

June 6, 2021
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Meditation: “The Holy Spirit Speaks”

This past week, by the time I needed to have the bulletin completed and sent off to Dianne, I still had no idea of what the message would be about. I really needed to have a sermon title, yet nothing was speaking to me in the scriptures, and so I put down the title “The Holy Spirit Speaks”, because I was counting on the Holy Spirit to speak to me. Or perhaps I was counting on being able to hear what the Holy Spirit was saying. Really, I am counting on the Holy Spirit to speak through me to all of you.

I know that this is Pride Month, and National Indigenous History Month, and this coming Thursday is the 96th birthday of the United Church of Canada. Beyond that..... I read several commentaries on the scriptures. It was mildly interesting to read differing opinions about what was happening in the Old Testament lesson from 1 Samuel. Some thought the problem in the text was that the Israelites wanted to keep up the with Joneses... they wanted what the other nations had.... a king. Others thought that the problem was simply that their desire for a human king was a sign that they were turning their back on being ruled by the Divine, so they were turning their collective back on God in favour of a human king. An aging Samuel, one of the last judges to rule over the commonwealth of tribes, warned them of the consequences of appointing a king: *“he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves.”*

I should point out that Samuel’s two sons, Joel and Abiah, had been appointed judges by an elderly Samuel, to rule after him. Neither one of them was interested in or fit for the position, and both were corrupt. They took bribes and perverted justice. So it’s easy to see that the options of the Israelites were limited, at least from a

human perspective. They decided that a king, someone who would raise an army and protect them from their enemies was preferable to two corrupt judges. Samuel complained to God, and God told Samuel to listen to the people and give them what they wanted.

I don't believe that it was God's first choice for them to have a human king, but more like the case of a parent who warns a child not to do something because the parent can foresee the consequences, yet the child insists and so the parent decides that perhaps the only way for the child to learn is the hard way.

Saul was not a particularly good king. His successor, David, with all of his faults, remains to this day THE model king in Jewish history. His successor, Solomon, was king when Israel was at its zenith in terms of territory, military and economic power. In fact, the background today is a rendering of what someone thought Solomon's throne room looked like. What you can see is that there was obviously a concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few at the expense of the many. And that was the problem. God's vision was and is one of distributive justice, where there is fairness and equity in the distribution of a society's wealth and power....you know, righteousness.

When wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, and left to our own devices the results can be catastrophic for the many, just as they have been for the First Nations of this country. By now we've all heard about the discovery of a mass grave at the former Kamloops Residential School.... a grave with up to 215 children. I don't know about you, but I was horrified, saddened, disgusted, and angry that my ancestors could do such a thing. And I don't mean just those 215 children, I mean the four to six thousand that died, many of tuberculosis that was exacerbated by poor nutrition; I mean the 150,000 children taken from their homes; I mean the government program of forced assimilation; I mean an intentional genocide – the intentional destruction of a culture. That's what we are accusing the Chinese of in regards to the Uyghurs, only the Chinese call it re-education.

Now, there is a search going on at the site of the only Residential School in the Maritimes, to see if they can locate a mass grave there. And there is a growing group of lawyers who have petitioned the ICC (International Criminal Court) to investigate the Government of Canada and the Vatican for crimes against humanity.

When too few people have too much money and power, and when left to our own devices, things go off the rails, quickly. We need God. We need God to remind us that we are all God's beloved children; that we all need and deserve to be treated with respect and to have the necessities of life.

Yes, the Israelites chose a king. Yes, there was a long history of kings in Israel. Yes, some of them were disastrous, and some were fair. Yes, the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians, and many years later the southern kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians and the elite were taken to Babylon. Yes, they spent almost seven decades in exile before Cyrus allowed them to return to Jerusalem. And eventually God sent Jesus, to call the people back into relationship with God. Even though God allowed the Israelites to choose a king for themselves, God did not abandon them. Even though God allowed them to learn some lessons the hard way, eventually God sought reconciliation with the people. Even though our ancestors, and perhaps even our relatives, participated in the shameful events in the history of this country, God has not abandoned them or us, and seeks reconciliation with us, and between us and the First Nations of this country.

This National Indigenous History Month may we shut our mouths and open our ears, our eyes, our minds to listen, see, and comprehend the history of what has happened, and continues to happen. May we come to understand the long-term impact of having generations of people who have no parenting skills. May we come to understand the spiritual pain of an entire people who seek to drown their pain with drugs and alcohol. May we listen to them for what they need to heal and be reconciled to the past, and for the future, instead of trying to tell them what they need and throwing money at the situation. May we commit to a healthy relationship with one another, and with the God who created us all, and looked upon us and said, "It is good." For this God is still committed to us, all of us. Thanks be to God.