

## “How Does the Creature say ... #5 - Love and Peace”

Riverside United Church

October 6, 2024

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 2: 1-4

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

Matthew 5: 43-47

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”  
But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you  
may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the  
good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who  
love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if  
you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not  
even the Gentiles do the same?

Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,  
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,  
lead us to deeper understanding of you,  
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

## **“How Does the Creature say ... #5 - Love and Peace”**

Tomorrow is October 7<sup>th</sup> and it has become one of those dates that is etched in memory and doesn't need much more information to remember its significance. We can still say September 11<sup>th</sup>, or January 6<sup>th</sup> and there is that common sense of meaning. We hope and pray that more calendar dates do not become common dates of memory and meaning especially when it seems to the acts of terror and violence that become the common memory.

A year ago tomorrow, we woke up to the news of the Hamas attack on Israel and the hostages that were taken and many are still held in captivity. It has been a year of hearing about the devastation in Gaza and the attacks back and forth. The conflict has now moved into Lebanon and it is an anxious time as the Middle East is so volatile. One Palestinian Christian elder that I read the other day lamented that the beauty of their Holy land, their homeland, has been turned into piles of rubble.

As we seek to comprehend what is happening and why, we recognize that this situation did not begin a year ago and in fact one of the sources of conflict is that there is disagreement on the history. We do know that this conflict is difficult to talk about because the sides are so polarized and words and even questions are quickly assessed and judged. It is difficult to imagine how there will be a resolution when there is such intensity of emotion and deep rooted competing narratives.

Over the past year, I haven't said a lot about this situation, except in prayer when we pray for a ceasefire and other means of resolution to the conflict. Because we long for a time when swords will be turned in plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. The weapons of war may have changed since Isaiah's time, but the motives and the situations that lead to weapons being drawn continue to be part of our human story - our human longing for another way.

As the season of creation continues we focus on the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of the hymn God of the Sparrow. We are grateful for Jaroslav Vajda's evocative and poetic words:

God of the neighbour, God of the foe, God of the pruning hook,  
How does the creature say Love How does the creature say Peace.

God of the foe - four words and yet, so much packed into them. How the Holy must weep at the inability of humanity to see the image of God in one another? How creation cries out over the ways that human beings have created foes and enemies - when walls of hatred have become fixed and deeply rooted.

In the gospel reading, Jesus repeats the Jewish commandment to love your neighbour - and adds the challenge to love your enemies. God of the neighbour, God of the foe, God of the pruning hook ....

While tomorrow is Oct 7<sup>th</sup>, today is World Communion Sunday and this date - the first Sunday in

October - may not have as universal meaning and memory connected to it. But, on the eve of remembering terror and war, it is humbling to reflect on the gift and grace of communion.

This is always a meaningful communion experience for me. My mind and soul goes to various church communities that I have been a part of. World Communion was the idea of a Presbyterian minister in the 1930's to help build a sense of connection within the reformed tradition of Christianity; church traditions that didn't share in the Eucharist every Sunday. At a time when Christians of other denominations may have been seen as suspicious maybe even enemies, it was a good idea to name the brokenness and taste the grace of our shared story, and humanity.

We gather at one table. As important as Christian ecumenical spirit and work is, it is not enough. Because our world is strained by our inability to sit at table with one another in respect and humility.

I have been reflecting this week on the concept of enemies and I have been searching my mind and heart to ponder - do I have enemies? I have had some friendships that have soured and some family members where conversation is difficult - but enemies? I have realized that maybe that comes from a position of comfort and privilege - but it is also the narratives that I have been taught and shown. I have mentioned before that I have a clear memory of a Sunday School Teacher responding in a firm and clear voice to another person in the Sunday School who said that they hated someone - "Never say that you hate someone." I don't remember who the teacher was, but her voice is so clear in my memory.

We know that there are situations and places where hate is taught - and it is learned. We know that there are deep seeded conflicts and prejudices and narratives that promote division. We know that it is one of the tools of power to make sure that the enemy is clearly defined. We see the creep of polarized views and personal attacks happening in our country - not just to the nation to our south.

When Jesus was asked to define neighbour in response to the commandment to Love your neighbour, he left us all still thinking about what that means when we portrayed the "dreaded" Samaritan as the one who showed compassion.

Who is our neighbour? How do the teachings of Jesus challenge our attitudes and our actions?

In January, when 8 of us sat down in the Principal's office of Brookfield High School to imagine what has become the Brookfield Community Food Cupboard, we quickly agreed on some of the principles of the vision that is now lived out each week. And one of the principles was that we would refer to those who came to receive food as neighbours - not clients, not recipients, not users. There was a recognition that those who would come would be our neighbours - sharing postal codes, but also sharing humanity. Language makes a difference and I am reminded of that each time I hear the phrase "illegal aliens" in the election rhetoric that blows up from the south.

How does the creature say love, How does the creature say peace.

Our language matters. Our actions matter. The narratives we speak, and teach and live matter.

And one of the narratives we tell as followers of Jesus is that all are welcome to the table to be nourished by grace and love. We remember a story shared for centuries upon centuries, we remember a story retold each week or 5-6 times a year - of how Jesus took bread and a cup and invited his disciples - even the one who was to be a foe of betrayal - to share in the symbols of brokenness and grace.

As we gather at this communion table today, we hold in our minds and in our imaginations, some of the other communion celebrations and the realities and circumstances where the courage of grace is being shared: among Palestinian Christians, amidst the rubble in the Ukraine, in small churches in US states still without power from Hurricane Helene. Our minds and hearts may take us to beloved buildings, places and communities that have been part of our history. Four years ago we shared communion on Zoom with our partner congregation in Jamaica.

There are a variety of realities and circumstances that meet at this table of communion and grace. And there are a variety of walls that divide our world in destructive and evil ways. In a few moments we will sing Walter Farquharson's words: "Walls that divide are broken down, Christ is our unity, chains that enslave are thrown aside, Christ is our liberty."

As followers of Jesus, we celebrate, we can sing Christ is our unity and our liberty and are invited to sing with a conviction of humility. All the faith traditions and paths to the Holy are not in competition, but with a conviction of humility, we are all invited to break down the barriers so that creation may know healing and a vision of unity. How does the creature say love, How does the creature say peace.

May it be so. Amen.