

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard

July 26,2020

Scripture:

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Nothing is Permanent

A contemplative life of faith is what grounds me in this difficult world. If ever there has been a need for grounding it is now for so many of us.

I have been blessed to just begin to touch in on the Inhabit 2020 conference this year and the session that is sticking with me the most right now is when pastor Willie Jennings spoke. As I listened I found myself wanting to shout AMEN over and over. “You gotta shout when the spirit says shout” so here it is.

The world is not how it should be. We live in an illusion of permanence. It’s like we have settled in to discontent. We don’t like what’s going on but there is not much we can do about it right?

But that’s not our faith story. That’s not who were are called to be. That’s not who Jesus was. He didn’t just settle in to the permanence of empire, greed and power.

Our series ends with a reaffirmation of our call to contemplative action in the world. Farley writes the awareness of one another’s beauty is the “seedling for the birth of compassion and justice.” Once we see the beauty in all things and in one another we can’t help but want abundance for all.

Life is hard, there is hurt, there is evil, there is discrimination and injustice everywhere. A contemplative life of faith can empty us and ready us to become instruments of the Good. So that we can live and practice “a way of beauty” that makes life “rich, courageous, generous, and joyful.” It gives us fuel for life so that we can fully live rather than be exhausted by the overwhelming work there is to be done.

The question of our faith is always how are we to be Christians in our place. Disciples on the ground. That is what discovering this beauty in the world is all about, rediscovering the ground. Our faith and are world is so often not grounded. Jennings suggests that our discipleship is absent of the ground. It is time for us to reorganize our living. Reorganize the foundation of our lives. To look around us,

around our community around are world and rediscover God at work, rediscover its beauty.

The hard truth is that we inhabit a world of inequality, oppression, violence, racism, greed...and until we admit that and reorient ourselves we will inhabit it. Jennings speaking of the racial crisis in America says this crisis is not about public policy this racial, greed, self indulgent social crisis is about the ground that has been created, the built environment. The moral character of western society allows capital, greed and power to dominate.

That is the opposite of how it should be. The world is full of beauty and abundance and until we ensure the equality of all people and creation we will continue to destroy our world and everyone in it. Control, possession and mastery are the sins of our generations (and those long before us).

As Christians we are called to live and move and have our being in holy welcome. We are followers of Jesus the one who calls all to abundance. We hope in a God that created all of this out of nothing. And if all of this was created out of nothing than “nothing is eternal, nothing is permanent, nothing is unchangeable but God.”

Jennings preached “We are up against an illusion of permanence, something that projects itself as unchangeable. Things can be changed. This is what our hope means at this moment. We work to change what others think impossible.” I truly believe that because I have seen the beauty of all people and all things. I truly believe that everyone is to flourish. We as people of faith are called to constantly go back to being grounded in this truth so that we can participate in the work of turning our world upside-down. Wendy Farley writes “Falling in love with the beauty of beings lets us “stand outside of ourselves. And, contrary to the calculating advice of the ego, this displacement of self-centered awareness is a kind of bliss. But by letting us feel that others are really real, we become more alert to the brutality of their pain.” “We are made for the Beloved and created with a capacity to recognize the profound beauty of all of creation. This is our essential nature, our inheritance and destiny. But the great paradox of human life is how alienated we are from this nature and how difficult it is to recover” the abundant life. Until we recognize and truly see the beauty of others as important as ourselves we will struggle. Howard Thurman the civil rights activist says it this way “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” (Howard Thurman quoted in Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York:

Crossroads, 1997). We come alive when we recognize our connectedness, ground ourselves in the dirt, the foundation of all creation.

“Rosemarie Freeney Harding identifies beauty and joyfulness as essential to her civil rights work. This capacity for beauty was imbued in her from her childhood. She writes “As I think about my family I ask myself, ‘What helped them survive? What was it that gave them the capacity to navigate their way through so many obstacles?’ It had something to do, I’m sure, with knowing they were of great value. No matter what messages we got from the outside world, someone at home was always telling us how beautiful we were, how intelligent, how talented.” (Rosemarie Freeney Harding and Rachel Harding, *Remnants: Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 69.) This awareness of one another’s beauty ... is the seedling for the birth of compassion and justice... Death comes to all things but murder, cruelty, wanton destruction or greedy exploitation are painful interruptions of the dignity and grandeur of life.”

That is not the world as it should be. Today I invite you to continue to look around you. To continue to see the beauty of the earth. To shout out when you discover its beauty. And when you do don’t allow the demise of our world to cloud your judgement. Nothing is permanent everything has a capacity to change, to be reformed to abundant life. “This is what our hope means at this moment. We work to change what others think impossible.”

May we so live. For the beauty of the Earth