

Sqaumsih United Church  
Rev. Karen Millard

August 2, 2020

Scripture  
Genesis 1:2-4

### **Made in God's Image**

God is good, all the time, all the time. God is good. Life is not always good, circumstances are not always good but God and God's dream is always good.

In the last few weeks I found myself re-immersed in conversations that centre me. In the last couple weeks I have been slowly taking in all of the inhabit 2020 at home conference. This is a conference that I engage in as often as possible. This week it reminded me of people who speak to my soul, a community of people who ground me. Whenever I hear them preach and speak and sing and story tell my heart bursts wide open. So much so that I spent a year studying and traveling neighbourhoods with many of them.

This week I also found myself in amazing conversations about Squamish with other community leaders and again my heart was warmed. Covid-19 has meant an empty office and a lot of working alone looking at a computer screen even to have daily meetings. So it was good to reconnect with my neighbours and reconnect with the purpose of who God calls us to be even if it was over zoom.

I guess I would say this week I was reminded of what grounds me, what connects me to God and to the earth and to the soul of the Spirit that enlivens me.

It can be easy to get lost as we get up and hit the ground running each and every day. I feel like I preach love of neighbourhood at nauseam, it is why we as a community of faith built a building that shares social housing and community services but my heart broke a little this week when some folks I work with regularly said they never understood what it was to be church outside the box, for community.

How can that be when that is how we have been trying to live for the last several years? And my confession is I realized I haven't been doing my work lately as I just spend all my days trying and figure out how to keep an organization running afraid that it going to fall apart because we can't pay the bills. See that's not God's work, that's not God's dream. That's not the kingdom come. That's human nature, that's not the spirit filled life we are birthed out of, the presence we come from, that is the structures that have been created that uproot us. That sucks the life out of us as individuals and communities of faith.

So today I want to help remind us of where we have come from and the place we inhabit. We are going right back to the creation story, right back ground us in story.

Jonathan Brooks says 'we cannot talk about Jesus without talking about place.' Why is that? Because Jesus always entered a place as a guest and let them offer what they had to give before he offered himself. Early Christians and church were about being and living in community together. We are not called to be religious we are called to be followers of the Jesus way. To be rooted in loving our place and its people. Being a Christian is about being a neighbour created in the image of God and believing that your neighbour is too. Being with more than being for. Jesus was more of a guest than a host. He went into homes, he accepted meals, he listened and cared for others. I think we have actually gotten it all wrong for a long time. Jesus turns the kingdom life upside down. So today I am pondering once again how do we be Christians in our place and I am reminded that before we know that we have to know from where we came.

I was so moved by one of the speakers at the inhabit conference that I think I watched the session three times. Lisa Sharon Harper reminded us that Genesis was written by a people who were exiled, removed from their place, wandering around in the wilderness due to war. They were exiled to a place to be a slave of the Gods. Oppressed peoples removed from their land. It is a story of colonization. And it is out of colonization that our creation story is written.

Harper talks about four words that Change Everything. The first word is a word from the creation story that we know well that we began our worship with today. It is from the Hebrew bible *Tov' m'od* - this is what God says when God say's it is good. But this good is about the relationship between God and man and in this context God says it is forcefully God - amazingly good. Fully good - Shalom.

And in that goodness the next word Harper highlighted was *Tselem* - a representative figure of all humanity made in the image of God. The word "image" is translated from the Hebrew *tselem*, and it means "shape, resemblance, figure, shadow." There is nothing abstract in it. How have we forgotten that along the way? How have we forgotten that all humanity was made in the image of God. We all start from the same dirt we are created and grounded in the same way.

And the third word *Radah* which usually gets translated as have dominion over but correctly translated it is to tread down the untamed wilderness and to serve and protect all the earth. Stewarding all the relationships in creation.

So, to be human is to be made in the image of God and we have a divine call to care for this world. There is not a human being who was not made in the image of God. But unfortunately along the way beginning with Plato and Aristotle human hierarchy was created and so we live in a lie that some are more worthy than others. The doctrine of discovery states what it means to be civilized and what it means to be civilized is to be white, male and able bodied. It goes back that far. Even today current law is built on the doctrine of discovery. So of course we also have to contend with the colonizing impulse in us.

And yet if we do not live equity for all people and creation we are actually destroying the image of God. Harper went as far as to say our politics and policies that exploit or exclude any people we are erasing the image of God from earth. When we live in power, greed and empire that

exploits and puts down others we are declaring war on the image of God on the kingdom of God. We prevent the flourishing of the image of God here on earth we are preventing God's kingdom come.

Paul tells us in Galatians 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Here Paul is saying when we live in Christ we don't see through the lenses of human hierarchy we see the image of God in all.

The final word is Harper spoke to was *dmuwth* which in Genesis states we are made in the likeness of God. We are not the master we are simply human all of us. We are just as equal as the rest of the human community. That also means the first people to be on any land are the people God has called upon to steward and care for that land first and foremost. And most first peoples suffer because they have had the image of God their dominion and strength stripped from them. Justice says It is time for us them to rise up and live their truth.

There are a lot of stories of war and occupying in the bible and we always need to remember what lense we read those from. Maybe just maybe if we really look deep and read them again you will see the cautionary tales throughout. Recall that God did not want to give the Israelites a king but they begged him for it and they were at war from that point on. Power and hierarchy is not God's way. All place and all people are sacred. If God was about power and hierarchy the story of Jesus would be very different. Jesus was a brown man who was killed by an occupied Rome. That is the story that grounds our faith.

So in the next weeks as we rediscover our place as we are reminded of the land we inhabit and the neighbours we meet may we remember that the kingdom of God is all people fully alive. The glory of God is alive as God's image is brought to life in all people.

I invite you to pray with me now a prayer written by Montege Williams.  
A Lords prayer for our neighbourhoods.