Homily November 8 2020

November 8, 2020
“Truth Be Told”

Psalm 78: 1-7
Truth be told, I don’t think we are always particularly good at listening, paying attention to, or being plain attentive to our human histories, the wisdom of the ages, the prophetic amongst us, or the cries of anguish that emanate from the war torn and ravished ones who have either put themselves in the line of fire or are the innocent recipients of our brilliance and creativity turned towards producing weapons of mass destruction. One would think that in the course of a single lifetime the exposure to war, armed conflict, terrorist activities, and just about every other form of violence humankind is capable of thinking up, would be enough to turn the tide of human invention towards creating joy-filled and life-enhancing endeavours. Why is it in our nature to create divisions and weaponize just about everything? Why do we have to be so good at it? Why can’t we dream bigger and better? So much about us has already proved we can do it.
The Psalm for today is pretty instructive. It is like a step-by-step guide to paying heed, passing on, and telling all, so that one generation can learn from a previous generation’s mistakes, successes, and ways of living that could allow for wisdom and experience to lead into constructive change. The saddest thing of all is that in our failure to build upon peace and joy, we persist in rejecting a greater Wisdom that knows we are capable of better. Indeed, when we put our God-given minds to it, it turns out we are capable of great things—of alleviating great suffering, even if we are the cause of much of it.
We are not alone in this creative endeavour of human life. That which we call God, and by many names, that essence of Presence, Being, and Beginning, the known and unknowable Oneness that exploded out of nothing a wondrous something, has been enduringly active in and with all that exists from the beginning to this very moment that we are present to. Vast in capacity and wise beyond our imagining, this Creative Presence has accompanied every creaturely emergence from the inception of the Cosmos, and there is nothing to suggest that this companioning will cease in our lifetimes or in fact ever. Why then are we so often foolish in our ways when we are made of such better stuff?
The persistence of the Creator is remarkable, and there is nothing covert about the work of the Creator’s hand. What we see in all its marvel is what we get. It is what we do with it that seems to create most of the trouble in the world. The Psalmist writes “Give heed to my teaching…turn your ears to the words of my mouth.” In one ear, out the other! Look says the Psalmist, “I will speak in creative ways to help you discern the hidden meaning of things in the past.” Yes, we respond, and we will pass this knowledge on from generation to generation. And then we forget that wisdom is a living, evolving organism and that the truth we are passing on requires a re-telling and re-hearing for each new context. And then we fight about it. It must be so, for if we had learned anything from of old, war would be no more, the untold burden of mourning and crying and pain would be no more, for the first things would have passed away.
But, here we are, and it is Remembrance Sunday. Once again, we are left to remember while yet we see daily that conflict, human suffering, war, misadventure and falsehood prevail. The battleground of life as we see it can be so wearying. And, I will admit that for as many years as I have been in ministry preparing for Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day services it has been with a sense of dread and wish to avoid. I cannot glorify war. I am such a pacifist at heart. For a number of years, I was a Legion chaplain and believe me accepting that position when I was asked to do it was remarkably difficult. But I learned. I learned the importance of a need for a pastoral presence in company with memory and post-traumatic stress disorder. I learned how to respect the memories and experience of those who had served and stay true to my deep inclination towards peace and non-violent resolution. The veterans from the Great Wars, Korea, and Vietnam were diminishing rapidly in numbers to be replaced by those who had served in Bosnia and Afghanistan. Men and women younger than me—wounded and shocked by their experience. There may be stories of comradeship and adventure, but there are few that glorify war’s brutality. “Lest we forget” and “Never again” go hand in hand as a testimony to a truth we just can’t seem to get beyond.
If we can’t trust ourselves to our own instincts, surely then it would be better to trust ourselves to an Instinct for life, love, beauty and joy? To turn from the futility of destructive patterns to immerse ourselves in a grander design that chooses a creative path and enables a persistent life-force to guide the existence of productive, purpose-driven human life, indeed all life. The kind of peace God envisions doesn’t preclude death, but it does invoke death with reason and purpose—feeding life and making way for new life. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 argues the paradox so very poetically: “There is a time to be born, and a time to die…a time for war, and a time for peace.” There are reasons to fight for and to die for. In keeping with God’s commandments, it seems to me that the deliberate destructiveness of war must be a last resort, however, and peace the more perfect option when love is the command to live by. Surely the voice of Love is the one to listen to, and love the testimony to pass on from generation to generation. Surely that is the voice to trust.
Sometimes one finds a voice that eloquently names the trust and the reason for believing in it. I’d like to share in closing a poem/prayer written by William Cleary from a collection of writings discovered in his book: “Prayers to an Evolutionary God.” This one is titled: *Unfolding at Every Moment—When Questioning Everything*. When I can’t make any sense of something, it is a blessing to discover a voice willing to bend itself to the complexity and the question. Willing to bend itself towards hope…and peace.

*Unfolding at Every Moment—When Questioning Everything*

Holy spirit of Evolution
creator of the cosmos and its wonders,
how shall we deal with the insidious evil
—epidemic in world cultures and societies—
of human egotism,
cruel in its delusional ignorance
and destructive of human life and its environment?
Egotism produces war, crime, cruelty,
disappointment, isolation,
impoverishment, ignorance, illusion:
we are all too familiar with these.
In the end, along with all spiritualities of the world,
we must trust you, Silent Mystery,
and your evolutionary plan for us
unfolding at every moment.
We will come together in our pain,
to pool our wisdom and our energies of hope,
convinced that in the end, the very end,
all shall somehow be well.
May it be so.