

**May 7, 2023**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Meditation:** “Stoner, or Stoned?”

Did you hear about the African Chieftain whose tribe lived on the plains of Africa? On the plains, wood was a scarce commodity, and so it was very valuable. Every year the tribe carved a new throne for their beloved chief and presented it to him as a sign of their adoration. Each year, the chief would put the previous throne in the attic of his grass hut palace. One year, as he was putting the previous year’s throne in the attic, the weight of all those thrones became too much for the grass hut palace to support, and the entire palace collapsed into a heap, once again proving that those who live in grass houses shouldn’t stow thrones.

It was difficult to know what to focus on in the passage from the book of acts. Was it Stephen’s words, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” that are reminiscent of Jesus’ words, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”? Was it the fact that Saul, later to be known as the apostle Paul, was there holding the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen? In truth, it may have been Saul who found Stephen and reported his whereabouts to the authorities, much in the way that Judas did with Jesus. Saul did so on many occasions, in fact, he was on his way to Damascus to root out other followers of ‘The Way’ so that they could be punished when he had his conversion experience. And Saul also participated, if not in this instance, in other stonings. Even so, he was complicit in the stoning of Stephen. Or was it.....

There he was, speaking out against those who sought to maintain the status quo, protecting their positions, their status, their wealth, their power, their control.

And what did he get for it? Crucified on the cross.

There was Stephen, speaking out against those who sought to maintain the status quo, protecting their positions, their status, their wealth, their power, their control.

And what did he get for it? Stoned to death.

As in most cases, there are two sides to the story. There was Stephen, who spoke out against the inequities and injustices in his society, and there were those who sought to silence him by stoning him to death. There was the one who got stoned, and there were the stoners. And I wondered, which one am I? Which one are any of us?

Do I take note of the inequities and injustices and speak out against them? Sure, it takes work to become informed and to take note of these things. Sure, it comes with the risk of being labelled a troublemaker or a whistle blower, or worse. In some parts of the world, speaking out is not tolerated. Even in 2023 you can find yourself silenced by imprisonment or death.

Or perhaps I am someone who seeks to preserve the status quo. It's terrible how some people have to live, but in order for me to have my position, status and wealth, others must suffer. In order for me to enjoy all that I have, I must protect it at any cost, because, if there is change, God only knows what will happen to me. So I must prevent change. I must become a fear monger to convince others to resist change.

And then I noticed there was a third position represented in the lesson. Have you ever heard of the 80-20 rule? 20 percent of the people do most of the work, and 80 percent are along for the ride. Paul, sorry, he's still Saul here, is one of the 80 percent. Saul, in this instance, stands on the sideline, neither speaking against the status quo, nor stoning Stephen. But even if Saul is not an active participant in the stoning, he is still complicit by not speaking out against the stoning.

Many people just don't seem to be passionate about things. They don't want to rock the boat, nor do they want to pick up a stone. They just want to remain detached, invisible. And by being a detached bystander they are implicitly supporting the status quo.

There are opportunities for each of us to be a bystander or to get involved in either changing the status quo or perpetuating it. Many don't think that what we say or do can make a difference, can change anything. To you I would say, watch this video.

----- *play video* -----

Okay, so full disclosure, there is also a video that aims to debunk this video. It states that there were other contributing factors that affected the flow of the river and those factors were not adequately considered in the video we just watched. They also correctly state that the wolves are not the only predators in Yellowstone. In spite of those objections, the other video does not deny that the wolves did indeed have an impact; it only seeks to limit the scope of the impact they had. The wolves did indeed change the behaviours of the other creatures, and that indirectly contributed to changes in the overall environment.

I believe that what we say and do every day of our lives has the potential to be just as potent. An act of kindness can lift a person from despondency. Lending your name to a petition can change the policy of a government, a multinational corporation, or a denomination. A vote, when multiplied by the votes of many, can change the direction of a community, a province, a nation, or a congregation.

This coming week is the annual spring meeting of the Antler River Watershed Regional Council. One of the things that will happen is that four people will be ordained, commissioned, or recognized for ministry within the wider church. This is something to celebrate, for through their ministry they will guide the ministries of many communities of faith and many individuals. They will work for justice and speak out against injustices. In so doing, they will contribute to changes in our communities, in our country, and in the world.

The question I have for each of you is, will you be a stoner, one who is stoned, or a bystander in life?