

Remembrance Sunday

1 Peter 1:3-9

Affirming Hope

Rev. Sharon Smith

Let us imagine the year is around 60 AD, a group of people who were compelled to follow the teachings of a Jewish Rabbi, some born into Jewish families, some raised praying to the Roman gods, were now living in community in rural Asia (what is present day Turkey). They were immigrants, foreigners, refugees with few legal rights.

These Christians were not yet being oppressed by the national governments, rather because many were not citizens of the country, they were vulnerable to:

- abusive treatment by their neighbours and by local authorities.
- cultural and religious discrimination
- poverty and homelessness - though they paid taxes and contributed to the local economy, they could not inherit property, and they were denied the legal protections that citizens enjoyed.

They lived as displaced people.

John Hall Elliot, 1 Peter, Anchor Bible Commentary Series.

After what has been a roller coaster political week in a powerful nation, I am mindful that many countries in our world have no semblance of democracy and are faced with a very different reality:

- Today at least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their homes.
- There are millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment and freedom of movement.

This is the long-term effects of national conflict and division among people.

We live in a country, stable enough to welcome in people who need safety and protection. What a gift Canada gives to the world.

- Today we express our gratitude to those who put their lives on the line to keep this country safe.
- And today we open our awareness to those in our neighborhoods who are here seeking safety.

This little first century letter of 1 Peter – could have been written to us.

The author acknowledges suffering, commends to them a God who can be trusted, and speaks into being a sense of belonging, inheritance and honour in community as a gift to people fleeing the impacts of conflict and division.

Living in the district of North Vancouver are 26 thousand people who made this their new home between the years of 2011 and 2016. (the last available census data)

People from Iran, United Kingdom, China, Philippines, South Korea, United States, Hong Kong, South Africa, Mexico, and Brazil.

Many applying for economic reasons – arriving with education and skills to offer.

Some sponsored by their families.

And some here primarily for protection and safety.

New to BC: Immigration Demographics District of North Vancouver 2018

Each person arriving with a story, a journey, having said goodbye to people, to land, and arriving to forge a new path.

While it is easy for us as humans to divide people into the them and the us,
in this place, as a people who follow the way of Jesus,
we welcome each other as fellow pilgrims.

Where...

- Some of us have only known this as our home, and have no other view of the world
- Some of us have journeyed far and feel disoriented here
- Some of us do not know what it is like to distrust our government
- Some of us have experienced government oppression, being forced to live in a way that we are not comfortable with
- Some of us find it easy to trust people – having experienced others as trustworthy
- Some of us have lived in contexts where it is hard to know who is trustworthy and who is not
- Some of us have never feared for our lives and the lives of our families
- Some of us live in daily fear for the wellbeing of those we love
- Some of us have been given opportunities since the day we were born
- Some of us have had to fight to remain hopeful

We are in this together.

No one is greater or less.

No one knows more or less.

We are like a group of people walking along a path – one has an extra pair of shoes, another has two bottles of water, another has walked on a path like this before, someone else has interesting stories to share to pass the time.

And we offer each other what we have.

And somehow friends, in the midst of the despair and divisions that we see in our world, in this place we are afforded the opportunity of **affirming hope**.

For Jurgen Moltmann, writing in the 1960's in a postwar Germany,
Hope is considered as the only realistic option

For hope alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught.

Hope is the passion of the possible.

Jurgen Moltman, Theology of Hope

Hope tips its hat to a Kamala Harris and her family, or
to the Most Reverend Mark MacDonald (Indigenous Archbishop in Canada).

Hope tips its hat to you and me. To the times we look back on and ask:
“How in the world did I face that and get where I am?”

Hope is the passion of the possible.

I love how John Caputo puts it:

Hope means that a great ‘perhaps’ hovers over the world.

As Christians we do not live in the high noon of life, but at the dawn of a new day at the point where night and day, things passing and things to come, grapple with each other. Where resurrection life (something new, something emerging) is always just below the surface even in the most despairing times.

Hope strains to hear the words of Jesus at a grave side: I am resurrection and I am life.

In this fall of 2020 – a year of COVID, jobs lost, surmounting intercultural tensions, deepening divisions, and conflict... I leave you with a poem that for me captures our common humanity:

Cross the Sea by Naomi Shihab Nye

A girl in Gaza
Speaks into a table microphone:
Do you believe in infinity?
If so, what does it look like to you?

Not like a wall
Not like a soldier with a gun
Not like a ruined house
Bombed out of being
Not like concrete wreckage
Of a school's good hope
A clinic's best dream
In fact not like anything
Imposed upon you and your family
Thus far
In your precious thirteen years.

Infinity would be
The never-ending light
You deserve
Every road opening up in front of you.
Soberly she nods her head.

In our time voices cross the sea
Easily
But sense is still difficult to come by.

Next girl's question:
Were you ever shy?

Speak Hope - pledge to make our tomorrows become our todays.

Amen