

Home Worship, June 21, 2020

Gathering Words:

Such a long journey we have been on, we humans! Charged with the care of each other and the care of all creation, since the very beginning. How far have we come? How far have we yet to go? What good can we yet do? What lives can we make better? What hope can we embody, and for whom? We are feathers, each of us, on the Breath of God. And truly, the answer is blowing in the wind:

Gathering Music

Blowin' in the Wind

[Bob Dylan] sung by Joan Baez

[Jane grew up with Joan Baez LPs, and has been inspired by the 1960s folk tradition - like other folk music, this is music of the people, which expresses aspirations for a better world for all]

<https://youtu.be/cBP59jSU4Aq>

Opening Prayer

We long, O Holy One, for that better world, where there is peace, and safety, and food, and shelter and hope for all. We grow weary by times, especially when pandemic season mutes our joy, and saps our energy, and keeps us from each other. But today we gather to remember our purpose as your people: our work of loving the world you so love. May we find fresh strength and courage to journey on, especially as this beloved community, so rich in hope and vision and compassion. May it be so!

Readings:

Amos 5:21-25

I despise and reject your feasts!
I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies!
When you offer me burnt offerings,
I reject your oblations and refuse to look at your sacrifices of fattened cattle!
Spare me the racket of your chanting!
Relieve me of the strumming of your harps!
Instead, let justice flow like a river
And righteousness like an unfailing stream.

Matthew 25:34-40

Come, you blessed of God! Inherit the realm prepared for you from the creation of the world! For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, I was ill, and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me." And then these just people will ask, "when did we see you hungry and feed you, or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we see you ill or in prison and come visit you?" The ruler will answer them, "The truth is, every time you did this for the least of my sisters or my brothers, you did it for me".

Reflection

[Jane's note- This is part 2 of my reflection on what's defined my faith and my ministry - or as I was saying in a recent Facebook Live talk, what makes me want to get up in the morning]

I was a teenage church dropout.

One reason -

I was a classic 60s kid- never quite a hippie- but I was into human rights and the peace movement.

My family were friends with Holocaust survivors and Russian dissidents.

My bus route took me past slums in north end Halifax, and I knew that Nova Scotian Black people did not have the opportunities I had.

But when I went to church, no one was talking about this-

All I seemed to hear about was - Jesus died for my sins-

And he's up in heaven with God- and we need to try to get there-

Nothing about life on this earth.

I was drawn back into church in my 20s-long story- when I was a postgrad at Oxford- and that's when I discovered - God did care about life on this earth!

First, we had a guest preacher - Colin Winter, bishop in exile of Namibia- why in exile- because his faith drove him to speak out about apartheid, and the South African government did not like that- Bishop Winter challenged us - much like the prophet Amos - Worshipping God is not just what you do on Sunday morning- it's about what you do to make the just fair world God wants.

And then - a theological student attached to our church led a Bible study on the First Testament prophets- like Amos - He pointed out how often the prophets say, as Bishop Winter did, God doesn't care about your fancy buildings and your order of service and your rituals - To please God, you need to be about justice and peace.

And then one Good Friday we heard from a Chilean refugee. This was in the brutal regime of General Pinochet when many were imprisoned, tortured, killed, others disappeared- And I got it - the Good Friday story was not just about Jesus' crucifixions but all the crucifixions since, Crucifixions which should not have happened, If we as Christians had only got the message- that it was not Ok for Jesus or anyone else to suffer and die this way.

Our candidate for ministry, Emma, has been to Guatemala - where still human rights and indigenous rights are abused and suffering and death continue - as in Honduras [where Lois Hord and family used to live]- and in so many other lands- we still haven't put an end to Good Fridays.

And I went, one year, to Mexico, not for a beach holiday, but to learn from the poor, from community activists, from base Christian communities- and the stories I heard and the people I met there have stayed with me always.

Meanwhile in my volunteer work I was learning how welfare recipients were treated, compared to tax evaders- Being a privileged middle-class kid, I thought the justice system was by and large fair- till I sat in magistrates court day by day and learned there was one law for the rich and one the poor- And today we find there is one law for white people and one law for those of other races.

Back then I was going on peace marches and discovering Christians who were opposed to nuclear weapons. And I was getting involved with the rights of women, in the church and beyond.

And I was discovering liberation theology- Latin Americans and South American Christians were talking about God's preferential option for the poor- You could say this was Poor Lives matter.

Years later, I realized there were liberation theologies in the plural- written by Latin Americans, Black Americans, South Africans against apartheid, Asian Christians, white feminists, black womanists, indigenous peoples, gay and lesbian people - And I still study these theologies - now there is Dalit theology, those formerly known as untouchables in India, and post-colonial, coming out of countries colonized by Europeans.

I still ask-who are the vulnerable, who are those who are most at risk, who are those who suffer from injustice ? What I teach and preach and write should have something for those people, not just for privileged people like me.

And of course rural communities too- communities like ours have a different take too- we live on the edges, the margins, and the powers that be don't always understand us- so I try to tell that story where I can.

To cut a long story short again, my years in Saskatchewan immersed me in the birthplace of medicare and cooperative movements and modern social justice movements-

People asking what about women, what about the poor, what about indigenous people?

The gospel I learned in Saskatchewan was about making life better for all the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the disadvantaged- including the strangers, the marginalized- and the family farmers , especially the small ones, whose work was often undervalued in the scheme of things.

And this Anglican got hooked on the United Church - when I heard a minister saying, it's not good enough to have food banks, you have to ask why are people so badly off that they need food banks.

Same question as the prairie feminist Nellie McClung asked - if Good Samaritans keep finding people wounded by the roadside, when do they ask, what's beating these people up?

And today - learning about the work of our Open Door- and seeing some of the cracks exposed by COVID- we realize - poverty has many faces.

If 2000 a month is better than what some people were making working, what does that say?

The United Church is not perfect- no church is-

But generally speaking- in the United Churches Ive' known- we think about neighbours, community, how to make life in this world better.

We've been open to new ways of understanding the Bible, speaking about family,

New ways to read our own history-

Including painful chapters like our treatment of indigenous people, and other varieties of racism,

Our exclusion, in past decades, of LGBTQ people,

And our part in a Christian past of prejudice against Jewish people.

The United Church has also inspired me, with their interfaith work,

So now I learn from the wisdom of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and mor.

Every faith offers resources for how to live a better life on this earth, how to touch the earth more gently, sharing more generously, seeking a just society and a just world.

We can all work together!

And although we can't do it all, we can still do amazing work- as indeed you have and indeed you will.

Especially if we work with others who care about social and economic justice, who care about inclusion, who care about climate change, and more.

And this is the hope and dream I leave you with as I wind up my regular ministry with you-

How can these wonderful faith communities open up a space for all voices,

Open up a space where all can tell their stories,

Open up a table where- when social distancing permits- all can sit and talk and share equally-

And how can you continue to make a world where we learn the wisdom of survivors,

Where we care even from our own vulnerability, where we spread love and hope and peace wherever it needs to be,

Going the road with all who would travel that journey,

And knowing that God goes that road with us/

May it be so!

Reflective Music

When a Poor One

sung by Philip Murray

[translation of Spanish original by Oliver and Manzano]

[the only version I could find that was sung in English but sounded the least bit Spanish/Latin].

<https://youtu.be/QpQcRjH0LY8>

When the poor ones who have nothing share with strangers, when the thirsty water give unto us all, when the wounded in their weakness strengthen others, [Refrain] then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

When at last all those who suffer find their comfort, when they hope though even hope seems hopelessness, when we love though hate at times seems all around us, [Refrain] then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

When our joy fills up our cup to overflowing, when our lips can speak no words other than true, when we know that love for simple things is better, [Refrain] then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

When our homes are filled with goodness in abundance, when we learn how to peace instead of war, when each stranger that we meet is called a neighbor, [Refrain] then we know that God still goes that road with us, then we know that God still goes that road with us.

Making a Home Whole Again

Fairfield, a historic village in Bothwell, Ontario, was first settled by the Lenape people on May 8, 1792. It was established by Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit (*El-na-pow-way Lah-ka-weet*) ancestors and the Moravian missionaries who lived among the group for generations. For the past 74 years, Fairfield has been operated as a historical park and museum by The United Church of Canada through a grant from Mission & Service.

In May 2019, the United Church returned a significant piece of land to the Eelünaapéewi Lahkéewiit people of Delaware Nation. A ceremony was held on the site to officially execute the land transfer.

"I think the community is going to be really proud of getting that piece of property back because it's part of who they are," said Chief Denise Stonefish. "That will make our home whole again."

"I actually view it as the people whose story it is are finally getting to tell the story," said Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa, a regional council Executive Minister.

But both Stonefish and the United Church recognize it took the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to bring the transfer to fruition. We are thankful that Mission & Service has played a part in the Truth and Reconciliation process within The United Church of Canada. "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission involved all of us viewing ourselves as treaty people and understanding how broken the relationship was between Indigenous peoples and Settlers, and how all of us have a role to play in the care and tending of that," said Stadelbauer-Sampa. "The United Church is deeply committed to being honest with ourselves about our colonial past."

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

Offering:

God of love, we offer these gifts as a way of caring for those in need, here and around the world. Help us give also of ourselves, as we seek to honour your presence in all whom we meet. Amen

Prayers of the People

[first part by the United Church of Christ]

Today, O Holy One, we seek a vision of your world as your love would have it:

a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;
a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.

May we have the inspiration and courage to build it.

On this Father's Day we give thanks for those fathers and father figures who have nurtured, guided and inspired us -

And we seek to learn from their example.

On this Indigenous history weekend, we give thanks for the voice and vision of indigenous people, as we seek to learn from them, as we seek to do our part to heal from systemic racism, as we seek to break down walls that divide, while allowing each tradition, each community their own story, their own identity,

We pray for those indigenous people grieving the loss of their loved ones- as we seek to make a healing path with fewer such tragedies in the future.

And we pray for all those grieving losses including those missing their fathers on this day and other days, And for others facing adversity at this time.

In a moment of silence we hold in love and light those in our hearts today:

These and all our prayers we gather into the community prayer shared around the world and across the ages
Our Father ..

We Sing

Though Ancient Walls

[Farquharson/Klusmeier]. Strathroy United Church

[Jane has chosen this hymn because her Saskatchewan time exposed her to the hymns of Walter Farquharson, minister in Saltcoats SK and former United Church Moderator, often set to music by Ron Klusmeier whose music we know well and who was through here doing a concert a few years ago]

https://youtu.be/TKkhzZC_p10

***Though ancient walls may still stand proud and racial strife be fact,
though boundaries may be lines of hate, proclaim God's saving act.***

REFRAIN:

***Walls that divide are broken down; Christ is our unity!
Chains that enslave are thrown aside; Christ is our liberty!***

***When vested power stands firm entrenched and breaks another's back,
when waste and want live side by side, it's Gospel that we lack. (Refrain)***

***The truth we seek in varied scheme, the life that we pursue,
unites us in a common quest of self and world made new. (Refrain)***

***The church divided seeks that grace, that newness we proclaim,
a unity of serving love that lives praise to God's name. (Refrain)***

***This broken world seeks lasting health and vital unity.
God's people, by God's Word renewed, cast off all slavery (Refrain)***

Blessing:

May we dare to dream! May we dare to imagine! May we be filled with a passion for justice, filled with compassion for all living beings. And may we know Blessing accompanies us, Light and Love for every step we take, even on unbeaten paths leading to undiscovered places. May it be so!

We Go Forth Singing

We Shall Overcome

[unofficial civil rights anthem of the 1960s, originally a gospel song, then collected as a folk song, here sung by Pete Seeger, another folk singer on whose music Jane was raised]

https://youtu.be/M_Ld8JGv56E

Stewardship Message June 2020

<https://wesleyunitedstandrewsbythesea704293189.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/stewardship-message-june-2020.pdf>