

It was a nail biter on Tuesday night, in the North Vancouver District council chambers. We had a respectable crowd. Not as many as last month, I'm told, but a good showing. People from presbytery came to offer support. Speaker after speaker rose to give their perspective on the merits of our redevelopment project. Jessica – Awesome! Barbara – Awesome. There were some surprises. Random people from the neighborhood got up to speak in favour of the project. Others spoke neither in favour or in opposition. There was a recommendation for a moratorium on development in Lynn Valley, after our project.

I found myself getting anxious, absorbing the energy of the room as one by one, our neighbors to the north spoke against the project in very personal terms. We heard the familiar parking and traffic issues. It was hard to hear that while we said we want to be a church that serves the community, we don't seem to care for those who are most directly affected. It was hard to hear that from their perspective we had been uncaring and unsympathetic to their suggestions for modifications to the planned foot print of the project. It was hard to hear all the accusations that were inconsistent with our core values. I found myself agitated, breathing deeply to hold the energy of the room.

And when one of the district councilors introduced a motion to adjourn the Public Hearing to May 13, to give us every opportunity to cooperate and collaborate with our neighbors, the ones who had just held up that mirror to us, nobody breathed. Making matters more challenging, the mayor had promised that another project would have its public hearing after ours, and those folks were waiting. While the motion was still on the floor he asked us all to leave, and to return after the next hearing was over. There we were in the foyer of the District Hall, pacing, speaking in hushed tones, fussing; our neighbors went outside in the cold night air. You could cut the tension with a knife. It was like five and half years of planning and two and a half years of council delays in the rezoning process was about to come crashing down. One person said I was unrecognizable, looking pale as a ghost and speechless.

The second public hearing ended, and those who stayed behind were ushered back into council chambers. Members of the Property Redevelopment Committee, our development partner and the architect, our consultants and all their "people" took their places in the front seats of the assembly. They stood before council to commit to doing everything they could to address some of the concerns of our neighbors. The motion to adjourn to May 13 was soundly defeated. A second motion to close our public hearing passed by a healthy majority and in minutes it was over.

For those who were there, as you shared with your neighbor earlier this morning, talking about your feelings from Tuesday, could you feel again that pent up frustration and anger rise up in you from all these months and years of delay? It's amazing. I know as I was writing this, I could feel it again. Even now, I find myself continuing to reflect on my role in any process of collaboration with the neighbors. I find myself squirming with some degree of culpability. Whenever I'm accused of anything in such tone, I immediately rise to the defensive. It's almost instinctual. That defense response has to come out sometime and most often it's not very pretty.

In his book, *The Powers that Be* American theologian and author, Walter Wink quotes Leah Rabin widow of the murdered Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, as she remembers when Yassir Arafat came to visit her "I have a very warm feeling for him. You know he came here after my husband's murder. He was here in this apartment, and we spend a very amazing hour or two hours together. He couldn't have been nicer. It really was *amazing*, you know, that this person until not too long ago we thought we shall never reconcile with. And now he comes in like a member of the family and is accepted like one. What I am saying is that it is so easy – to get over – longtime misunderstandings."

And in his book, Wink makes a very compelling statement. "I submit that the ultimate religious question today should no longer be the sixteenth-century Reformation's query, "How can I find a gracious God?" but rather, "How can we find God in our enemies?" I add a couple of questions. Long after the development partner and the architect and the construction consultants are gone, and the buildings are built, and the traffic has absorbed the increase, the underground parking is working and the shrubs and plants in the new landscaping are alive with new growth, there will only be us, and our neighbors; the new ones in our condos, and the ones who have left the sting of accusation on our hearts. Who is my neighbor now, and how do I wish to be in relationship with them then? What does gracious and active hospitality look like today? What seeds of grace will we sow today and what fruit do we hope it will bear? And I wonder how many hear these questions as a royal pain when we are still living with the troubles we carry about all this.

There is a lot going on in the story of Jesus at Lazarus' tomb. It's a dense read from the gospel of John – a collection of stories that is mostly metaphor. As we step into the story we have to continue to ask, how is this story consistent with the theological agenda of the whole collection of stories? What is the gospel writer up to?

Among other things, for me, the story points to the very humanity of Jesus and his capacity to be real. By the time he gets to the tomb and sees the mess that's before him,

both behind the stone, and the expectation all around him, I think Jesus succumbs to what it means to be finite, and still manages to pull a rabbit from the hat. The Greek word used to describe his state of being at this moment is greatly disturbed in spirit. This is the same condition he was in when he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested. It's the breadth of emotional trauma – sadness, grief, disappointment, fear, anger. Jesus is feeling them all in the Garden and he's feeling them all here.

They've called him to save the day with Lazarus, and almost in defiance, he waits two days. When he decides to go, the disciples challenge the decision, which is probably just plain frustrating. Martha throws herself at his feet and nearly admonishes him for not having come sooner, (probably in the way she complained when Mary didn't help with a dinner party he attended). The disciples lean into Jesus in their typically confused way, preventing him from going to the house. And so Mary comes and throws herself at his feet with the same accusation. If only you'd come earlier. Guests are chasing after her. When he realizes how overwhelmed and sad he is, and starts to cry, the peanut gallery chimes in "he may have loved Lazarus, but he sure took his own sweet time to get here." The wall of pressure builds– demanding, unmet expectation, blame. Can you feel it too?

This is not a story about Lazarus. This is a story about us...his followers...and our unwillingness to take responsibility for our own situation and bring the very best of what it means to be human. It's also a story about the very depths of Jesus' humanity. Long before Jesus was the Messiah of the Christian tradition, he was a person, putting one foot in front of the other, just like you and me.

As we recognize the feelings we carry in light of the past five years of our development project, we can realize that sometimes, we are simply human, putting one foot in front of the other. And so too our neighbors. They're simply human, putting one foot in front of the other, just like us.

And the point? Here's Walter Wink again: "If God is compassionate towards us, with all our unredeemed evil, then God must treat our enemies the same way. As we begin to acknowledge our own inner shadow, we become more tolerant of the shadow in others. As we begin to love the enemy within, we develop the compassion we need to love the enemy without."

This my friends, is the way of Jesus. For this...and for all our blessings...thanks be to God.