

Lent 2012
March 4
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“Taking Up Your Cross”

God, our simple prayer is this: To hear your voice.

Our scripture today reads the “Promised One had to suffer much, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and religious scholars”. Since starting my work here, I have been thinking a lot about how can we balance honouring the wisdom of elders, and those who have come before, while embracing new ideas and perspectives of the younger generations. And in amongst this balancing act, how can we allow space for the status quo to be challenged by members of all ages in our community? How can we embrace and support those hearing and responding to God’s radical call?

My mother was telling me a story about how when she cooked a pot roast she always cut off both ends, just like her mother did. One day she asked her mother why she did this. The response: because my grandmothers pan was never big enough for the roast she was cooking! All those years. If my grandmother had died before my mother had asked, my mother would still be cutting the ends off her pot roasts. The risk of not asking why we do what we have always done on this small scale is somewhat insignificant, perhaps the inconvenience of having to spend extra time preparing dinner, and a drier roast. But on a larger scale, when we don’t ask the why, when we don’t challenge how it has always been we end up perpetuating injustices. Like the questions, why can’t women vote? Why are First Nations parents deemed unfit to parent their children? Why can’t gay couples marry? Why are children to be seen and not heard? Why do we drive our cars everywhere?

Now, on the other end of the spectrum, looking at a younger generation: a friend of mine recently posted a facebook status saying, “cooking advice from mom is officially over. She just told me to google it”. Her mother is telling her to look up a recipe on the internet instead of giving her the family recipe. Now, there is undoubtedly a good recipe online for whatever she was cooking, and it probably wont instruct her to cut off both ends of her pot roast, but the challenge is that there are millions of recipes online. For example, a quick search for apple pie yields about eleven million one hundred thousand recipes! Her challenge now is not too little information; it is too much. When we have too much information, with too little guidance, we can think that scientists have been able to figure out teleportation and have completed the feat of teleporting a walnut. A belief that isn’t so immediately problematic...However, we can also think that violent, hateful and abusive language are key attributes to peer acceptance. We can think that violence against women in physical intimacy is the norm. We can become so overwhelmed by information that we have no idea if it is true, or how to apply it in our own lives.

We must find a balance. We need the wisdom of our elders and our children. We need to listen to each other and prayerfully reflect on how to move together towards peace, love and justice as a community. We need to stop judging each other and ourselves as “old and outdated” or “young and naive”. We need each and every one of us.

Part of what it means to be in community is to bring fully who we are what we have to offer. Despite sacrifice and risk, to show up and challenge ourselves to live more fully into the teachings.

I once had a job working in a boys group home. There were four boys at a time living in this home. All had experienced severe trauma and abandonment. I will spare you the details, but some of the stories I heard there have been permanently seared into my memory; simply thinking of them causes me a feeling of nausea and a knot to appear my stomach. In my line of work, I have heard a lot of stories, but the injustice experienced by these children had damaged them in a ways that are unimaginable to many of us. On each of boys bedroom doors there was a buzzer, which I would turn on every night once they were in their rooms with their doors closed. Once turned on, the buzzers would ring each time the boys doors opened, this was a safety measure to prevent them from sneaking out of their rooms and sexually abusing each other. This is the environment they were living in. This is potent, I know. But it is true.

One young boy, Caleb I'll call him, was on so much medication that he was a shell of a person, eyes glazed over, rarely showing any emotion. One summer, he decided he was going to choose his laugh. Caleb had never really laughed before, and he decided that it would be socially appropriate for him to choose a laugh. So all summer he practiced various laughs and finally decided on one. The thing is, it always sounded forced, because it always was. Caleb was the loneliest boy I have ever met. The house manager had a strong distain of this boy, and referred to him in no uncertain terms as the devil. She said that any opportunity he had to wrong someone, he would take it. She said he would never do anything that was truly altruistic, he would only do it if he thought that he would gain something. I don't believe this is true of anyone. Even those most wronged.

I introduced to the boys the idea of “opportunities for kindness”. They received nothing tangible for choosing to take an “opportunity for kindness”. I simply helped them to identify what they were doing. This could range from allowing someone else a turn with the Nintendo, allowing someone the chance to serve themselves first at a meal, or to giving up the front seat. On one occasion two of the boys were fighting over the front seat, I told them that this was an opportunity for kindness, they each wanted the opportunity so much, that they began fighting in reverse about who would *give up* their turn in the front seat. This argument ended quickly when I pointed out the absurdity of the situation.

One day I had a conversation with Caleb about how difficult it was for him to begin showing kindness. It was not that he did not want to be kind or that the act of kindness was too difficult, it was that he was taking such a risk. Why would kindness be a risk? Because he was challenging the status quo. The culture in this home was every child for himself. When he

begin doing something different by showing kindness, it created suspicion from the other boys. They assumed he was trying to trick them. They didn't trust that his offer was genuine.

When I think about our scripture, and Jesus' call to "take up your cross" I think of Caleb. Some might say that the severe sexual, emotional and physical abuse he experienced as a child is the cross he will bear for the rest of his life. But I don't see it like that. Because bearing your cross is always a choice. Caleb did not choose his situation. The cross he chose to bear was each moment he risked showing kindness, each moment he challenge the status quo. To do this he had to dig deep inside himself, to connect to the spirit within and find an inherent sense of justice, kindness and compassion; despite his environment being so void of these virtues. This is our challenge too. To dig deep inside ourselves, connect to the spirit within and find our inherent sense of justice, without having a model of what this can look like on a global scale. It is easy for us to identify the injustice in Caleb's life because it goes against our cultural values of what is right. Our call is to listen deeply to God's voice so we can see justice through God's eyes, rather than just our own. God helps us to see the world with more clarity; helps us to see the absurdity of the way things are. Most of us have become desensitized to the horrors and inequities in our world. Like wearing a pair of glasses that become tinted blue ever so gradually over time; we are unaware of the blue tint and eventually we are no longer see colors for what they are. When I was a child, walking by someone begging for change on the street caused my heart to break, brought my eyes to tears. Today, it is mostly just a small pang. I am not saying this is wrong, because we have had to desensitize ourselves so we can function. It does no good for us to be overwhelmed and immobilized by the injustice of our world. And yet, how does it make sense that in 2010 925 million people on our planet were hungry? That is about 1 in 7. That doesn't count people who have inadequate housing, clothing, and educational opportunities. That is simply those who are unable to provide for themselves and their children the most basic need of sustaining life in a physical body. And yet, we easily spend thousands of dollars on homes, cars, clothes, and other material goods, of which a large percentage is about aesthetics and luxury rather than necessity. This is insane. The only reason it seems less so is because of our blue tinted glasses, because we have become desensitized. If a child arrived on your doorstep starving, you would, of course take them in.

But global poverty... it feels out of reach... The problem is just too big. There are too many people, there isn't enough...

According to United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, to solve the problem of world hunger it would cost \$30 billion dollars a year to launch the necessary programs. To put this in perspective, global military and arms trade have hit a high of 1 trillion dollars annually. As a planet, we are spending 1 trillion dollars a year on resources that are designed to destroy creation. This is insane. It is so out of control. Why even bother? My time, resources and dedication are just a drop in the bucket.

I ask you this: Have you ever given to another to the point you do not have? To the point that you are without? For those of you who are parents, I imagine this may resonate with you. I ask you, what would it be like to give in that way to those who are not your children? What would it be like to be a global parent? For those of you who do not know what it is like to give to the

point you are without, of which group I am a part, I wonder what it would take? I wonder what it would feel like? When I give to charity- the only difference is in black and white, or red... I am never really sacrificing anything. I'm never really taking up my cross.

I stand here before you, with no certain action plan. I stand before you knowing that many of the choices I make regarding my clothing, transportation, food, and housing, not to mention other luxuries, are at the expense of my fellow humans, animals, and our planet. Because of the interconnection of the cosmos, each time we make choices at the expense of others, we are also making choices at the expense of ourselves.

That thing you're thinking of, that thing that is tapping away at the door to your conscious mind, that thing you keep shoving back into your subconscious- that might be your cross in this moment. If there is nothing tapping away- your call is to listen. And then, take up your cross despite rejection from friends, family, ministers, colleagues. Spend enough time listening so you can judge your own actions by God's standards, not by human standards. Because "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

Let us pray. God, our simple prayer is for the strength to respond to your voice. We pray to be transformed from the inside, so our actions can be in line with your will. Amen.