

SYNOD 2018 SUNDAY WORSHIP

CATHERINE PATE

Isaiah 65:17-25, Mark 16:14-18, Romans 8: 28-39

O God, take my lips and speak through them. Take our minds and think through them. Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

Friends,

Today's readings, appointed as part of the lectionary for the Season of Creation, which is being observed in Christian churches around the world until October 4, these readings are filled with good news. Good news indeed, and I'm looking forward to digging into these texts with you this morning. But let me start with a question.

Does anyone here have a favourite recipe? Maybe it's one your grandmother made or one your mom or dad served you often as a child and you looked forward to every time? I love to cook. I particularly love cooking Indian food. I love the layering of flavours; olive oil, garlic, onion, ginger, toasted cumin and coriander, cardamom, curry and masala blends, slowly layered one on top of the other to create rich, aromatic bursts of flavour. Indian food is slow food. It takes time.

The thing I make that my daughter loves probably the most though is very simple and takes very little time to make. She loves my biscuits. And really, there is nothin' to them. Flour, baking powder, cold butter, mixed together with my hands with enough buttermilk to just hold it all together without melting the butter before their baked. I think they're best when there is just enough butter to make the layers ooze just a little with bubbling fat as they bake.

I serve these biscuits with raspberry jam, more butter and some cheese. And they are very very good. But, those four ingredients are only part of what goes into this recipe for the best biscuits in the world, according to my daughter. Because you see, I bake these biscuits on Sunday mornings. For the last 15 years, I've attended churches that worship Sunday evening instead morning, which means we get to observe the Sabbath, and part of the ritual of Sabbath in our home is to start the day slowly with biscuits, and to this day, when she is in town, my 23-year-old daughter and I love to cuddle up in bed until noon with our biscuits and watch a movie or episodes of Grey's Anatomy (don't knock it, the show is responsible, in part, for her wanting to be a midwife which is what she is off studying to do). The ingredients not found in the Joy of Cooking recipe that these biscuits come from; the ones that really make my biscuits taste the best are time and love. So, my daughter's association with these biscuits, is...love. And we know, everything tastes better when it's baked with love.

Today's readings are really recipes and instructions for how to live this Christian life — the life that brings us together this weekend — as the people of God —the shared life that synods like

SYNOD 2018 SUNDAY WORSHIP

CATHERINE PATE

this should/no must help us order ourselves, towards God's good purpose. If they don't, we need to re-evaluate the time spent together. Because we don't have time to waste.

So what is this recipe, what are the instructions and what are we trying to make?

In Isaiah, the prophet, speaking to the Israelites in exile in Babylon remember, describes what Jerusalem will look like when they return after they are freed. It's the image of what they have been longing for—the home of their dreams. Its utopian really. Too good to be true.

Bringing the language forward to modern day, it is like saying to the refugees of Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan that there will be no more war, no torture, no hunger, no rape. Your children and their children will be safe. They will have a roof over their heads and they will be free. You will shed no more tears, your fear and anxiety will be gone, and your hearts will be filled with joy. And all of your mistakes; the things you have done to others that have harmed them, all of it will be forgotten. They will no longer exist. You will be free.

This is not only good news for those fleeing oppression -- exiled from their homeland, right? It's good news for all of us. I want that kind of world. Don't you? No cancer, no fires, no hurricanes, no earthquakes, no murder, no homelessness, no hunger, no depression, no loneliness. And all who work against God's good purpose will be powerless.

Isaiah is describing the peaceable kingdom. That is what God is baking - a city of joy where all can live and work together for the common good. A place where no one will be left behind.

But unlike my world famous biscuits (at the risk of stretching this analogy too far) God is really starting from scratch. What God is creating is so different that God can't mix up a batch with what's already there, so God is starting all over again. "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."

A city of joy, a delight for God's people and a delight for God. That's what God is up to. That is what God's is mixing up a batch of.

And in Mark's Gospel we're told who God has invited to help. And I love this part. So, God raises Jesus from the dead and the first person Jesus will encounter; the first person to witness the transformative moment of all time is.... Mary Magdalene, a woman (in other words, a person of no account) and she goes and tells the apostles and they don't believe her, surprise surprise. Then Jesus appears to two unnamed apostles, but when they tell the others, they too are not believed. So, try try again...Jesus appears to the eleven in the upper room and he chastises them for doubting those who had said they had seen him. He admonishes them for their lack of faith and stubbornness; their unbelief.

SYNOD 2018 SUNDAY WORSHIP

CATHERINE PATE

But here's the thing, no sooner does he tell them that their faith is weak, he then commissions them...these weak eleven men to do what? "Go into the world and proclaim the good news to the whole of creation." To these unbelievers, he says "Those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned. This...to the eleven he just reprimanded for not believing. These guys (and the unnamed women) are the ones who are going to go out and "spread the good news" God has an amazing sense of humour.

So, go be disciples, Jesus tells them. And in Matthew 28 we learn what a disciple is. A disciple is:

- a) one who knows and follows Christ
- b) one who is being changed by Christ
- c) one who is committed to the mission of Christ

In the very design of this movement; at its very core in other words, is the recognition that we are going to fail. We are going to stumble. We are going to lose faith. We were not selected because we were the best candidates for the job. We were selected because God can work with whatever God is given to work with. In fact, God can make something out of nothing. Thanks be to God.

So, go make (action words) disciples, Jesus tells us. Go make disciples and spread the good news. The good news that deems you worthy, in spite of yourself, the good news that finds you worthy, the good news that finds me worthy, to transform the world.

You and I can know and follow Christ; and our church can help us do that. It can also guide us towards being changed by the living Christ as we pray, and participate in worship and live our life together in community. But, we will fail to be the disciple-making church Christ calls us to be unless we also encourage, equip, and empower people in our church family to be disciples who are also committed to making disciples.

So, turning back to Isaiah, God is inviting us to be co-creators with God—in building the peaceable kingdom here on earth. It's kinda like asking my then three-yr old daughter to help me make biscuits - believe me, there are easier ways of getting the job done. God doesn't NEED us. God WANTS us to share in the joy of co-creation. To be a part of building the city of joy for ourselves and for others and in so doing, to be drawn closer to God's timeless love.

And I think we have said, in the constitution of this institution that the answer to that invitation is "yes."

I mean, that's what this church thing is all about, right? Please, tell me that's why we gather Sunday by Sunday. That's why we run lunch programs, and book groups, and Bible studies, and

SYNOD 2018 SUNDAY WORSHIP

CATHERINE PATE

Messy Church. That's why we build labyrinths and offer spiritual direction and Safe Church training and funeral ministries and Sunday School and build housing and support refugees, right? (pause) Right?

Because we want to help God build the peaceable kingdom. The city of joy.

We have the recipe, we have the ingredients and Jesus came to show us how to get started. But it's up to us to live it. Heaven is something we can experience now. We just have to live as if God's kingdom has already come, because in Christ Jesus it has.

God's recipe was made plain in the person of Jesus Christ. It has to be made plain in us too. And that happens for us by following Jesus.

It starts by being at peace; modelling kingdom peace in ourselves, in our families, in our churches, in our communities. It starts by mending broken relationships. It starts by remembering that in God's kingdom there is unity in our diversity because there is no gentile or Jew, slave or free, woman or man. All are one and all are beloved in God's eyes. That is the secret ingredient to mixing up a batch of the peaceable kingdom. Unending, uncompromising, timeless love.

And in Romans 8 we are told that nothing can separate us from the love of God. And as the psalmist says, it doesn't matter if you go to the ends of the world, as far from God as can be found, there is no running, you are always the beloved and the lover will always find you. Even the most powerful will be found there. Even those who set out to unseat God will be found there and they will be powerless. In the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus even the most undeserving and disobedient will be met by that love.

Paul tells us God reconciles us to God through no action of our own—it is completely and totally by God's grace. Nothing else. There is nothing we *have* to do: no law to follow; no act of charity to perform; no prayer to pray. But if we follow Christ Jesus, if we work for the peaceable kingdom, our hearts will be captured by God's unending grace and love.

And when our heart is captured by God's unending grace and love, we fall in love with God. We fall in love with Jesus. We stop looking for joy in what the world has to offer and instead we seek God. We live for God. We find ourselves in Christ and we find Christ in us, and then the Holy Spirit sets up shop in our hearts to help us focus on God's good purpose in our lives.

And speaking of God's good purpose, people often use Romans 8 to suggest that nothing bad happens to those who are truly faithful. But the good spoken about in this passage is not as we define it. God is not in the business of giving us our heart's desire. God is in the business of transforming our heart to desire God. That is the good that will be worked out for those who

SYNOD 2018 SUNDAY WORSHIP

CATHERINE PATE

love God. Those who are called according to God's good purpose - the co-creation of the city of joy.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden, says the psalmist. And the church is to model that city —to provide a glimpse of the peaceable kingdom God is creating out of nothing.

And I know some people are skeptical about the church. Heck, I'm skeptical about the church. And some folks are skeptical about Christians. We don't often live up to the model set for us by our founder, do we? But God isn't finished with us yet. God is in the transformation business. And I for one, can use some transforming. How 'bout you?

We are a broken people, we fail and we make mistakes, we hurt each other and we hurt those we don't even know. But, we have a recipe to follow. We have the ingredients we need. And we have a picture of what the product will look like. So, let's roll-up our sleeves, put on our aprons, and start again from scratch, knowing that God is doing a whole new thing in us while we do it.

Let's pray: God of abundance and grace, help us to fall in love with you so that we can see your good purpose for us. Renew our hearts and spirits so we can be a renewed people for the work you have set before us. Transform us for the future we cannot see and make us a city on a hill, a glimpse of the peaceable kingdom you are creating here on earth. In the name of the one who first showed us the way, we pray. Amen.