

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Lent 1

March 6,2022

Scriptures:
Romans 10:8-13
Luke 4:1-13

But Lent

As I drove away from the office much later than planned on Friday night the day spun through my mind and by the time I got to Pemberton Avenue I had an epiphany. I stopped at the red light at Pemberton and Cleveland. I took a very deep breath and I said out loud to no one.

“The Whole World needs a stress leave.” I thought and I talked to myself out loud We just need to stop, and breathe and sleep in until all this liminal space transition crap goes away. We just need to be on the other side of this.

And then the light turned green and I went on with my night recognizing that my epiphany was impossible. So I went to a friend’s 40th birthday celebration and enjoyed what felt like the first celebration I had been to since January 2020 and I drank a little bit more champagne than usual and I realized we are all going to fumble through this next part of this pandemic together and it is just going to have to be ‘good enough.’

It was the same kind of truth that hit me as I stood on the dike and at O’Siyam Pavilion on Wednesday placing ashes on peoples foreheads. This year, I felt more ready for lent than I think I ever have. There was a sense of relief as I said to myself and others “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return” It reassured me because it reminded me that one of the profound truths I hold is correct. We all come from and return to the same place, we are dust and dirt and particles, we are all woven from the same cloth no matter how different we are. And as I placed ashes on foreheads I thought about the crisis in the Ukraine and I discussed it with people more than once.

Together many of us have realized that the news is filled with a devastating, earth shattering reality that we hoped would never happen and the truth is overwhelming. The invasion of Russia on the Ukraine is taking lives, and stripping people from their homes and the media is showing us images of the stuff of movies. The kind of thing that I never wanted to have to explain to my 9 year old who looks at me inquisitively and says “why would any country attack another, don’t they know that we are all equal” and I have to say “that is a good question sweetie, you are right and unfortunately sometimes even adults and world leaders are bullies and think because they are bigger and stronger they have the right to take over someone else.” And as a parent I hope I answered the question correctly. So when we did ashes together as a family Wednesday night because my youngest begged Cameron to come over and give us ashes it was one of the most profound lenten moments I have ever had. Because it felt like even my 9 year old

understood better than most that we all come from the same dust. And so putting ashes on our heads and praying it didn't feel pious or even religious it just felt real.

This lent we are going to dive into the real stuff of life while we look at what robs us of being shiny and perfect. I hope you ready for the ride because for the next six weeks we are going to face the reality that the life we planned out with our vision boards or our bucket lists that we wrote in our twenties maybe didn't all fall into place. Sometimes, life robs us of the shiny, perfect life we had planned for. Sometimes - A diagnosis. A broken relationship. An accident. A lost opportunity, or A pandemic get in the way. This Lent, rather than change for "the best," we'll seek to gain momentum one day at a time, "to reach for a faith that is never perfect, but good enough" (Bowler/Richie).

Jesus in the wilderness isn't tempted by anything much different than we are. Lets take the opportunity to see our own wonderings, wanderings and struggles with the incessant temptations to "greatness" as portals to a spirituality of "integrity"—a way of redefining "perfection" to mean that which is perfectly suited "for us" which might, in fact, be quite "ordinary." The Latin "sacramentum" is a description of the Divine or "holy" breaking into something quite ordinary. Like bread and wine or water. "Actually, all we have is the ordinary stuff of life to point toward the Divine presence. All we have is our ordinary lives to give witness to the sacramental nature of God's action here and now. While we are waiting for something "spectacular" to happen (stones into bread, a million likes on social media, angels swooping down to catch us), we might just miss the real inbreaking of the spirit. If life is feeling like a wilderness wandering of ordinariness, we are in good company with the Israelites and Jesus who encountered the inbreaking of God in just such conditions." (Marcia McFee)

Luke 4 tells the story of Jesus' first journey after his baptism in the wilderness We assume he fasted, mostly because one of the temptations he experienced was to turn ordinary things into bread. Bread might seem mundane to us. But bread wasn't mundane to people who lived in the 1st century. Bread was something you could exclusively live off of--fermented whole grain dough contains all nutrients necessary for survival. Thus.... The bread of life.

One might think that Jesus' journey after this harrowing experience of temptation would have led to some mystical mountain top experience afterwards. One might hope that when we get through this pandemic we will have become perfected because we have learned so much. But as it turns out, after his satanic encounter Jesus instead just went back home for a bit! Some times it is simple things that we need most when we are having the hardest time.

It turns out that as we have gone through a pandemic the world has become more hateful and more despairing and that can be really hard to sit with. Maybe it hasn't become more of either but it certainly is more visible and transparent. Don't get me wrong here we all still need to find our ways to do our part and support the coming of a better world. But sometimes what is "good enough" is all that we need to do and be with ourselves, our families and our communities so we all begin to survive and thrive in our ordinary lives. Despite the cultural pressures to have or be

the shiniest, most perfect, most influential or most incredible people with the shiniest, most expensive things what we need to be is true.

I have lived a life of faith all my life -Of course, I tried to throw it away a few times because other people of faith messed with my vision of God and a faith life. But, I think I have come to realize that just because someone is a person of faith (any faith) doesn't make them less human than the rest of us. They all come from the same dust....So when I heard Kate Bowler say in her podcast "Life is a series of chronic conditions." I realized there was deep truth in that. "Life is chronic. Fear will always be present. I can only make those brave, soft choices to find my way forward when there is no way back." That is exactly what our meditation group found ourselves doing every day of February. Making realistic choices to get through the day a little calmer.

The self help and wellness industry will always try to fix your life. "Eat this and you won't get sick, lose weight and you won't be lonely, believe with your whole heart and God will provide, Keep this attitude and the money is yours." All of these things can and will be helpful but the truth is there are some things you can fix and some things you can't. These are exactly the kind of things the programs of the CUP are meant to address. When church and faith and the world gets it right we say to one another 'lets be on the journey of life together' even when its messy.

I know messy. I'm a parent. I have a beautiful 6 year old and a stunning 9 year old and all I want to be is the Best Mom in the world and all my husband wants to be is the Best Dad in the world. Before I had kids I had people often say to me "you will be such a good mom." My foster kids said that to me, my youth group kids said that to me and even occasionally my children have a moment when they now say to me "you are the best mom in the world." (Note the oldest is only 9).

But the truth is most of the time I feel like I'm not good enough. I hate most mornings because when they don't get out of bed and ready on time I start to bubble inside and somedays I am patient and some days I yell I've never been a yeller, I've never yelled at anyone every before in my life - but this pandemic has changed me - I'm less patient, I'm less healthy, I have gained weight, and I have not been the wife and mom I pride myself in being and yet here we are. My life is not a bright shiny instagram feed it feels kind of messy right now. I know a lot of people don't want to hear that from the minister but the truth for me is until we get truly honest with one another in this world we will all keep fighting to be or do something that doesn't even exist it. It isn't real.

The truth is we can all look good if you don't tell your story. I can't cooperate with the narrative the world and the church often ask for. Why, because I have friends and you have friends and some of you in the room have sometimes messy lives. That doesn't make you a bad person, it makes you human.

Some of you have done an amazing job at life but your children still have learning disabilities or anxiety or depression. You partner still has cancer no matter how perfectly you ate and exercised and lived. The truth is sometimes the worst thing in the world actually does happen.

My best friend has a child that has a rare blood disorder that makes him so vulnerable I have not been able to see my best friend in person for fear of covid more than once in two years, and last week he was diagnosed with Chrones disease on top of all the rest. And my best friend sent me an email to tell me because she said she is in so much pain she can't speak the words.

Kate Bowler and Nadia Bolz Webber joked about the saying "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Kate who has been suffering with cancer for 4 years said 'no, I don't think so' and Nadia responded right - "What doesn't kill you gives you a raging anxiety disorder"

Phew. Deep breath. I hate the word resilience right now because I am a little tired of being resilient and watching everyone else be resilient and I am weary because I'm pretty sure my 6 year old has been significantly socially impacted by this pandemic, but everyone including myself will say 'its okay kids are resilient.'

And the truth is I am in the business of helping people be resilient and I am in the business of hope because I have to be. I don't know any other way. Because sometimes life is really hard. We want a linear path but instead we find ourselves stuck in a liminal time where we don't really know what life will look like when it gets back to whatever normal now looks like.

Whatever it looks like this is what I hope. I hope that church will look more like a AA meeting where we all get to tell our truth and be honest about our lives and how we are connecting to God and one another no matter how hard it is. More like a dragon boat team that paddles as hard as they can together recognizing that every person on the boat is of equal importance and if someone falls off we will swing back around and pick them up and then paddles our asses off to catch up to the destination.

You know one of the most common things I hear from people is "I used to go to church" or "my grandfather was a minister." (Seriously you would be amazed how many people have grandfathers who were ministers). But people avoid the church or community because people are disappointing and people mess up. Church people are disappointing and church people mess up. The problem with that is people think church people are not supposed to be disappointing or mess up. Ministers certainly don't have that option. The truth is however every single one of us in this room will take a turn at messing up. We will all say the wrong thing, or not react in the right way to news we receive and that is the truth. But it is also the truth that every one of us will take a turn at helping someone else when they feel messed up. Every single one of us will help someone get back on their feet or be there for someone else when they are down.

Another, mistake people make⁴ is we think we are too hurt or broken for community and/or faith and yet that is exactly what community and faith are for. Vulnerability is invitational, your vulnerability will heal you and as you share it it will heal others. You will become less hidden and alone. You will become more whole and so will all of us as we live truth together.

I want to conclude by a paraphrase of a writing by Diana Carroll called

“But Lent” she writes

“I would love to become the kind of person who makes sure the dishes are done every night so I can wake up in the morning to the peaceful welcome of a clean kitchen.

I would love to become the kind of person who replies to every email the same day it arrives and keeps a neat, nearly empty inbox.

I would love to become the kind of person who never chews off her broken nails, or never has one too many glasses of wine.

But Lent is not for trying to become someone I am not. It is for honouring the person I already am.

My wholeness. My integrity. My belovedness. And so, in this holy season, I will not strive for self-improvement. I will not seek to create new habits or to break the old ones. I will not squeeze myself into impossible expectations guaranteed to leave me angry and disappointed when I fail. Instead, I will do nothing but breathe, receiving the quiet gift of every inhale and every exhale, receiving it even when I am too busy or distracted to notice. Somehow, God is present in the breath, in the breathing. And from time to time, if I simply stop trying, I may be given the grace of knowing it. (Copyright Diana Carroll February 20, 2021)

This lent may you discover the truth that you are loved and beloved. Indeed you are Good enough.

Amen