

I was on the program staff at Naramata Centre for five years and I consider it to be a pivotal time in my life, launching me onto the path of formal Christian ministry. I left Naramata believing I had just spent five years in residential seminary learning the practical skills I would need for working in congregations. Of all the programs I worked with and helped to coordinate, I feel best about my involvement in the development of the Healing Pathway curriculum with my dear friend Rochelle Graham.

While Rochelle was already a licensed instructor with Healing Touch international, she was convinced that this kind of healing program belonged to the church. She reasoned, of all the things we can know about Jesus, his was definitely a healing ministry. If the church is to be his hands and feet in a hurting world, then surely the church would be excited to embrace his hands on healing ministry.

With this practical logic, we began by developing a pastoral care training program which taught about music as a therapeutic tool, healing touch as the hands-on support to people in trouble, and we had didactic input from a student of Elisabeth Kubler Ross, Vickie Lannie, the coordinator of hospice services at the Methodist Medical Centre in Peoria, Illinois. New Life and Abundant Care ran for four years, launching the Healing Pathway curriculum.

I remember in the first year, Vicki talked about working with children, and how often, therapists encourage children to colour pictures as a way of expressing their own feelings. She told the story of a 7 or 8 year old child who had come to Hospice dying of a horrible cancer that could not be treated. The child coped by remaining silent, to the worry of everyone around him.

Finally a therapist invited the child to draw a picture of what he was experiencing. The background was black and red, coloured with broad sweeping strokes. In the centre of the picture was the meanest looking army tank you could possibly imagine. There were no people in the tank, it seemed to be a voiceless, heartless, thoughtless machine with its canon pointed on its target. The target was one little stick character, holding a stop sign, drawn in the upper right hand corner of the image. Over the stick person, the little boy wrote "ME."

There could not be a more honest way to communicate the situation. The little guy knew he was going to die. He was completely vulnerable to something unstoppable; he was angry about it and scared. He felt completely alone. With the gentle wisdom from years of experience and a deep faith, my dear friend Vicki asked if she could make one small change to the drawing. Sitting very close to the little boy, and saying no words, Vicki simply drew a second stick figure right next to the first, only it was a little bigger. Over its head she wrote "ME." It was the only way the little guy could understand that he would not be alone.

The text that Judith read for us this morning has caused a lot of trouble in the world. This one, and others like it from Revelation, have been used to threaten and coerce vulnerable people to join the Christian church before Christ should come and take only those who have been washed in his blood. These texts and others have been used to oppress, and to judge, they have been used as the church's weapon against its own extinction. It would not surprise me if many of you are sitting here wondering why we read this stuff anyway.

The Revelation to John, the last book in the bible, was written sometime in the middle to late second century, by John the evangelist, a political prisoner of Rome, incarcerated on the Greek Island of Patmos, a rocky, desolate place devoid of much life. It's where the Roman Empire kept their prisoners, typically in solitary confinement, typically deprived of food and water for days. From his own personal hell, John wrote to the spirits of the seven churches in Asia Minor who were also undergoing unspeakable persecution. Members of the churches lived in fear of their lives simply because they believed in Jesus Christ.

We cannot lose the irony here. Their devotion and commitment to the very person, the very path designed to bring life and healing, created their greatest source of personal fear. Their faith was doing anything but making them well.

The Revelation to John is full of secret codes and strange images that would have been completely familiar to the people to whom they were addressed. For centuries scholars have tried to figure out what all the symbolism and the images mean. Some have been downright silly especially in the days of the cold war when the beast, described elsewhere in Revelation, was thought to be the Soviet Union. And as I said, rather than be words of deep hope to fearful people, the images and the language from Revelation has been used by the church to stir up hate and division. Writing from his own personal hell, John was writing to Christians fearing for their lives.

What personal hell would Aaron Webster have gone through in 2001, as he died in the bushes at Stanley Park, beaten by baseball bats and a pool cue because he was gay. What personal hell did the 427,000 Canadian women over 15, in 1995 experience because of the sexual assault they experienced.

Those studying Peter Gomes' book, *The Good Book*, discovered this week just how the bible has been used to justify our culture's treatment of women throughout the centuries, and the more current and trendy, but equally heinous treatment of gays and lesbians, bi-sexual and transgendered persons.

Today, I invite you to stand in what might be your own personal hell right now. You know what that is. You carry it with you every day. It's as real to you as the nose on your face and sometimes it's so overwhelming, you don't even know what to do. As you get in touch with your own experience, I invite you to stand beside the little boy who drew the picture. Stand with Aaron Webster's family who lost their son, and all those Canadian women, and particularly the families of those who lost their daughter's in the downtown east side. Imagine, like them, that you can only see life through the lens of your torment. Imagine standing in solidarity with those who share the emotional content of your experience. Imagine you're standing with them all in front of that unstoppable cannon.

And now imagine receiving a letter from one equally battered, equally tormented, equally abused man who shares his vision with you.

"And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. And nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, (might I add, anyone who points cannons) but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

Friends, we are that new Jerusalem...each of us as individuals, and those who follow in the Jesus way together. Here is the place where you do get to bring all of who you are and together we hold it in peace. We are not alone. We live in God's World. Amen.