

**Riverside United Church, Ottawa, Ontario
September 29, 2024**

Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-40

The Judgement of the Nations ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

“How Does the Creature Say... #4 Care and Life”

Karen Percy

Disclaimer: This is my preaching manual. Any punctuation or spacing irregularities are present to personally assist in my preaching.

There will be topics discussed in this sermon, which may be triggering for some. If you are reading this online and find yourself needing to speak with someone, please reach out to the church at 613-733-7735.

This morning, as in the past few Sundays, we continue our reflection exploring the numerous ways the creature responds to creation, to say care and how to say life in general.

Earlier this morning, we heard in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus offering a glimpse of what it means to choose to accept to follow in his footsteps. Though we did not read the beginning of this chapter today, in it, Jesus offers parable

after parable to share God's message of care and what it means to live a life of discipleship.

Our invitation to discipleship is ours to make if we so choose. According to the guidelines that Jesus offers the disciples, **offers us** – there is no special skillset that we need to learn, no prescribed dollar amount is required in our bank accounts before we can participate. We are called to simply do as Jesus would when caring for another beloved child of God. In essence, Jesus is prompting us to ready ourselves to offer radical hospitality to those in our midst. This is how the creature says care in life.

Today, many of us chose to wear orange in recognition of September 30th, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, or Orange Shirt Day, as many refer to it as. Since 2013, each year on September 30th, all across Canada, we are encouraged to wear orange to honour Indigenous children who were taken from their homes, families, communities, and placed in residential institutions.

The consumer-driven society that we live in is eager for us to participate in this day. Whether we shop in person or online, we are being reminded and encouraged to purchase these orange shirts that may or may not benefit Indigenous communities, artists, or programs. Purchasing these shirts, wearing them, and thinking our work is done – **is not** exactly working towards reconciliation.

Jesus is asking us, **in part**, to see the one who hungers before us, the one who thirsts for clean water, the one who needs a sustainable shelter, the one who needs warm clothes to survive our cold, frigid winters; to see the one who is sick and needs access to compassionate medical care to assist in healthy living. Wearing our orange shirt is **only** a small step in how we can journey towards reconciliation. We have more work to do to respond to show that we wish to say care and life for all.

Jesus indeed calls us to see the other before us – **but** that is not all. We are called to be moved by our heart to “say care”; to strive to find ways to offer

affordable food that can be accessed by all, to do our part to ensure that we protect the vast waterways so that we all benefit from clean, drinking water – no matter where we live. We are called to care for one another and for creation and to “say life.” There is no one way to participate. It is up to each one of us to discern how we can contribute to being a compassionate agent of change in this shared life. As Jesus shared with the disciples, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these [siblings] of mine, you did for me.”¹

Reconciling and journeying towards healing is not easy. Many of us have firsthand experience or know of someone who is currently caught in the middle of a disagreement with someone, involved in a family feud, a divorce, a separation or trying to navigate the legal system to bring about justice. There are many more hurts and wrongdoings that remain unnamed. In each circumstance, it is not always easy to care and see the other in that situation as Jesus would.

Sometimes, we find it easier to ignore them; we don’t want to talk to them, we don’t want to hear what they have to say. This does not get us to a place of healing, but we often choose this path anyway. Reconciling and healing takes time and a great deal of intentional effort to get to a place where we are open to hearing the other person’s story. Their life. Their truth.

What holds us back from extending radical hospitality to others that we meet along our path? What makes us reluctant to respond to say that we care? What holds us back from saying life – a life to be shared as a sibling of Christ? Is it a fear of a culture different than our own? Fear of rejection? Fear of being vulnerable? Have we become so hardened by our own experiences that we only see our own hurts whether they have been revealed or remain camouflaged to protect us?

Have we given up thinking healing is a possibility, because rightly or wrongly, we have simply embraced the idea that the other does not care? What

¹ The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version – Updated Version, Matthew 25: 31-40.

is it that prevents us from seeing the need and dignity of someone who is thirsty, hungry, dealing with addictions, or living with intergenerational trauma? Why is it that we are quick to avoid and deny others a safe place to tell their story, their pain, their truth, and all the parts that make up their life? What makes it so easy to forget to share life and to say we care about you?

Last week, I visited a friend, who is terminally ill, in the hospital. She was having difficulties forming her words, as she is currently dealing with health issues that are affecting her cognitively. At one point during our visit, she looked at me, frustrated with herself and said, “Why are you even bothering talking to me?” I told her it’s because I want to hear what she has to say and that I care. She smiled and we continued our conversation even if it was difficult to formulate.

Her question, “Why are you even bothering talking to me?” has stayed with me since our visit. Something about those words made me think of reconciliation. How many times do we wonder silently or aloud why the other person is not listening to us? How many times do we say they don’t care? We may even question and get frustrated as to why we need to keep retelling our story. How many times do we choose the path of not speaking to the other person to bring a false sense of peace to ourselves? How do we say life?

We may have an inkling that this is not exactly what Jesus would do in our place. Yet, sometimes, it is a big task. It is hard to move past the hurt and the pain of our experience. At times we feel awkward or uncertain about taking that important first step to say we care. Embracing vulnerability to share life is not easy. Jesus’ teachings are trying to encourage us to say care... to say in life...we say we care for the other; to allow ourselves to truly see them as a beloved child of God who may have hurts and pain unknown to us.

My friend’s words, “Why are you even bothering talking to me?” – helps us to see that **we bother** because as a follower of Christ, this is what Jesus wants

from us. ***We bother*** because we are called to be the Christ-light for our fellow citizens and siblings in Christ.

Jesus wants us to push ourselves to continue to open our hearts to compassion, to humility, to extend understanding, to want to hear the other person's story. In listening, we may learn of their hurts, their disappointments, and their needs. Our societal norms teach us to fear, to ignore, to shame and be quick to lay blame. Yet our faith story challenges and encourages us that when we are willing to walk the road with the other, ready to extend our hand out, to share their joy and sorrow, we can say care. When we are willing and ready to care for those in need, it is in this moment that we also serve Christ. This is how the creature says care.

We bother to care in this life because in the hungry and those who thirst, we may come to see the face of Christ in the one before us. We say care when we come to recognize ourselves in them. Not that they need to mirror every fiber of our being, but that they too can be seen as a beloved child of God, just like us. This is how the Creature says care. The Creature says care for others, the Creature, the Created One, says this is how we live our life as a Christian. The Creature says do these things to others, and then you have done them unto me. As we leave this place today, let us pray that we may have the Grace to say care – to say life. Amen.