



Sermons **from Northwood United Church**

“Let’s get real!”

Amos 5:21-24, Matthew 6:25-33
Will Sparks October 5, 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

Loyal Rue, author of "Religion is not about God" wrote, "The most profound insight in the history of humankind is that we should seek to live in accord with reality. Indeed, living in harmony with reality may be accepted as a formal definition of wisdom. If we live at odds with reality (foolishly), then we will be doomed, but if live in proper relationship with reality (wisely), then we shall be saved. Humans everywhere, and at all times, have had at least a tacit understanding of this fundamental principle. What we are less in agreement about is how we should think about reality and what we should do to bring ourselves into harmony with it."

Loyal Rue is basically saying that religion, faith, is about getting real, about finding the trust and courage to face reality, the way things really are.

For the last three weeks now we have been taking a close look at the creation, at the unfolding of life, and the uncovering of science in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the creator. The ancient poet claimed that "The heavens declare the glory of God" and when you look at a supernova you say, "you bet they do!!" Our faith declares, we are made in the image of God, and when we look at the pure genius of the brain and the body and the way life itself actually works, protects itself, dodges and weaves through all kinds of mishaps in order to keep life going, well, ya! God is powerful, ingenious, and utterly biased towards life. And the more we look at the ongoing discoveries of science, the voice of faith cries awe and praise.

Today is worldwide communion Sunday, the day when we are acutely aware of our sisters and brothers who gather around the table of grace across God's green earth, celebrating together the gospel of radical love, liberation and peace. We, as a global Christian community have an incredible opportunity to connect at a deep level with people of faith in other parts of the world, and know what is really happening within the human community. We have family everywhere. Today we celebrate that our community does not know bounds of time and space. When we gather at this table, we open to the presence of people all over the world gathering in huts on islands, under tin roves and trees, in cathedrals in the great cities of the world, in homes and halls in every corner of the globe. And this means that we are one with those who gather with fear and tears in Liberia, where their churches are decimated by Ebola. This means we are here with our sisters and brothers in Fiji feel the effects of climate change, the rise in ocean temperature, and the melting icecap acutely. this means that for us, these "global issues" are not just theoretical. They are real, felt by our sisters and brothers. This worldwide communion connects us in a real way with real people, real communities. If we are to wise, get real, bring our lives in harmony with reality, the reality of our sisters and brothers around the world.

Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, or right relation. The prophet Amos said a similar thing when the wealthy and powerful had forgotten the vulnerable. True religion is about seeking to have our lives in harmony with the lives of our sisters and brothers around the world.

Now getting real means becoming aware and that can be downright depressing. I think about conflicts like those boiling over in the Middle East and Iraq, and these realities are hard to

manage. And getting real about climate change. It can be immobilizing, frustrating. But I want to tell you a little story, before we gather at the table, of what a difference it can make to people around this table when some person, with creativity and heart, seeks to be in right relation.

Some of you know that when I was in Guatemala in May I visited a sight of struggle where local farmers are trying to keep a mining company from moving in a destroying their land, water and community. It has become known as La Puya, one of several sites in Guatemala where international companies, mostly Canadian, are attempting to set up mines against the wishes of the people and with the active support of the notoriously corrupt Guatemalan government. I had been to La Puya 16 months before and these people had been peacefully holding the proposed mine at bay for 27 months. Well the Friday before I was to visit, the government sent in the special police forces, full riot gear, truncheons, tear gas... and over the space of half a day, pushed the people off the entrance to the mine in order to let heavy equipment in. 13 were taken to hospital. The blockade was broken. I can tell you lots more details about this if you come this Wednesday to Seniors Coffee at 10am, or at the evening gathering we are planning. But there is a piece of this story that few people know.

Word travels fast in the 21st century, and I heard this was going on and made plans to go there as quickly as I could. I was just a couple of hours away in Antigua. But more powerfully, my friend Emilie Smith, an Anglican priest serving a church in New Westminster heard as well, and immediately called up the CEO of the mining company and said, do you know what the police are doing on your behalf in Guatemala. Make them stop! She then gathered with some friends, put on her starchiest clerical collar, scooped up an icon of Mary the mother of Jesus, and went down to the head office of Radius mining, the company partially involved in this mining project, to ask them to make it stop. And she took pictures, and she sent them to the people on the front lines at La Puya.

I was there on the Saturday, the day after the special forces moved in. The place looked like marshal law had been declared- riot police everywhere, taking pictures of anyone there. The people had a meeting. And you would think that they would be discouraged, having the line they had successfully held for 27 months broken, and many were. But they very quickly changed strategies, have the UN Human Rights observers onsite, and when the news that Emilie had called the CEO of the company at home, and was heading down to Radius' head office, there was a visible lifting of spirits. They were not alone. The world was there.

These threads of connection, these relationships, nurtured in justice and peace, are powerful. They make a real difference if we are aware of them, and deliberately foster them. Several Catholic priests from neighboring villages came the next day to celebrate mass on site, under the watchful eye of the riot police. Today, worldwide communion, as we gather around this table, we name Yolanda, Dona Bertha, and all those who celebrate communion there and in so many other places seeking justice and peace, seeking right relation with the earth, seeking healing. We name them in prayer and we make these prayers real by nurturing relationships rooted not only in the ritual of the bread and the cup, but rooted in what Amos called justice and righteousness, what Jesus called, the kingdom of God. And in this way, we bring ritual and justice together, we get real. Amen.