. The holy is opening up God's presence for all.

And every time the apostle Paul makes a claim of separation in the name of holiness and piety God says I've made that clean, I've welcomed those. No Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female - all are welcome. And all are welcomed to God's dwelling place.

Revelations claims God say's I am making all things new and then God say's it is done! I am the Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end. God does not only speak of future promise God speaks of a never-ending Kindom of Grace. God is constantly co-creating God's kindom with us. (I'll remind you as I have said before that I use the word kindom rather than kingdom because it is a more welcoming word that includes all rather than designating insiders and outsiders, giving no one a status over and above).

Do we believe God's kindom or holy presence is alive and well today?

I actually believe it is. I actually believe that being and living in the presence of God is Heaven - God dwelling here on earth with us. That doesn't wipe away for me another heavenly realm - and I live in hope of that. But today I also believe that when God offers us eternal life, and God's kindom presence it is here and now.

Now, some of us have had some hard things going on and by hard I mean some days feel like hell on earth. And so for me to say the new heaven and earth are here now might sound trite or

even a little naive. But that's the thing about faith. It takes a little - no a lot of courage. It means that when we read the scriptures and say our prayers we are called to live in the light of promise.

When Jesus gave the disciples the new commandment to love and live as he had, he had just finished washing their feet and he had just finished telling them that he knew he would not be with them much longer. It wasn't an easy moment. Unfortunately, sometimes we take that commandment to love as a light hearted fluffy suggestion.

And yet the life we are called to isn't fluffy, it might even ask us to be different than the rest. It might even ask us to love or welcome those whom nobody else will. It might even call us as a church to be people of love and promise to those who don't even belong to our circle of life and faith.

I think we here do that well sometimes.

This week - I was able to hand a bag of food to a stranger who came to through our door dripping wet from a sudden downpour. I saw his face change from despair to carrying a glimmer of hope. Both of us were blessed - and perhaps that glimmer - was a glimpse of the kingdom in which all who hunger and thirst are feed.

This week I heard just a brief story of a friend who was slipped a prayer shawl to comfort her in a difficult journey.

This week I know families were fed as they learned together how better to live healthy lives through our offering of meals to the Strengthening Families program.

This week I heard a story of a friend finding a wallet scattered on the road - she went and picked it up and took it back even though it interfered with the schedule of the day.

And this week I saw a holy kind of love as I watched a friend need to feed her husband his lunch for the first time. I witnessed in that moment kingdom Grace.

God's presence is here with us. We live within it all the time. We participate in it when we live out love and grace for others. Sometimes it can be in the simplest things and at other times it is not so easy.

Yesterday I presided over a beautiful wedding for Graham and Kelsey Roberge - and I want to thank you Wilf for being willing to be here to put on the sound system just in case the weather was bad. You never complained to me but I know that likely it was inconvenient. But to be able to say to that couple - (that are not members of this church) that we were willing to flex for them - was an offering of love and grace. It freed me up to be able to serve them better - and I will tell you it blessed that whole family because they knew that whatever happened the ceremony would be okay. That is a kind of example of how we can be different. And although it may not work every time - I hope we can always make the effort to be an inclusive community serving others, no matter who they are.

Breaking down walls, offering welcome, living differently for all is actually the kind of faith we are called to.

A friend of mine shared that in her church they have started to make a mission board. On that board they are placing pictures and/or posters of ways they are living out God's mission to the world.

Often we think of mission as something overseas. But, I believe we miss the whole point when it becomes only that. I want us to become a people of hope and promise. I want us to begin to share our kindom ways with one another. Not to puff ourselves up but to help us see what we are doing already that may encourage us to do more. We were invited in the board to share with one another where we see needs within our community and although we did not spend time on that last meeting we will continue to ask the question of ourselves and one another.

For example on Thursday I was able to go to the environmental awareness seminar for churches. Although there were only a few gathered the offering of information and opportunities for participation was a great success. Perhaps some of you might like to participate with some of their projects, perhaps some might have suggestions of how we can do more for seniors, or families in need in our community. I do not know what you do already, or what you would like to do - but I do know God is calling us to carry out our mission of being an "inclusive community serving God's world." And I want to challenge us to do that a little more openly - freely - maybe even with a little more effort.

I want us to celebrate and live into that mission. I want us to celebrate our life of faith and promise.

So as we sing Be Thou My Vision now - pray into the words you sing. That our lives may be a vision of love and hope and promise to all the world.

Amen.