

2021.06.13 SERMON 3rd Sunday after Pentecost ©Gyllian Daviest†

This has been a brutal two weeks. First the revelation of the unmarked graves at the residential school. Children who died for being the wrong race. Not white. And then the savage murder of a Muslim family on their evening walk: Salman Afzaal, his wife Madiha Salman, their 15-year-old daughter Yumna Afzaal, and Salman's mother, Talat Afzaal. Killed for being Muslim. For not being white. These events wrench at all our hearts. And let us take a moment of silence right now to pray for 9 year old Fayez, in critical care, without his mummy and daddy to comfort him...

Perhaps it all makes you feel a tiny bit of despair about our times, our country, our humanity. But...

This is also the week of the parable of the mustard seed... it's tiny. Remember tiny? Like a little baby being born in a barn, the savior of the world? Tiny is not to be underestimated. Tiny is powerful. Maybe even more powerful because people don't pay much attention to tiny... Maybe because any of us can begin with tiny... We've all seen tiny little trees growing in an infinitesimal crack in a huge rock. And we know if we came back in ten years that tree would be bigger and that crack would have expanded. Because of a tiny root that just won't give up. Like a mustard seed. Not very big and yet... it can grow into a tree. But wait - mustard doesn't grow into a tree! Actually in the Holy Land mustard seeds do grow into a tree, maybe even as large as 25-30 feet.

Seeds are magical, mysterious, full of potential... They are one place where the Kingdom of God thrives. From all kinds of seeds including the seed of God within us. And God knows we need the Kingdom to be here now. Because if you have any Muslim or Indigenous or Asian friends you simply have to ask them to hear all kinds of stories about the hurts and insults they endure daily. You will indeed hear why they might have hesitated to go for an evening walk even before the Afzaal Salman family was so brutally murdered simply because they were Muslim. This is not the kingdom of God, my friends. Not when people are afraid to go out for a walk. In Canada. So we need seeds. Seeds for the kingdom.

Listen to what Vandana Shiva, the Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and more has to say about her encounters with seeds: *"Well I started to save seeds twenty years ago when I first realized that corporations wanted to own and control seed and they wanted to create property in seed and they wanted to turn it into their intellectual property."*

What do we know? The corporations are not interested in seeds for the kingdom. Vandana continues, *"... For me the imperative to save seeds came from ...an ethical urge to defend life's evolution, life's diversity, and the freedom of life to reproduce, to multiply, to be able to be distributed. Because I could see that this would create a new kind of scarcity and it has. ..."* "the freedom to be able to distribute seed... Because she could see that this would create a new kind of scarcity and it has. You have perhaps heard the stories of farmers in India who self-immolate because they

can no longer afford to buy seed and the seed saved from the previous year's crop has been engineered not to germinate. Scarcity.

This is a scarcity of human decency. A scarcity of generosity. A scarcity of respect and kindness. Course you might be thinking, "Wait a minute, Gyllian. In this country the scarcity or lack of human decency towards indigenous people or Asian people or Muslim people has been around a long time. Many of us have never prioritized behaving decently towards people who are not white." Yup, I would say you're right.

OK so now we can see the cruelty of racism may seem huge and overwhelming. BUT... the power of tiny seeds...? Huge. So it's our choice. We get to choose. Which seeds will we plant, nurture, harvest? Jesus has made it clear which ones he wants us to choose. We already know that. And then he points us at a really important truth - never underestimate the power of a tiny seed to change the world. Never underestimate the mystery of God.

It's up to us to do something about this - we who are listening and our families and friends, our co-workers and neighbours - all of us together. It's time for us to take a stand, to be fierce in our insistence that we are not here to hate each other, but to love each other. We are here to speak up when we overhear someone being verbally slurred. We are here to intervene with our bodies when someone is being targeted by racist speech or actions. It's time for all of us to say - this won't do. We will not stand for such abysmal behaviour. We will not be quiet when anyone speaks or acts from hate. Or disrespect. Or an absence of compassion. It's up to us and here we are.

Last week we publicized our intention to ring our church bells 215 times in sorrow and love for the children who never went home. Whose families never knew what happened to them. We received some nasty responses, mostly anger directed against the church. So before we stood in silent vigil by the Ganges-Vesuvius Rd on Sunday I prepared myself. Perhaps someone would come and speak their anger and hate towards us - I wanted to be ready. So I imagined the kinds of angry comments that might be made and I imagined what I might say back. How would I defuse the situation? How might I speak love to hate? Could I listen so carefully and with such love that their anger might even dissipate? I prepared myself.

And that is **what we must all do**. Prepare ourselves by keeping alert when we walk on the streets or in the grocery stores. Prepare ourselves to *hear* the slurs and looks and words of hate. Prepare ourselves not to turn a deaf ear. Open our ears and not be 'nice and polite'. We're very good at being polite, us Canadians. Let's wake up to the racism all around us and become allies. Let's be ready to stand for the Kingdom of God wherever, whenever. Let's be ready to say "What you just did is not ok. You can't treat another human being like that. Not while I'm here." Speaking calmly and firmly, as God's love and mercy. God's justice and compassion in the world. Right where you are. In the world where everyone belongs, including the angry and wounded. Yes, we have our work cut out for us. Go and be God's love in the world. You know the world is desperate for it right now. Amen.