

Take Home Worship – Sunday September 27, 2020

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

Opening Prayer

(Celtic Benediction, Philip Newell. Page 28)

The world is alive with your goodness, O God,
it grows green from the ground
and ripens into the roundness of fruit.
Its taste and its touch
enliven my body and stir my soul.
Generously given
profusely displayed
your graces of goodness pour forth from the earth.
As I have received
so free me to give.
As I have been granted
so may I give.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NRSV)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40 (NRSV)

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Reflection

I always have trouble getting my sermons down on paper.
I do a lot of thinking about it, reading the scriptures, reading bible commentaries, sleeping on it, watching the world, going for walk, on and on it goes.
But when the deadline comes, I'm reluctantly forced to start writing, forced to get it down on paper.

Why am I so reluctant? Once I get going I quite enjoy it...however getting started is another matter. I think I'm reluctant to get going because I want the sermon / reflection to be "perfect."

Brene Brown writes about overcoming perfectionism in her book "The Gifts of Imperfection...Your Guide to a Whole Hearted Life". She talks about missing out on things because we can become so stuck on doing it perfectly, that we can't even get started. Letting go of expecting perfection of ourselves (and others) is a step towards practicing self-compassion (and compassion for others).

Dr. Brown recognizes the value of healthy striving (it's ok to strive to do well) rather than perfection... none of us is perfect...although when it comes to my dentist doing a crown on my tooth, I want her healthy striving to be really good!

This idea of compassion for ourselves...accepting we are enough just the way we are...is essential to self-compassion.

The idea of self-compassion and loving ourselves reminds me of our Matthew reading, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." This implies that we can only love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves...more about this later...

Jesus says this to one of Pharisees (a Jewish sect of his time). The Pharisee, being an expert on the religious laws is trying to outsmart Jesus by asking him "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus answers "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment."

Jesus quotes this scripture from Deuteronomy, known as the Shema, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

This is so important, it goes on to say...keep these words in your heart...teach them to your children...remember them when you are away or home...when you rise and when you sleep...put them as a sign on your hand...write them on your doorpost and gates.

- if you were ever getting a tatooo this what you get....love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your might.

- I can hear Health Minister Adrian Dix...you need to be ALL IN

- this is an ALL IN adventure

Jesus does something new here.

He pairs the Shema...love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might

WITH

"you shall love your neighbour as yourself" from Leviticus 19

And he says this second commandment "to love your neighbour as yourself" is like the first....meaning they go together... they are connected...of same value...they need to go together.

Imagine a braid of the three going together into one...loving God...loving your neighbour...loving yourself...connected and strengthening each other.

In our book study this week we talked about the question, can we have compassion and love for others if we don't have it for ourselves?

- some may argue no, we can't love others unless we love ourselves... Dr. Brown writes that the better we accept ourselves and others, the more compassionate we become. But this leaves me wondering about people who don't have compassion for themselves?

- I love this example of a program for people who are in prison. They are given the opportunity to look after horses and found that over time they ended up being more compassionate to themselves and others. People that were in prison could be nudged (with the right circumstances) in a direction of becoming more compassionate. People can grow and change.

- I think it is the same for children and adults who may not have compassion for themselves. With love and compassion given, we can learn to love ourselves and have compassion for ourselves and others.

But of course the purpose is not that we just have compassion for ourselves but that we become a reservoir of compassion for others. Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"

Compassion is contagious. A quote from Brene Brown, "When we're kind to ourselves, we create a reservoir of compassion that we can extend to others. Children (and adults) learn how to be self-compassionate by watching us, and the people around us feel free to be authentic and connected."

So how do we love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind? I think we do this actively by having compassion and love for ourselves and others. I'm not speaking about love as a feeling or an emotion...but as an action in how we live and treat ourselves and others (our neighbours close by and far away) every day.

I think during this time of Covid and all the uncertainty it creates, we need to be gentle on ourselves and others more than ever. We need to create reservoirs of compassion for uncertainty, for questions, for anxiety, and for the losses people experience because of Covid. Loss of physical connection, loss of employment, loss of freedom to travel, and threats to our health will take a toll on us over time.

If we look to our faith tradition for guidance at this time the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew say it all...Love God with all your heart, soul and mind...do this by loving your neighbour as yourself.

If you are caregiver for yourself, for children, for aging parents, or for someone who is unwell...be compassionate with yourself. Take time for yourself to eat well, to sleep, to have contact with others, to do something enjoyable. Ask for help where you need it.

If you are an activist involved in local or international issues take time to remember your work comes from the love of God for you and all people. Thank you for your work and inspiration. Practice the same compassion for yourself that you share with others. Don't let anger or frustration be expressed in hurtful ways towards other...but show compassion as others learn of your justice seeking.

Jesus says, on these two commandments (love God, love neighbour as yourself) hang all the law and the prophets. So as followers of Jesus, seekers, or simply questioners of how to live in the world, we have been given our instructions. So go for it, don't wait to get it perfect...be ALL IN as you love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and as you love your neighbour as yourself. Amen.

Prayer of Blessing

May the love of life
fill our hearts.

May the love of earth
bring joy to heaven.

May the love of self
deepen our souls.

May the love of neighbour
heal our world.

As nations, as peoples, as families this day
may the love of life heal our world.

Amen