

2020 06 21 – Pray. Preach. Protest.

Matthew 10:24-39

In today's reading, Jesus is sending his disciples off on their own to share the good news of God's reign of peace and justice. If we had read from the beginning of the chapter we would know that Jesus is telling them to go and heal those who are sick. He is telling them to go with nothing and to accept no payment. He is telling them that their journey will not be easy and that there will be many who will persecute them. Jesus is telling his disciples that, like him, they too will be misunderstood and called Beelzebul, the devil!

And so he encourages them with these words: "Don't let people intimidate you. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing is hidden that will not be made known." As soon as I read those words earlier this week, I thought of all the secrets, all the hidden things, all the painful truths that are coming to light in our world today:

- I thought of the residential schools, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the thousands of hidden stories of emotional, physical, spiritual and sexual abuse. <http://www.trc.ca/>
- I thought of the #metoo movement and of two Canadian women who have recently come forward, after years of silence, to say they were raped by fashion designer Peter Nygard. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/peter-nygard-1>

- I thought of our own Pride Sunday service and the four brave women who shared their stories of the fear and prejudice experienced by gay and lesbian people in our community and in our province.
http://www.firstunitedsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Yr-A_2020-06-07-Pride-Sunday-Four-People-Share.pdf
- I thought of George Floyd, and how his shocking death has shed a light on police brutality and the racial injustice that exists not only in the United States, but here in Canada and around the world.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/police-chief-ottawa-edmonton-1.5609568>
- I thought about all the stories that are now being told, all the videos that are being shared, of black people, brown people and Indigenous people who have been beaten and even killed by those who have sworn to protect them. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/rcmp-chief-allan-adam-1.5608472>

And I thought of all the ways these stories have been silenced. Just yesterday, I watched a story on CBC online about Tulsa, Oklahoma. This is the city where the president of the United States is currently holding his first campaign rally since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also the city where, in 1921 300 black people were massacred by their white neighbours and a thriving black neighbourhood was destroyed by arson. In the video a young black lawyer who grew up in that area of Tulsa tells how he first heard about this massacre in a university class. He couldn't believe that he had gone through all his years of schooling in the city of Tulsa and had never heard of the 1921 Race Massacre.
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1753673795645>

But we get it, don't we! Most of us grew up in the Canadian school system never hearing about treaties, pass systems, and residential schools. We were never told about the First Nations people who struggled to survive on their reserves, the children who died or were abused in schools run by our churches, or the thousands of Indigenous people in Canada who died from smallpox, measles, tuberculosis and all the other diseases that were introduced by white settlers. Those stories were not included in the curriculum created by those in power in our provinces and in our country.

Jesus said, "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops." Jesus lived in a time of oppression, a time when his people were being treated unjustly and he told his disciples that they were to share a message of hope. They were to share a message of a just and peaceful society, a message of God's reign of love and compassion. It was, of course, a message of change, and Jesus knew that this message would not be popular with those in power, but he was asking his disciples to share the good news anyway.

We are also being asked to share the good news here in Canada, in the midst of a pandemic, in the year 2020. The truth of past and present oppression is being told and we have been listening. But what should we be doing about it? What is our role in this moment in history? In order to answer that question, I am going to use the words of Adele Halliday, a member of the staff at our General Council offices and a Black Canadian. At the beginning of June she wrote a personal

article for Broadview magazine called “What I need from white people right now,” and in it she said:

Some have wondered what role churches play. I need you to please: Pray. Preach. Protest (and repeat). I heard a few people say that the only thing we can do about racial injustice is pray. Don't get me wrong, I am a praying person, and deeply believe in the transformative power of prayer. So, while I may get down on my knees and pray to God, I also then need to get up and preach. I need to protest. I need our churches to not only pray on Sundays, but to also offer a prayer through a lifetime commitment to systemic change.

Please keep doing this work long after the current display of anti-Black racism has faded from the news cycle and our social media feeds.

<https://broadview.org/what-i-need-from-white-people/>

Pray. Preach. Protest. (and repeat) That is our current call to action. We will do some of the praying today and I invite you to do more praying throughout the days and weeks to come.

But let's talk about preaching. I don't think that Adele Halliday was just talking about Sunday morning sermons. Preaching is something that we can all do, every day. We all have the ability to share our thoughts and our feelings with our family, our friends and even our neighbours. When was the last time you stopped a conversation to question the use of a word or a phrase that was discriminatory or that made broad-based assumptions about a group of racialized

people? When was the last time you preached the good news of peace and justice?

Adele has also asked us to protest. In the last few weeks we have watched as thousands of people have participated in protest marches around the world. Some of you even were part of the June 11th march here in Swift Current. But I believe that marches are just one form of protest. I believe that what Adele is asking for is action. We can take action by writing letters to government leaders, by creating social action groups, by volunteering with agencies that already exist, by working for change here in our own community. We can take action by reaching out to our Indigenous neighbours, to our neighbours who are people of colour and by creating meaningful and lasting relationships.

Will this be easy? No. Could it cause rifts in our families? Possibly. Will we be ridiculed and maybe even called the devil? More than likely. But Jesus assures us that we are not alone in this ministry. Jesus tells us that God loves all things - even the sparrow. God loves me and you. God loves everyone - no matter the colour of our skin. The Loving Spirit of God will be with every one of us as we work for peace and justice for all.

So don't let people intimidate you. Pray. Preach. Protest. (and repeat)