

“Who is Your Neighbour?”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

February 21, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – February 21, 2021

Come, Ye Disconsolate” #195 in the Book of Praise

Samuel Webbe Sr. / Thomas Hastings / Thomas Moore Public Domain

CCLI License # 1952948

V. 1 Come ye disconsolate

Where'er ye languish

Come to the mercy seat

Fervently kneel

Here bring your wounded hearts

Here tell your anguish

Earth has no sorrow

That heav'n cannot heal

V. 2 Joy of the desolate

Light of the straying

Hope of the penitent

Fadeless and pure

Here speaks the Comforter

Tenderly saying

Earth has no sorrow

That heav'n cannot cure

V. 3 Here see the bread of life

See the waters flowing

Forth from the throne of God

Pure from above

Come to the feast of love

Come ever knowing

Earth has no sorrow

But heav'n can remove

“Out of my Bondage, Sorrow and Night” #193 in the Book of Praise

George Coles Stebbins / William True Sleeper © Words & Music: Public Domain

CCLI License # 1952948

V. 1 Out of my bondage sorrow and night

Jesus I come Jesus I come

Into Thy freedom gladness and light

Jesus I come to Thee

Out of my sickness into Thy health

Out of my want and into Thy wealth

Out of my sin and into Thyself

Jesus I come to Thee

V. 2 Out of my shameful failure and loss

Jesus I come Jesus I come
Into the glorious gain of Thy cross
Jesus I come to Thee
Out of earth's sorrows into Thy balm
Out of life's storms and into Thy calm
Out of distress to jubilant psalm
Jesus I come to Thee

V. 3 Out of unrest and arrogant pride

Jesus I come Jesus I come
Into Thy blessed will to abide
Jesus I come to Thee
Out of myself to dwell in Thy love
Out of despair into raptures above
Upward for aye on wings like a dove
Jesus I come to Thee

V. 4 Out of the fear and dread of the tomb

Jesus I come Jesus I come
Into the joy and light of Thy home
Jesus I come to Thee
Out of the depths of ruin untold
Into the peace of Thy sheltering fold
Ever Thy glorious face to behold
Jesus I come to Thee

“Spirit of God, descend upon my Heart” #382 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3, 4, 5.

Vs. 4 from the Book of Praise

George Croly / Robert Buchley Farlee

© Words: Public Domain Music: 2004 MorningStar Music Publishers CCLI License # 1952948

V. 1 Spirit of God descend upon my heart

Wean it from earth through all its pulses move
Stoop to my weakness strength to me impart
And make me love You as I ought to love

V. 3 Have You not bid me love You God and King

All all Your own soul heart and strength and mind
I see Your cross there teach my heart to cling
Oh let me seek You and oh let me find

V. 4 Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh

Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear
To face the rising doubt, the rebel sigh
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer

V. 5 Teach me to love You as Your angels love
One holy passion filling all my frame
The baptism of the heav'n descended dove
My heart an altar and Your love the flame

Closing Chorus: "Go now in peace"

Don Besig & Nancy Price, Harold Flammer Music 1988, 1989

Go now in peace
Never be afraid
God will go with you each hour of every day
Go now in faith steadfast strong and true
Know he will guide you in all you do
Go now in love
And show you believe
Reach out to others so all the world can see
God will be there watching from above
Go now in peace in faith & in love.
Amen Amen Amen

Scripture Texts: Psalm 15

O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?
² Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;
³ who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,
nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
⁴ in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
but who honor those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
⁵ who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling

came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Who is my neighbour? In our current cultural reality, that’s a powerful and poignant question. Over the past year we have been made aware of our neighbours in powerful ways. We have realized neighbours are not only the people living next door.

The church has neighbours. Families throughout the Belleville community make use of the St. Columba building and property as a safe place for children to play, to sit on a bench and read, to work in the gardens, to slide on the snow hills, to meet for help and support. All are welcomed as they find a comfortable place here. Some have inquired about the church, its activities, when it will open again and if they could attend given the restrictions of the pandemic. Others have shown interest online, becoming a part of the greater St. Columba neighbourhood. In welcoming all, we act as good neighbours.

Unfortunately, people aren’t always good neighbours. They can be unhelpful, ignorant.

As we read today’s Psalm and the parable of the Good Samaritan, we clearly see a definition of neighbour that some may find uncomfortable. How many sermons have you heard in which you are asked to place yourself in the sandals of one of the characters? Are you the priest? The Levite? The victim? The innkeeper? The Samaritan? Maybe you’re the legal mind asking Jesus the question in the first place. Perhaps you’re a bystander listening in. Regardless, we all hear the same message. The one who showed mercy was the neighbour. It didn’t matter that they came from opposite sides of a conflicted relationship. The Samaritan put all that aside and helped someone in need.

This year I have begun a daily Lenten devotional written by alumnus of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. On Ash Wednesday, to start the season of Lent, The Rev. Paul Leone shared his reflections on the season in our current context. Keeping in mind the references are from the U.S. experience, the reflections Rev. Leone offered point us to a very real situation in the western world. His words were a meditation on the story of Jonah.

“The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’” I am writing this reflection while practicing social distancing, wearing a mask in public, and churches worship virtually in response to a virus that has literally sickened to death this globe.

Concurrently, a pandemic of another sort has shaken this country to its core—a disease unveiled by a video of a dying black man gasping for air. In angry response, a collective “Jonah” (protestors and demonstrators) has taken to the streets of Nineveh (think Minneapolis and

beyond) proclaiming a message: “I can’t breathe,” “Get your knee off our necks,” “No justice, no peace.”

“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’” Day after day the voice of the people in our city streets has grown larger and louder. The sin and wickedness they rail against? Racism, discrimination, and... brutality.

God’s message through Jonah stirred the hearts and minds of the people of Nineveh. “They proclaimed a fast and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.” Even the King of Nineveh rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. What is our country doing? Will God’s message through the collective street voice stir the hearts and minds of national, state, and local government? Will our leaders heed the prophetic word “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Will this commitment infiltrate the decisions, policies, and reform desperately needed?

Further, what are we as individual Christians doing? ...Ash Wednesday [is] the first day of 40 in this season of Lent, which takes its name from the imposition of ashes on the foreheads of worshipers as a sign of human sin and mortality. Are we sincere when we pray, with the psalmist, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). Do we take seriously both parts of Jesus’ call to “Repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15)?

I heard a black man telling his children they are in danger, not because of anything they have done, but because of the color of their skin. He said, “The skin is the sin.” Let all of us remember—we are dust, and to dust we shall return (Gen. 3:19b).¹

As I read that devotional, I could not help but think of the Canadian context and whose voices cry out for justice:

Indigenous peoples;

The poor;

The homeless;

Black people and people of colour;

People with disabilities.

There are too many voices crying for help and justice. As Christians, we must be a part of seeking justice, because as people we have contributed to the injustice, whether we realize it or not.

We make and laugh at jokes at the expense of others.

We make racist comments.

We complain about people crying for justice.

We judge.

We ignore.

We exclude.

¹ The Rev. Paul Leone. Devotional for Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2021. Pittsburgh Theological Seminary website (https://www.pts.edu/devotional_1).

In this season of Lent, we are to take a good hard look at ways in which we have not been good neighbours, and pray for forgiveness. We can thank God for what we have learned throughout the pandemic, what we have realized about our priorities and views, and how we have grown in our understanding of others – no matter how different we are, one from the other. We can pray for God’s strength to build us as people seeking justice in this world for the sake of Jesus and the sacrifice he made for ALL people. We can pray for God’s mercy to flow through us to those who need help, and for God to help us recognize where we can help. We can pray for God’s love to push aside any discomfort or assumption we make about others and create in us hearts to love God’s people the way God does. We can pray for God to make us the kind of neighbours we see in Jesus’ parable today. We can, and we must.

The Psalmist asks “O Lord, who may abide in your tent?” Part of the response is, those who do not “take up a reproach against their neighbours.” In other words, those who live without blame and strive for righteousness, who show mercy, who do not slander or criticize their neighbour may dwell in God’s tent, on God’s holy hill. Those who know how to be good neighbours, according to the way and example of Jesus, no matter what colour our skin, what tax bracket we fall into, what job we hold, what mistakes we have made, are welcomed into God’s abiding place.

In a few minutes we will share in the sacrament of the Lord’s Table. Here we are welcomed because of our need for grace. All are welcomed at this table. All who know and love Jesus and seek to know and love him more deeply are welcomed here. All who are just beginning their journey with the Lord are welcomed here. ALL. As we receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation today, let us reflect on our neighbours, and ourselves as neighbours. Let us repent of the ways we have failed to recognize our neighbours and their needs, and seek God’s mercy, so that we may show mercy. In the name of Jesus. Amen.