

2021.08.22 SERMON 13th Sunday after Pentecost ©Gyllian Daviest†

What makes us the People of God? What makes you one of the community, a member of the Tribe of Jesus...??? It's a big question to ponder right now in our lives. Because...

Look at the world this week -

Last Saturday, Haiti was pummeled by an earthquake. Close to 2000 people were killed. Over 10,000 were seriously injured.

Then on **Sunday** the Taliban took Kabul, the capital of **Afghanistan**. **Now** all those who had been working to bring Afghanistan into the 21st century - promoting education for girls, a judicial system that is fair and just, policing that protects the vulnerable and maintains the law and elected officials... all this now in jeopardy and those who worked for it, hiding, fearing for their lives, wondering if they'll be able to get out.

Then it's **Monday** and the UN Climate Report is released with such sobering news - we have reached code red and unless our governments take drastic action we are on the road to certain catastrophe. Not possible. Certain.

Then on **Tuesday** Tropical Storm Grace hits Haiti, bringing floods and landslides, inundating the makeshift shelters people are forced to live in with their homes destroyed by the quake. According to UNICEF 1.2 million people are struggling in these conditions.

All of this is taking place to a backdrop here at home in Canada that includes

- hundreds more unmarked children's graves being found as more and more sites of former residential schools are being searched.
- wildfires rampaging through our province forcing the evacuations of thousands.
- the drought, especially the drought in the prairie provinces.... Our wheat and flour, our canola and oil? - that's where they all come from.
- and then there's that threatening fourth wave of COVID hanging over us and that growing division between those who've chosen to be vaccinated and those who've chosen not to be vaccinated. A division fueled by anger and blame. A toxic recipe for creating resentment and animosity.

Wow - we are really living in challenging times. There's no point looking away, distracting ourselves. That would be like leaving a wound to fester. Why would we do that? We all know better. We need action.

Clearly we need to put on the armour of God. And if you were listening closely you might have noticed that Paul tells us to put on the *whole* armour of God. Wholeness...

And of course, remembering how Jesus is notorious for turning things upside down and inside out? We can safely guess this armour is not your typical armour made of metal or other tough substances designed to protect us from harm. Nope. We pretty much know that the armour of God is made of love. And rather than protecting and

insulating us from all danger it actually functions to make us more vulnerable to each other, more sensitive, more exposed. Cause we know, don't we - the only armour God cares about is love and light. And actually I believe the only armour that's going to get us through this is exactly that - the whole armour of love, of compassion, of kindness and empathy, of mutual respect... We all need as much of that kind of armour as we can get. Because as Paul reminds us that is the only thing that will really give us the strength to stand firm against evil.

“Stand therefore”, Paul says, “and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace... With all of these, take the shield of faith..., with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. The Word of God. Love. Light. Truth. Listen to this story a friend sent me:

Sometimes I just want it to stop. Talk of Covid, protests, looting, brutality. I lose my way. Become convinced that this “new normal “ is real life. But, then I meet an 87 year old who talks of living through Polio, diphtheria, Vietnam, protests and yet is still enchanted with life. He seemed surprised when I said that 2020 must be especially challenging for him. “No”, he said slowly looking me straight in the eyes, “ I learned a long time ago to not see the world through the printed headlines, I see the world through the people that surround me. I see the world with the realization that we love big. Therefore, I just choose to write my own headlines. “Husband loves wife today. “ “Family drops everything to come to Grandmas bedside.” He patted my hand “ Old man, makes new friend”. His words collide with my worries, freeing them from the tether I had been holding tight. They float away. I am left with a renewed spirit. My headline now reads “ woman overwhelmed by the spirit of kindness and the reminder that our Capacity to love is never ending “

The Word of God. Love. Light. Truth. Or as Jesus puts it, “*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me.*” We take the Word of God into ourselves so that we may abide in God, become one with God, be God’s presence in the world. And Jesus says it again and again, because he knows it’s difficult for us to really get it “*whoever eats me will live because of me.*” We do struggle to understand this at the deepest level. Isn’t that what the disciples keep saying - “This is difficult.” So difficult that many leave. But the twelve remain. And so do we.

SO DO WE. We remain. How do we do that? By grace!... We remain because... we too have a glimpse of what Jesus and Paul are talking about. We see down through the long darkness to that beautiful light, the light of God-with-us. And we KNOW there is nothing in our life more beautiful than this light, which signifies the living Presence of God. There is nothing more nourishing, more life-sustaining, more transformative than this. And we want it. We want it like we want the communion bread which symbolizes it, this essential food which is so much more than food. We want it because we know all life is meaner and stingier and less joyful without it. We want it because it’s our armour against anger and scapegoating and divisiveness.

[said with wonder!] And we get to have it!

I am so relieved.

I am so grateful.

Aren’t you?

(amen).