

Sunday Sermon February 5th

Last week, the Bishop gave the sermon at Christ Church Cathedral. It prepared the congregation for a meeting after church.... they are in the process of hiring a new Dean to follow Rev. Ansley. Thanks to Pearl, we emailed a link to that service and sermon.

Sharleen and I leave for Portugal on Tuesday. This is my last time with you before the Vestry meeting on the last Sunday of February. It took until Friday for me to realize that I should combine key points from the Bishop's sermon with the readings today.

Bishop Anna talked last week about the 'Great Emergence'

- a cultural shift among churches from a people focused on belief [39 Articles] towards a way of life defined by love.
- God is not understood as a violent supreme being, despite some sections of the early Old Testament. God is understood as a renewing spirit at work in the world, because of the New Testament and the Prophets.
- Micah asks "*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" The mission of the church, people and institution and even this building, is not growth and prosperity. I claim that *What the Lord Requires* is lived out among each other here, and in the streets, and among 8 billion people and in all of Creation.

Lecto divino... hold and ponder the word or phrase grabs your mind and heart.... Today's reading from Matthew:

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot."

The church is one of the salts of the earth. When are we salt? and when should we be thrown out?

One understanding of the foundations of church is the 3 B's - Belief; Behaviour; Belonging. We need all 3.

Being human, we fumble juggling, and prioritize. Sadly, sometimes we find darkness where there should be light.

- Great-grandmother Eamer back in Ontario was sure that anyone not an Anglican was going to Hell. We alone know God. Who in good conscience could watch silently while another person goes towards a dungeon of perpetual torture? Belief was paramount. **THIS SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE - THROW IT OUT.**

In some churches Behaviour is paramount.

- For simplicity, church leaders often [1] focus on simple or visible behaviour.. alcohol? sexual attraction? and [2] are negative. [WE don't do THAT!] **THIS SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE - THROW IT OUT.** BTW.. Jesus focuses condemnation on hypocrisy and avarice, not sex.
- Too often in Canada, congregations are consciously open to all, with the hidden requirement that everyone new must clone themselves to everyone already here. **THIS SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE - THROW IT OUT.**

- Believe in and say the right words, give and give so the church is a palace and the preacher lives in a mansion, and God will make you rich, and safe, and beautiful, and happy and..... THIS SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE - THROW IT OUT.

What might it mean to start with Belonging? The verb is “might” not “is” because the congregation will explore that, resolve that, live that together. No one person can do all that for a community.

At worst, Belonging leads to a Cult, with Belonging, Behaviour and Belief welded into a solid mass. Think of ISIS. Think of the mass suicide at Jonestown, Guyana in 1978. THIS SALT HAS LOST ITS TASTE - THROW IT OUT.

We are all by birth Children of God who inherit Creation - I suggest that we Belong with everyone and everywhere.

Oh, certainly we are constrained by living in the English language in the Canadian culture at the south end of this marvellous Island. Someone who spoke only Amharic, an Ethiopian Semitic language, would find community in the Esquimalt Ethiopian church more easily. *Go where fed* - celebrate when a person is fed spiritually, no matter where. God's Call is planetary, made more rewarding and also difficult by our very human limitations and vulnerabilities. Try to live without walls.

In past sermons I called Belonging ‘Community’. A rose is a rose by whatever the name. Belonging married to loving Behaviour brings us to, I think, what Bishop Anna called a way of life defined by love.

This love must be planet scale — not love of us, and hatred of others. It is a warm and messy place, like a toddler's play space, where kindness and forgiving are as necessary as air and water.

There is a wonderful Swedish saying: *Shared joy is double joy; Shared sorrow is half a sorrow.* Imagine you are an investor and here's the deal: when the stock goes up, you get double the gain, and when the stock goes down, you pay half the loss. Yahoo, sign me up!!

St. Mary's Metchosin, in a warm and messy way, is often such a place.

As you come to the Vestry meeting on the last Sunday of February, consider where you are called to serve. As the Gospel of Matthew says: *let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

This is neither ego nor dour duty - serve where you find joy and peace. Serve where your eyes sparkle, and the eyes of those around you sparkle back.

Belonging. Behaviour. Belief.

Shared joy is double joy; Shared sorrow is half a sorrow.

Do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

May it be so with us.