

September 25, 2022  
“No Way Out...But There is a Way Forward”

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7

Psalm 146

Luke 16:19-31

Today is not what you were expecting. In the normal course of things Rev. Karen would be cheerfully up here with words of wisdom from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s “Braiding Sweetgrass” and rounding out this Season of Creation with the theme of Hope. Last year, the Elder College Non-Fiction Book Club I belong to read and discussed “Braiding Sweetgrass.” It is a good read, full of truth and story and wisdom woven into a vision of renewed hope. Indeed, you may have come here today expecting Karen to link Kimmerer’s hope-filled outlook with scriptural text and the work of the Spirit intent on creating a way forward that speaks of symbiosis and radical possibility. Instead, you have Rev. Sally at the last minute and a reversion back to the lectionary and a Gospel story focussed on an impasse. Not what you were expecting.

Ironically, the liturgy recommended for this Sunday’s lectionary texts and embodied by “*enfleshed*,” the resource Karen introduced a year or so ago, very much fits with the strange dynamic of today and the disruption we are caught up in. Question, confusion, loss, consternation, albeit hopefully temporary, are probably surfacing, even as it is too soon to really know what emotions are being triggered in you by what was announced at the beginning of this morning’s service. But it helps, I think, to read, hear, and speak out loud words that may echo some of our initial reactions and emotions and bring them into God-space. In addition, we have a puzzle of a Gospel text that brings with it an awkward message of separation and Jesus appearing to frame it in a rather harsh way that could sever all hope without adequate discernment and reflection. So, even though it is virtually impossible to make a direct comparison between the impasse Christ Church Gabriola currently finds itself in and the Gospel

story, I do, however, have thoughts to share with you.

We begin by fast forwarding to the end of the Gospel text as Jesus tells it. Lazarus is in heaven. The rich man is in hell, and he is not a happy camper. He had had it good in life and is flummoxed because he now finds himself in a fiery furnace. Lazarus, who suffered horribly in life has, in death, been transported by the angels to be with Abraham. Frustratingly for him the rich man can see Lazarus in all his new found comfort, and with all the bias of privilege still intact he still perceives Lazarus as subservient and at his beck and call: “Send Lazarus down to wet my parched lips.” “Can’t do,” is Abraham’s response, for there is no way to cross the great divide and no way for either Lazarus or the rich man to escape their destiny. The rich man, in a moment of filial concern panics, and tries again. “Then have Lazarus go to my brothers and warn them for they are bound to the same path as me.” “Can’t do,” is the response. “Besides, your brothers have Moses and the Prophets. They need nothing else.” And we are left with an interesting juxtaposition between where hope lies and what we can hope for in this life and the next should we choose to take the story literally.

Ultimately, through this telling of the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus conveys that it is how we live that matters. Faithfully attending to the wisdom of God as it has come to us through Moses and the Prophets matters. Living out what Jesus teaches us matters as it has the potential to change us. Hope lies in paying attention to the Holy, no matter how it manifests itself. For Robin Wall Kimmerer, as an example, Holy Wisdom is rooted in Creation and the Creator, in nature and science, and in the wisdom and story-telling traditions of her Indigenous roots. I would also suggest that Wall Kimmerer is a seeker—seeking to become her full self by doing all she can to live out the principles that are foundational to her very understanding of who she is and who she can fully be in place—in this place of the Creator’s creating.

I don't usually go to the place of just rewards as it is a shade too judgemental for me. For me, heaven and hell are human constructs, and I am vested in the hope of how well we can live rather than what happens when we die. I believe each of us is well able to create an image of heaven that gifts us with hope of a different kind as we make the transition in Spirit/spirit from life to death and life after death. Having said that, some people truly live in hell on earth—Lazarus being the obvious example. Others create hell on earth—and at times I am sure the rich man certainly contributed to it, whether he was aware of it or not.

Each or any of us may spend time in life suffering or alternately adding to it. But in relief, as a church, as a Christ-led people and a Community of Faith, we have a Gospel to seek out, access, and live by that reconciles with both sides of suffering. A Gospel that rests on the tradition bounded to the wisdom discerned from Moses and the Prophets. A Gospel that has the potential to make a difference in every life. We know the wisdom of it by rote: “Love God, love your neighbour as yourself.” “Do unto others as you would have done to you.” We build upon these foundational truths by living them out as Jesus taught us. As disciples of Christ, we are called to seek out the Gospel of Jesus and create from it a place of radical hospitality, inclusivity, and respect for all. We are to live out a Gospel of healing and justice, care for one another, and care for Creation. It is our living that matters. And, indeed, hope matters for it is hope that believes in and yearns for the peaceable kin-dom that comes from putting these truths into practice.

Hope, I would therefore propose, is the purview of God, for God never ceases in trying to create healing peace in us and from us: Wisdom, with us from the very beginning...Moses and the Prophets...Jesus the Christ...the prophetic voices of this age and the ages to come...all cry out to us to remember the way, to be the way, to return to the way, and to live forward in hope as

we co-create a way of being in the world that fully reveals God's love for the whole Creation. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man we are faced with an impasse, but it isn't insurmountable. It is a story that reminds us that we can choose a better way and are well equipped to be the change. We can do differently and break down barriers, negating all that separates us one from another and from the Maker. Indeed, from a hearing of the old story we can turn to live out a new story—one that calls us to reconcile and make new as we co-create heaven on earth.

At present, it is as if we are at an impasse with respect to the current situation Karen and Christ Church Gabriola finds itself in. It is a breach that could feel as frustratingly impassable as the divide between Lazarus and the rich man, especially if the wheels of government process grind slowly. None of us enjoys feeling adrift and rudderless. In this immediate time, Karen can't come to us as minister and we can't go to Karen as we usually would as a Community of Faith. It feels like such a sudden and uncertain severing, held as we are by the semantics of government rules and regulations. For now, we are required to live within the bounds of the law, for it is the marker that regulates the nature of who we are in this place called Canada. Nevertheless, we can, as a faithful people, persist in faith despite by seeking to live out the Gospel as we have learned it from Jesus both as a Community of Faith and as individuals. We will certainly manage in the interim.

At this point, despite the uncertainty, we are well resourced to temporarily navigate our way, and I say well done Christ Church Gabriola. The Strategic Plan and Covenant is in place. Christ Church Gabriola is well equipped with folks who have well-developed leadership and discernment skills to help guide the work of the past two or more years into being, and the Implementation Team has a road map to follow. You know who you are and what you hope to achieve as a Community of Faith. Even if you aren't on Council or a Committee of the church,

you contribute to the whole with your time, talent and good faith. Hope therefore is made manifest in our faithfully living out the Gospel we have been given. Hope is made manifest when we are the church despite a momentary disruption, for it is the faithful way forward. And, even as we live within the framework of this current impasse, there is nothing holding us back from praying for Karen's situation, for the upholding of the Covenant we have made with one another as a Community of Faith, and continuing with what we are called to be—the people of God in Christ and living with Gospel intent as best we might. Indeed, with Christ with us, with a Gospel directive to give of ourselves towards the hope of co-creating a just and peace-filled world, with the tools we have collaboratively created to guide our mission and vision forward, with God's directive to live with respect in Creation, we can truly demonstrate that we are a Gospel people. And that, I believe, is God's hope in us. Amen.