

Home Worship Package, Sunday August 23, 2020

By Rev. Julie Lebrun - Inlet United Church, Port Moody BC

This is prepared as an alternative to worship during this time of COVID 19 while we are not able to meet in person. I hope this find you well. Please pass it on to anyone you think might appreciate it. This week the sermon is written in my speaking format, so punctuation is different. We also have an online service. Check our website at www.inletunited.ca.

Opening Prayer

Our God, how great you are!

On the first day of the week

we commemorate your creation of the world and all that is in it.

**Thank you for the light which wakes us morning by morning,
and for that greater light which shines in Jesus Christ.**

Our God, how great you are!

On the first day of the week

you raised Jesus from the dead.

Raise us with him to a new quality of faith and life.

Our God, how great you are!

Again, on the first day of the week

you sent your Holy Spirit on your disciples.

Renew your Holy Spirit in us day by day. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20 (NRSV)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Reflection

Pray, Loving God, May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be touched by you....amen.

Jesus and his disciples arrive at the district Caesarea in Philippi.

They had been traveling lots.

Jesus had been healing, teaching, inviting...welcoming "outsiders..."

Remember a few pages back in the story

-Jesus was trying to get away and have a break.

But the crowds kept following him

Remember the Feeding of 5000... the disciples wanted to send everyone home and Jesus said...feed them...the disciples complained ...but they did...and there was enough food...and more...

Jesus has been very busy ...not much time to rest...even when he tries...there is more to do...

Now, finally, they have arrived in Caesarea.

25 miles north of Galilee

Water springs from a cave

So it is considered to be a HOLY place.

Makes me think of Harrison Hot Springs

Springs of hot water... mineral water

There are the pools at the big hotel

But if you walk up the trail, you see the spring water rising up, hot!

HOLY...special...place of rest...place of reflection

-Kind of place you can take a breath from the usual responsibilities of life

-Kind of place you may ask: who am I...what am I doing...what do I want to do...what's God nudging me to do? What's important to me? Identity questions...

Caesarea is such a place...

But is also a place of recreation for the Romans...Built for Caesar of the Roman Empire

-So the spiritual side of me says yes...it is a HOLY place.

-And the practical side of me recognizes it is place of recreation for worshippers of another God

-the leader of the Roman Empire was also thought to be divine...to be God.

Jesus and the disciples arrive at the district of Caesarea.

And Jesus asked the question...identity question

"Who do people say that the son of man is?"

Side bar... on the son of man

-this is how Jesus refers to himself, 80 times in Gospels

-no one else refers to him this way

-son of man means humankind generally- in contrast to deity of God

-Human Jesus

-end side bar

Picture the crowd of disciples around Jesus...tired, hot, hungry...

...picture yourself there

...you have been traveling, learning from Jesus, there is a new movement starting, a new way of being together

- a new way of being in the world...where Jesus invites all people
- even the people the disciples would like to avoid -and not feed-
Jesus invites all people into God's love

Jesus wants the disciples and early followers to understand who he is

-he's been showing them

-he has been healing others – feeding people – offering hospitality

-then he asks the crowd, he asks us “who do people say the son of man is?”

-Where do you picture yourself?

Are you at the front of the crowd?

Middle? Back? Sitting on your mom or dad's shoulder so you can see?

- are you keeping quiet, eyes down, hoping someone else will answer

-Are you one of the people, who answers Jesus' question of “who do people say the son of man is?”

-some say John the Baptist

-you are Elijah

-you are Jeremiah

-you are one of the prophets from before

Jesus hears the answers- the prophets he knows through scripture and story- through scripture, they were all teachers to him.

-Jesus says ok- I hear what you are saying- you see me like the other prophets

--maybe even an incarnation of Elijah or Jeremiah

--Jesus nods...”good to know...that's what people are saying”

-it's before the time of google reviews

Then it gets more intense.

Jesus says to the crowd, to us...

-“but who do you say that I am?”

-picture yourself there...

-most of us looked down...you know- eyes to the ground...don't look at me...don't ask me...quick someone else answer the question

-there is a pause...it felt like forever...I could feel my face getting red...at the thought of having to say something

-the question hanging in the air

-“who do you say that I am?”

How would I describe Jesus?

Do I even know?

What does it mean to follow his teachings and his way of life?

-and then I hear it...good old Simon...remember Simon...he dropped his fishing nets to follow Jesus...he says

-“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”

-whew...finally someone answered...and I didn't have to

-and Jesus seemed happy with the answer

-he even changed Simon's name to Peter

-which means rock...on this rock the church will be built

The church is a gathering of people for a purpose

-To live God's light and Love in the world

-This has 2 halves...inner journey...and the outer journey.

Inner journey - is to nurture own inner lives, you have the light of God within you, grace...you don't have to earn it.

The other half is the outer journey ...to bring the Kin-dom of God here on earth now... Justice, peace, shalom...for all people.

-as Christians we understand God revealed through the life, teachings, death and continued spirit of Jesus...

-I also recognize other faith traditions as expressions of God in the world

-the United Church has study guides to help understand our wonderful multifaith and pluralistic world

-We can proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the son of the living God and respect other faith traditions.

What I find so encouraging about this scripture is Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God...in Caesarea...the playground for Roman soldiers and leaders.

-the place that recognized Caesar as God

-this is a bold move

This morning, We are not at Harrison hot Spring or Caesarea...

But I think COVID 19 has changed our world in such a way

-that we are in a new place

-the kind of place you may ask: who am I...what am I doing...what do I want to do...what is God nudging me to do? What's important to me? Identity questions...

-we can ask these questions for ourselves individually... and collectively as communities of Faith (churches)

For myself, the purpose of church does not change- As followers of Jesus, we live God's light and Love in the world

-This has 2 halves...inner journey...and the outer journey.

Inner journey - is to nurture own inner lives, you have the light of God within you, grace...you don't have to earn it.

The other half is the outer journey ...to bring the Kin-dom of God here on earth now... Justice, peace, shalom...for all people.

With our church buildings closed for now, we are finding new ways to do this.

-To nurture our inner spirits, we continue to offer spiritual practices, discussion groups and of course worship like this, all online.

-Phoning each other and keeping in touch is a priority. I really miss getting together in person...and hope we can stay connected even when we can't meet in person.

-But church is not just a feel good project...we are blessed to be a blessing. The wider United Church continues to work for peace around the world, including Palestine and South America. You can get involved where you are called. Locally, Inlet and Como Lake United Churches are building below market rental housing. Golden Ears United hosts a weekly community dinner (not now because of COVID)

-the list of "faith in action" projects could go on...but for today, we celebrate how our communities of faith can discern a need in our community and make connections to learn more... and to help make a difference. This is co-creating with God to bring the Kin-dom of God here on earth...one small action at time.

-I think also we are at time, where we need to be bold

-Simon Peter proclaimed Jesus as the son of the living God—in a place that worshipped Caesar as God.

-to live out God's love and hope in the world especially in places of challenge requires us to be bold.

- I invite to reach out to someone you sense would like some company with a phone call...someone you don't normally talk to. Or if you are feeling lonely or hopeless reach out for help. This is a bold move. It shows faith that things can be better. You can do it.

- I invite you to listen closely to the world around you. How can you learn more about and support the movements for justice active in our world right now. Suspend your opinions and be willing to learn a new viewpoint. This is bold move. It shows faith beyond what you already know. You can do it.

-Keep a balance between nurturing your inner life and helping to co-create with God... Peace, Justice, shalom here on earth.

-Our churches continue to be built on the testimony of our words and actions. This is the rock our churches continue to be built on.

Like Simon Peter we are in a world that worships many other things (money, status, just to name a few) but we can claim our roots as children of God...loved, forgiven and set free.

May it be so, Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you, and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;

The Lord lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.