

Making a Difference

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 and Luke 14:1, 7-14

Lenore and I found ourselves in the City of Grand Forks during a short road trip while I was on holiday. We discovered a very modest motel on the banks of the Kettle River. That's where I met Chad. He came over to see Duffy and I while we were on the river bank. Well, I was on the bank, but Duffy was in the water, no surprise there. Chad and his partner were holidaying from Vancouver where he works finding suitable social housing for the needy. Chad is an indigenous man; I would suggest in his mid to late 30's.

What a friendly and engaging gentleman, emphasis on the gentleman. He was very talkative and sociable. He had been to Grand Forks before and knew the area. He showed Duffy and I to a place on the river with deeper water where Duff could have a good swim.

As conversations often go, he was telling me about his work, and I shared some of mine. That is when he said, "I really appreciate and respect the United Church. You were the first to apologize for your part in the Residential Schools."

Now that got me thinking.

Often, I wonder, perhaps you do too, are we making a difference? There is absolutely no doubt that our ministry here in Peachland provides spiritual nourishment and growth to this community of faith, comfort and support through pastoral care, incredible outreach through the Bargain Bin and of course critical fellowship through our gatherings. But my Diaconal Social Justice spirit does challenge me at times. It asks, what are we doing in the larger context of justice, the kind of justice Jesus lived for?

Both of our scripture readings that Donna shared this morning speak of this calling. ⁸ ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,*** says Paul to the Hebrews. ¹⁶ ***Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.***

Paraphrasing Jesus' comments in Luke's gospel, when you are invited to a wedding banquet, don't take the seats of honour, leave those for someone else. And if you are planning a banquet yourself, invite the less fortunate, ***"the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind."***

These messages tell us to remember our discipleship calling and to act as we can on it. I was so thankful to meet and chat with Chad because he affirmed with me that we are making a difference. I didn't ask Chad about his childhood or history, but he would be the son of a mother or dad who had been affected in some way by the Residential School system and the aftermath of social ills that created. Perhaps he was a child caught up in the 60's scoop when many aboriginal children were taken from their birth homes and placed in foster care. Regardless, he expressed no bitterness or resentment. Meeting him was a blessing and it encouraged me.

Great things can happen when we listen to God's spirit and bear witness to Jesus' ministry calling us on to advocacy. In a recent post, Brian McLaren, a teacher at the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque New Mexico, offers some examples.

"Here's what will happen, he says, if you listen to the Spirit. You will see a person or a group being vilified or scapegoated. Everyone is blaming them, shaming them, gossiping about them, feeling superior to them, venting their anxieties on them.... But the Spirit will draw you to differ courageously and graciously... You will risk your reputation in defending the person or people being scapegoated. And in that risk, both you and they will know that God's Spirit is alive and at work in your midst."

“There is a prison near you. A hospital. A park or a bridge or an alley where homeless people sleep... There’s a country in great need or a social problem that few people notice. If you listen to the Spirit, you will be drawn toward an opportunity to serve. At first, the thought will frighten or repel you. But when you let the Spirit guide you, it will be a source of great joy—one of the richest blessings of your life.”¹

Jesus, and after him the Apostle Paul commend us to this kind of advocacy. And we could compile a huge list of others we know who have done likewise. Advocates of Peace and Justice, those that fight for racial equality, those that stand up for women’s rights or the rights of gay and lesbian individuals, climate justice critics, environmental activists, stewards of the poor and disenfranchised. We do what we can to stand with them, but we are often left with the question, what can I, what can we really do?

And so I am drawn back to Chad and wonder how many more Chads there are walking down beach avenue or sunning themselves at Sun-Oka beach? Perhaps you have made an impression on someone through your acts of kindness and generosity that you are unaware of. Perhaps you simply said hi and good day to a queer person in the grocery store line up, and it made them feel welcomed. Perhaps you honked your car horn when you passed by a demonstrator with a sign that read, “this is my body, my choice.” Perhaps you offered a street person a hot cup of coffee or served food at a hostel. Perhaps you helped a struggling elder carry her groceries home. Perhaps you dropped by a lonely neighbour’s home with some fresh baking.

We don’t know the names of people we might touch with our acts of generosity and compassion. And while it is nice to know we have made a difference; we don’t act to be praised. We act because we believe in the ministry of Jesus who gave, so that others may be blessed.

¹³ **“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.”** ¹⁴ **“And you will be blessed.”** You will be blessed says Jesus. Yes indeed, in ways we just can’t possibly comprehend.

I believe there are many Chads out there who would applaud what we do and what we stand for in Christian Ministry. I was encouraged to hear that he recognized this Church’s efforts. But I remember that Jesus wasn’t speaking to a church or to a faith following. He was speaking to ordinary everyday folks, people like you and me. He was spreading the message of how powerful unconditional love can be and what can be accomplished through it.

How many lives have you touched I wonder as you have walked along with the gospel? How many more might you touch as you continue to be that spirit of peace, grace, understanding and generosity? You may never know.

Then again someone like Chad might greet you one day and offer you the assurance that you have been a blessing, because you have been, and you are.

Thanks for listening this morning,

Amen

¹ Centre for Action and Contemplation, meditations at cac.org, Wednesday August 24, 2022