

Message for Sunday, July 12, 2020

### Finding Peace

The times were hard. The government, a huge bureaucracy that provided so many important things like roads and the military and the justice system was hopelessly out of touch with the people. The business community wasn't much better. It seemed focussed only on preserving what was, that fed their profit line. It had no or little vision of what could be. Religious institutions too, seemed unable to adapt to changing times riddled with dogma and tradition that relatively few understood.

When a prophet of change spoke out, they were vilified by the leaders, punished, especially if they called into question the decisions of the government.

Voices of hope arose, but just as quickly they fell, when questions about their character or their ability to deliver or the transgressions of their past.

Apathy was the prevailing ethos of the community. It wasn't surprising that the people began asking, "Why even bother when nothing seems to change?"

Of what time am I speaking? While the description is meant to refer to the gospeller Matthew's community centuries ago, it could be speaking of our present time without doubt.

There is indeed a sense of apathy in the air today as we wonder if indeed anything can change. We easily slip into that resignation of our hearts, that poverty, wars, huge numbers of refugees, hunger, injustice, racial tensions, inequality, hate and now disease, have no real answers. So there is no real hope. So nothing changes.

Makes you think of Sisyphus, the Greek King, who was punished by being compelled to roll an immense bolder up a hill, only to watch it roll back and the process begin again. Getting nowhere generation after generation.

We have just passed Canada Day, our national celebration day when we remember those who made hard choices for this nation: the questionable Sir John A, Tommy Douglas, Etienne Cartier, Lester Pearson.

It's not hard to move from there to world changers: Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and so many others. But in some ways that attention given to them, can actually feed the apathy of our age, for which of us will be a Mother Theresa or Nelson Mandela?

If we can't be them, what difference can we make?

Such is the thinking of those to whom Jesus is speaking in this passage, the so called wise ones, those who have lived life and are certain that life is what it is and we can never change it. Our fate is our fate, why try

to make a difference, to make things better? Why try to face the challenges of our age? We can only tend to our little part of the world, to our personal space. The rest we leave to God or fate or someone else.

And yet, Matthew says, the little children are eager to try.

*It is like the children sitting in the markets, calling to their friends, saying:*

*We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we sang a dirge for you and you did not mourn.*

*But wisdom is justified by her children.*

I don't know if you have noticed, but Matthew often refers to his followers as children. While they are not literally children, they have a childlike hunger to learn more, a childlike courage to try. They often blunder, but they go on anyway.

Children: they soak up everything they can, they are full of hope and expectation, they see others with their own eyes, not through learned prejudices.

I know the disciples were well past the shelter of childhood, they were not naïve. They were aware of the troubles of the world.

They may not have starved, but they have known hunger.

They may not be sick, but they love those who are.

They may not have been imprisoned, but they know they could be and yet the blunder on.

At the end of the passage for today comes that remarkable invitation. It's clear that the world of Matthew as today's world was full of what appear to be insurmountable problems, almost as if it could be Armageddon, the end of life as we know it.

Jesus invites followers to take upon themselves that incredible "yoke", another word for burden, those insurmountable problems.

Jesus invites to a paradox of faithful service in his love, an invitation to make the insurmountable struggles of the world suddenly become life-giving callings.

In a delightful movie from the 80's, Wargames, a young computer whiz helps a group of Military leaders and the National Defence Department program a super computer which has told them the sobering truth that nuclear war is a dangerous game that cannot be won. They want a different answer, so they employ this young man. At the end of the movie he gives them an answer, that the only way to win is not to play. It takes a kid, too young to drive, to see what a room of experts missed. *Wisdom is justified by her children.*

There are upon us in this time, many “yokes” that make us weary and concerned, Jesus invitation is to let go of those yokes and take up the yoke of faithful love and service.

*Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*

Well, perhaps time for a modern parable.

*On Pearl Harbour Day, Japanese troupe occupied Shanghai. Once again Jewish lives were threatened. The Japanese ordered the entire Jewish refugee population to move into a designated area (the worst part of town, already occupied by thousands of locals), allowing little time to find nooks and crannies to call home.*

*The first thing I learned about being incarcerated was that men raged against their confinement and women made curtains. My mother cut up a useless evening gown to make flounces and panels for one window in the nine by twelve cubicle that would be home for us for the next six years.*

*We lived on top of each other under the most difficult conditions and learned quickly to make the best of them. Some did better than others*

*and among those who made a difference in my eleven year old life was the round-faced, roly-poly, middle-aged Mrs. Rosa Goldberg.*

*Each morning as I was on my way to our makeshift warehouse classroom, she would stop me, reach out her hand to grasp mine, pull me to a stop at her side, look into my face and ask;*

*“So, what does Mrs. Goldberg tell you every day, little girl?”*

*Knowing her game well, I shook my head, voiced a quiet I-don’t-know and waited.*

*“Well, darling, Mrs. Goldberg will have to tell you again. Now listen and remember what it is I’m telling you,” she instructed. “Go out and make a miracle today. God is busy, he can’t do it all.”*

*Her face beamed up at me, her hand let go of mine. With a friendly pat on my backside, she sent me on my way, giving me a purpose for the day and meaning to my life that will be mine as long as I shall live.*

*She handed me wings to fly, opened my eyes to see a world that needed miracles and gave me the assurance that I could do God’s work.*

*May it be so, may it be so.*

*And the people said.....*