



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Listen to your Life”

Exodus 16:2-15, Matthew 20:1-16

Will Sparks September 21, 2014

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

I am standing, leaning against the low fence around the Hjorth Road soccer field watching Kendrick and the other 17 under 14 boys on his team in a scrimmage at the end of a monday afternoon practice. The late summer sun is warming the field- warming my face, as I hear the shouts of the coach, the hoots that come after goals. I watch the way these adolescent boys push their growing pre-man bodies to do things that they have never done before. Some are awkward, man-feet on boy-bodies, legs and arms a good 3 inches longer than their brains are ready for. Some are still small and compact, quick and sure. The range makes me smile. I can remember tripping over my own feet, falling up the stairs. I can remember Aidan hating his unreliable voice. Adolescent males: boys becoming men. IT is such an amazing, angst ridden, vulnerable, and funny unfolding in life. Is there something of divinity in their young growing lives, in their need to belong somewhere? God, why are we made like this, created as children and then re-wiring us in adolescence? What were you thinking?

If we were to listen to this moment, just pick it out of the millions of moments we live, and open to the divine voice in it, search its texture, movement, colour, for the hand of the Creator in it, for the Creator's intent for life in it, what might we hear, see, find?

We are in the season of Creation and this is the second of a five part series "The Heavens Declare the Glory of God." We are exploring the ways in which the creation, the created world reveals something of the Creator. In the same way that you can read a book and come into relationship with the author, or watch a film and appreciate the hand of the director, or listen to music and appreciate the composer, we are taking a few weeks to behold the creation and let it reveal to us the nature and character of the Creator.

Last week we began in the place of awe, stunned by the raw majesty, intricacy, genius of the universe, what is made, and how it is made. This week I want to look again, but this time behold Life as revelation of the Life Giver. Because just as we can observe what is in the sky or under our feet, over time, we can observe how life works, how it unfolds, or unravels, cycles along. We can see one season folding into the next. We can watch as one creative process disrupts another, how my aging need for security bumps up against your growing need for change. We can see how the life of the wolf and the life of the caribou are connected and ebb and flow with each other. Over time, we can watch and see how a wild fire, devastating in one moment, cleanses the forest and cracks open a whole new generation. We can see how conflict in nature, and in the human community can be creative, or destructive. I believe that if we listen carefully and openly to Life- Life with a capitol L and life with a small l- your life and my life, we can hear something of the divine voice in it.

Frederich Buechner, prolific Christian author writes in his memoir, "Sacred Journey", "It seemed to me then and seems to me still, that if God speaks to us at all in this world, if God speaks anywhere, it is into our personal lives... Someone we love dies, say. Some unforeseen act of kindness or cruelty touches the heart or makes the blood run cold. We fail a friend or a friend fails us, and we are appalled at the capacity we all of us have for estranging the very people in

our lives we need the most. Or maybe nothing extraordinary happens at all- just one day following another, helter-skelter, in the manner of days... To try to express in even the most insightful and theologically sophisticated terms the meaning of what God speaks through the events of our lives is as precarious a business as to try to express the meaning of the sound of rain on the roof or the spectacle of the setting sun. But I choose to believe that God speaks..."

Speaks in life. And I long to discern the voice, the meaning. I want to listen to Life the way we listen to scripture, for the voice of the divine. To some that may be kind of heretical- scripture is Holy with a capital H- but I would say, so is life. And scripture is here in our hands because some ancient one chose to listen to life, see it as sacred, and find the words to tell the story of the divine in it all. The Hebrew people wandering in the desert are hungry and cranky and they take a swing at their leader, Moses. And somehow God provides. And as they look back on that time and tell that life-story, God speaks. Jesus is looking at labour relations in his time, watching the way employers treat workers, how workers treat other workers, how humans create pecking orders, and he sees something of the divine in the way we choose to order our working lives. Two little snippets- two moments in life- two snapshots that we can hold and look at and listen to and see if we can see and hear something of God. And Life becomes scripture for us.

Now, it could be said, "Isn't that a kind of self-absorbed way of looking at things... it is all about me and my life." And that is a danger, but in fact if Life reveals God to us, it is really actually all about God, looking and listening for God, not for our own reflection, in life. As self-absorbed as our culture often appears, I believe our trouble is not that we think too highly of ourselves, but quite the opposite, that we think too little of ourselves and the life we live. In fact, if we were to listen closely to our lives- tenderly and with reverence, expecting that somehow the Life-Giver might just speak to us, I believe we might be humbled, we might see how it is not just my life, or even our life, but all Life is holy- the life of the Howe Street executive is sacred and must not be wasted in things that do not matter. The life of the woman in line for a meal at the front room is sacred and must not be neglected. The day spent in the hospital bed is as holy as the day filled with activity and adventure.

Not only that, but each of these sacred lives are interconnected- no life is lived in isolation- all life is lived in interplay. Life is a dance really, and we all have partners, welcome or unwelcome, that we must mesh with, trip over, grapple with.

The biggest danger in listening to our life as scripture revealing God is that we might tend to look at our lives and think we see more of God than we actually see- think we know more of the mind of God than we actually do. People do this with scripture all the time- read the bible and think they know the mind of God. God is always bigger than we can fathom- Life is always so much bigger than our experience of it. God is always beyond full description, meaning beyond what we can make, love unbound by our capacity to know. Like God, Life is holy, sacred, and it is also goofy, and hilarious, and heart breaking and baffling and both in us and beyond us. Much like God. So as we attend to the barrage of life, the boring bits and the sparkly bits, listening for God, we do so humbly, prayerfully, and together.

I'm back at Hjorth Field, watching the soccer practice. I used to have a body and mind at that stage. Thank God it didn't stay that way. Thank God for the process that grows the body and mind, settles the hormones. Thank God for communities that see us through the hurts and the healings, the stupid things we do that diminish life and the elegant moments of pure grace in which we participate. "Listen to your life," says Buechner. "See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace." Amen.