

TMUC Worship

Reflection – June 28, 2020

SERMON- Welcoming Christ

A few years ago, our sons were visiting family in Ontario. They were with their cousin Adam, who said there was a birthday party for one of my uncles, and suggested they 'drop by' to say hello.

When my Uncle's daughter opened the door, she recognized Adam, but not the two young men with him. She hesitated, wondering if Adam had decided to just bring a couple of friends to this small family party.

"Who are they?" she tentatively asked.

Adam enthusiastically replied, "They are Jeff's and Carol's sons – from Winnipeg!"

At which all three were enthusiastically welcomed into the party.

Having 'clergy parents', I am sure (well, maybe not absolutely sure) that our sons, at that moment, might have thought of a paraphrase of Jesus's words – 'those who receive you, Adam, receive us, and those who receive us are doing so as if they were receiving those who sent us (in this case, our parents, who drove us to the airport to fly to Ontario!)

In today's scripture reading, Jesus tells his disciples: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me"

Jesus knew the mystical paradox that we are both "deeply distinct and deeply connected" (Richard Rohr); that we do not have to create unity so much as acknowledge our unity as part of God's creation, as children of God, as carriers and couriers of God's image and God's love.

Jesus went on to say that anyone who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet, or a righteous person in the name of a righteous person, would receive the reward of the prophet and of the righteous person. Receiving a reward sounds like a good thing – we get a prize – but the 'reward' for prophets and the righteous in the Bible, the consequences for their being a prophet and being righteous (doing what is right in God's eyes) doesn't usually look like much of a desired prize – after all, Jesus was a prophet and was righteous – at his baptism God declares that Jesus is God's beloved One- if being God's beloved doesn't entitle you to all sorts of rewards and privileges, what does? – yet Jesus was crucified!!

The reward of prophets and those who try to live from God's love – the reward, what you get - is to have a passionate commitment to the well-being of all God's creation; it

is to have a passion for justice – justice which recognizes that it is never ‘just us’ – that attitudes that privilege ‘just us’- our group, the people who look like us believe like us etc..-that such attitudes create divisions and categories of various people and therefore are sin – are opposed to God’s love for all people.

Some countries have been adapting forms of restorative justice. Our familiar justice systems are referred to as retributive justice in which people are convicted of having broken a law. Restorative justice deals not with the breaking of a law, but the breaking of relationships. North American indigenous cultures view justice not as a matter of punishment and retribution, but of healing.

Jesus was healer. Jesus did not bask in the privilege of being God’s beloved, but was executed on a cross, trusting that the way of healing is often a way through suffering, a way of trusting in God’s love through all times.

Racism is sin because it is breaking of our relationship with God, because to welcome God in our lives is to welcome the ones who are sent/created/loved by God – is to welcome everyone, is to acknowledge that everyone we meet is a carrier and courier of God’s presence, God’s spirit, God’s image.

When we give water to those who are thirsty, we give water to Christ which is the image of God in each of us; the image of God in us gives water to the image of God in another.

We are all God’s children. We all live within God. God lives amongst, around and within each of us.

Let us welcome God, our creator, by welcoming, loving, caring for everyone, by being sources of justice, participant in the healing of human relationships, the healing of creation, the healing of our distinct and unified selves.

A healing grounded in the love of God.
AMEN