

June 21, 2020

2020 Vision, Based on Matthew 10:24-39

Prayer:

I expect you will all remember our Annual Report for 2019, its title was 2020 Vision. It brought into clear focus incredible achievements and much to celebrate. I mentioned in my report at the time that I believed we were thriving in spirit as a community of faith. Others reported on milestones, especially the completion of the restoration project. Our financial status was much improved. In his report our Board Chair Maurice said “The board seems to be working very well together and most have agreed to run again for 2020 hoping to continue their good work with hopefully a little less stress.....”**with hopefully a little less stress!**

Well that didn't pan out did it? God had another plan. God threw a wicked curve ball at us and we are still trying to manoeuvre around it. The Pandemic is keeping us from being together physically in worship and new cases of the virus occur every day. The economic pain and suffering are huge and anxiety and stress for many is enormous. Other things are happening as well like the unprecedented anti-racism protests on a worldwide stage.

Today as we commemorate National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada, we are unfortunately recognizing racism against our First Peoples. It has been five years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission filed its report and made its recommendations. You might remember Chief Justice Murray Sinclair saying that the actions of our Federal Government and those involved in Residential Schools were in fact “Cultural Genocide.”

In the executive summary of the report there were 94 "calls to action regarding reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous peoples."¹ Those calls to action were widespread and included concrete steps to make amends for years and years of abuse and discrimination against our First Peoples. Reforms were tabled on education, language and culture, health care, justice and of course reconciliation. Calls to Action 43 and 44 state:

43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

44. We call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_of_Canada

achieve the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Very recently we have been reminded how far we are from reconciliation. Last week I mentioned the brutal attacks on two Indigenous men, Fort Chipewyan Chief Allan Adam (Alberta) and Rodney Levi (New Brunswick). The later was shot and killed. The number of indigenous men incarcerated still far exceeds the “per capita” numbers for non-indigenous men. Indigenous women are still much more likely to fall victim to abuse and sexual violence.

And yesterday, casting aside any doubt that racism is still pervasive against our First Peoples we heard that **“British Columbia is investigating allegations health-care staff in emergency rooms were playing a "game" to guess the blood-alcohol level of Indigenous patients, behaviour officials describe as an overt example of widespread, deep-rooted racism across the field of health.”**²

I confess that I was shocked at that news. Like most of you I expect, I am appalled at such activity but more than that, I’m so disappointed that the attitude still exists that indigenous people can be treated with such disrespect. This tells me racism is indeed deeply embedded in our society. Perhaps it is as systemic as black racism is in the United States.

2020 is proving to be a year that will be remembered. The question is if it will be a year of dismay or a year offering a watershed of awakening.

My ministerial colleagues in the valley gather routinely to keep in touch and share ministry comings and goings. We met via zoom the other day. We had some time to reflect on current events. One of them shared that this year could actually offer incredible opportunity. Given the breadth of the anti-racism movement in the US and around the world she envisions cracks in the foundations of society that are growing ever wider. Her view was that sooner or later, some of those foundations are bound to crumble as the support is too weak to hold them up. In the aftermath things cannot be the same, perhaps they will be better!

A literal account of today’s Gospel message seems to offer a rather gloomy perspective. **34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her**

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/racism-in-bc-healthcare-health-minister-adrian-dix-1.5619245>

mother,38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

It is as if Matthew is predicting a great upheaval, one that will bring with it significant conflict. We always see Jesus as the peace broker, not the sword bearer. It is totally out of character for Jesus to say he is bringing dissension in the family unit. Why would he say such a thing? "You are not worthy of me; if you don't do as I do." That is also rather harsh and authoritative, so unlike Jesus of Nazareth.

In fact, today's reading is an excerpt from an account where Jesus sends out the disciples to do healing and pastoral work. And he knows they will not be universally welcomed. He knows preaching in his name will cause them to be targets of abuse and even death. He knows God's voice through discipleship will set the world on its head.

For change to occur there will be resistance, push back, anger, resentment, and controversy. It will be as if peace is shattered by swords. Friends and families will argue and fight each other. Alliances will be tested and broken. Before lush new growth on God's tree of life begins, there will need to be some drastic pruning.

In the throws of Covid, the "black lives matter" movement and in our Indigenous People's continual struggle for truly meaningful reconciliation, perhaps that pruning has begun. Perhaps we are seeing a time in history where there will be a turning point, a time such as there was when Jesus set in motion an unstoppable movement which gave birth to Christianity.

Are we approaching a time when racism can finally be recognized as cancerous and be cut from our societies by a sword of righteousness? Are we approaching a time when can all admit that there exists entrenched discrimination between us and our indigenous families and be prepared to do something about it?

I have heard stories of folks that have had vision restored to near perfect 2020 status. Some of you know what that means. What an incredible gift to be able to look at the world again in such light and with such clarity. Is such a thing possible in reconciling race, colour and ethnic differences as we move forward these next weeks and months? Might we see clearly, with 2020 vision, that we are all created equally in the image of the one who brought us forth from the dust of the earth?

Thanks for listening this morning,
Amen