

“A House Divided”

First Reading: Genesis 3:8-15

Immediately after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, they hide from God. Neither takes responsibility for their sin, instead blaming each other, the snake, and even God. The curse on the snake was understood as a messianic prophecy by the early church, who associated Eve’s “offspring” with Christ.

⁸[Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.⁹But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Psalm: Psalm 130

Wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love. (Ps. 130:7)

¹Out | of the depths I cry to | you, O Lord;

²O Lord, | hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my | supplication.

³If you were to keep watch | over sins, O Lord, | who could stand?

⁴Yet with you | is forgiveness, in order that you | may be feared. R

⁵I wait for you, O Lord; | my soul waits; in your word | is my hope.

⁶My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning, more than those who keep watch | for the morning.

⁷O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is | steadfast love;
with the Lord there is plen- | teous redemption.

⁸For the Lord shall | redeem Israel from all their sins. R

Gospel: Mark 3:20-35

In response to charges that he is possessed, Jesus wonders aloud how anyone who is demon-possessed can cast out demons. Those who do the will of God are possessed by the Holy Spirit, siblings of Christ.

[Jesus went home;] ²⁰and the crowd came together again, so that [Jesus and the disciples] could not even eat. ²¹When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²²And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”—³⁰for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

²⁵*And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*

In some ways, the Gospel for today is a difficult text to understand, for very little is known about Jesus and his family, especially in later life, and it is disturbing to think that he more or less rejected his family in order to carry out his ministry. Although, as with so much of scripture, we are given today's text, but not the back story and not what happened next. Was it an argument or just a discussion? Did it cause a permanent rift, or was his family only trying to shut Jesus down out of embarrassment or fear, for they knew what the Romans did to people who were too outspoken? After all, in the end, it was Jesus' mother Mary and her sisters at the foot of the cross. But for today, there is genuine discord and alienation. ²⁵*And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*

If there ever is a time in history when our house is divided, it most certainly would be now - on any number of political issues, but most profoundly on the issues of genuine acceptance of all people regardless of their race, culture, belief, skin colour, abilities, social stature, choice of who they love, choice of how they live. And in struggling to accept and incorporate difference and "otherness", we continue to endorse and prop up systems and structures that dehumanize and keep people who are "different" in their place, so that others can keep up their pretenses and pretentions.

Most of us feel proud to call ourselves Canadian, and are quietly smug about how highly our country is regarded world wide, and how much “better” we are than our neighbours to the South.

The reality, sadly is much harsher, as over the past few years we have seen chinks in our shiny, maple-syrup coated façade as deep inequities and divides have become increasingly apparent, and named, and challenged, so that we are not the carefully stitched cultural mosaic quilt that we have bragged about all these years, but more like a tattered blanket in deep need of repair.

The events of these past two weeks, with the discovery of the remains of what is estimated to be 215 Indigenous children on the grounds of the former Kamloops “Indian” facility have made “official” what some always knew and denied, and others had come to learn about, but still largely denied or dismissed as “not that bad....”.

Sadly, and undeniably, however, with the exception of a possible few, these deaths were not accidents or illness, but rather a concerted result of abuse and starvation, medical experimentation and neglect. And what was

grandiosely called a “school” was in reality much more akin to an interment camp or prison, with the government documents and written record of politicians and officials to prove it.

If you google “genocide” you will be provided with a long list - names, locations, dates and numbers. – Killing of Indigenous Australians in the 1850s, the pogroms in Ukraine in the 1920s, the Holocaust in Germany, Poland and Hungary. More recently - Sudan, Haiti, Kosovo, Rwanda, some lasting only a short time, yet still devastating, others going on for a few years before being halted, worked out, remembered.

Canada is not on that Wikipedia list – at least not yet, but what else should we call 160 years of never-ending despair and death, to say nothing of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls?

In the words of the ancient Hebrew people, who knew their own times of despair:

¹Out | of the depths I cry to | you, O Lord;

²O Lord, | hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my | supplication.

And elsewhere:

“How long, O Lord, how long....?... Tears have been my food day and night...and they mock me and say “where is your God....how long, O Lord...?!?”

We truly have come to one of our darkest hours as a country. Like Adam and Eve, having broken their promise with God, we try to hide our embarrassment and shame crudely stitched over with garments of indignation and finger pointing – “It was Eve – she made me do it.... It wasn’t us, it was them... I had nothing to do with it. That’s just the way it was - survival of the fittest...not our fault that the treaties were not respected...what can I do about it, anyway?”

And when the sputtering finally stops, the bare, bald truth remains – 215 bodies, some as young as three years old....and the more we look, the more we will find.

Like children waiting at the gates for parents who never come, we again hear the words of the Psalm, *“⁶My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch | for the morning, more than those who keep watch | for the morning.”* *How long, O Lord, how long?*

And yes, it's all the more worse as it didn't just happen once or a few times or yesterday, or because of a mistake or an accident.... It happened over and over again for 160 years....and we white folks, we descendants of those early colonizers and those who followed, kept letting it happen or denying it, or not speaking up for all kinds of reasons. Some even said it did some good, or dismissed it or any other things that we do when we don't want to deal with something.... because we are afraid, we are ashamed, we are too proud or arrogant, because we knew that our squeaky clean, polite maple-syrup coated reputation that makes the whole world want to come here and be "us" would be shattered if we came clean, and said, "You know what? We have our mistakes, we have our sin, we have our faults, too..." And if all of that, that we have been holding up for so long is shattered to smithereens, then where will we be?

And, we almost got away with it.... After all, the schools were eventually closed, 1996 the last one, I am told, and as survivor after survivor died, maybe people would forget or dismiss the stories and it would fade away...

But, the spirit of truth prevailed, and despite their unspeakable suffering, and the damage that was carried over to the generations that followed, our

Indigenous sisters, brothers, siblings, neighbours prevailed, holding on to the traditions and strengths more ancient and enduring.

And then, somebody decided to use some of that beloved technology that the we colonizers hold in such high esteem....and showed them, with their machines, their diagnostics, their tools, that these were not stories made up to be told in anguish and ignored.... that these were true accounts of the evil that happened. That buried in that soil were human bodies, children's bodies.... toddler bodies, baptized Christian bodies, declared and named before their God and the Christian God....

And we, in our self-righteous defensiveness are left gasping for words, and grasping at the pathetic shreds of that clothing to hide behind: "Where are you, Adam, where are you Eve?", God asks....

And we are hiding and afraid... We dare not look at each other in our shame. Some still hold on to the anger and the indignation, others look for a redemption that we know we did not earn and do not deserve....

And in reflecting on all of this, I have come to understand Luther in a whole new way, when he says, we are naked before God, we are nothing without God.... *all* of it is grace, *all* of it is gift from God; we come with nothing. It's times like this that we are reminded of our weakness, our helplessness, our *need* for God, our *need* for one another, our need for redemption.

And the words of a Lutheran pastor and preacher I worked with briefly a number of years ago, Hank Langknecht, pierce the shame and the despair, reminding us in our brokenness, as Pastor Langknecht says: "*When the worst thing happens, it is never the last thing.... God always has the last word....*"

The first time I heard them was at a service where Pastor Langknecht was preaching and he was referring to a recent, very devastating death in that particular congregation, and it was part of what he was saying, "*When the worst thing happens, it's not the last thing; God always has the last word....*"

...and I've quoted him over the years, a few times, usually in the context of a funeral, as part of speaking hope to the bereaved....

As I was wrestling with these texts last night, and wrestling with the final pieces of what to say - I've been working, living with this for many days.... his words came to me: *"When the worst thing happens, it is not the last thing.... God always has the last word...."*

.... And again our Psalmist speaks:

³If you were to keep watch | over sins, O Lord, | who could stand?

If you had an account book, we would be dead....

⁴Yet with you | is forgiveness, in order that you | may be feared.

⁵I wait for you, O Lord; | my soul waits; in your word | is my hope

.... *"When the worst thing happens, it is not the last thing.... God always has the last word...."*

And that last word, that offer of redemption comes in that gracious invitation – and challenge – of an Indigenous Chief, Christopher Derickson, who, with his people has lost so much, and who could so easily just write us off and use every legal tool in the land to bring us to our knees and sue back all

that was stolen so long ago...but instead, that Chief chooses to invite us to join with him to build a better future for all of us together.

And so, this day, people of God, people of Kelowna, people of Canada, people of the world.... We stand on a threshold, walking into a new room, a new possibility... We stand on a threshold – or perhaps it is a precipice, and we have to be very careful that we don't go tumbling down one side or the other.... We stand on a threshold - or a precipice - of the opportunity of transformation... Transformation – not trying to fix the cracked china of yesterday, but crafting totally new pottery, totally new earthen vessels for tomorrow – where all of God's children are genuinely invited around God's table together, where there's always room for one more, where we learn to get to know each other, where we tease each other, and laugh together, and find out the wonders of being together.

We're in the playoffs.... When Walter Gretzky, the father of the Great One, died last year, his son Wayne reflected on how much he had learned from his father, and that it was his father who taught him that famous saying that is often quoted: "When you're skating, don't look where the puck was; skate to where the puck is going...." And we all know how much his advice did for #99's game....

That puck moves very fast, and we need to pay attention to where it's going, so we don't get left behind ...and after all – it was their game first....so we will have to learn to skate better, to learn better to keep up.

And so sisters and brothers, siblings and others, here at Christ Lutheran, Kelowna, and those listening in from wherever on this day and this time, June 2021...we have a choice, an opportunity – we can acknowledge and own what has happened and its horrific awfulness. We can seek forgiveness, listen and learn, and as difficult and as demanding as it will be, join in this journey of reconciliation that invites us, and we know it's a journey and we know it will take a long time, and we look back at Rwanda, and Kosovo, and Sudan and all of those places. It's a journey and it takes a long time and it is hard, but it can bear much fruit... Or, we can hunker down, in that cracked china of yesterday, pretend it's not real, try to go back to whatever "normal" we had "before", but we risk if we do that being left in the dust as everyone else moves forward to the new hope and the new future that is offered and that is possible. And so we pray,

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Lord, Brother, and Friend.... **May the journey begin. Amen.**