

Reflection for the 2nd. Sunday after Pentecost. “The Divine heart of love calls to Mission.”

Readings: Genesis 18: 1-15 Psalm 116: 1-2 ; 12-19 Romans 5: 1-8 St. Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9 – 23)

Across the world there is the combination of struggle and uncertainty mixed with tentative hope and angry demands for freedom from restrictions and the economic implications of Covid-19. The world wrestles with what to do and how fast to ease back the isolation and physical distancing, how to re-emerge and how quickly to do it. Tentative steps are met with hesitancy or all out excitement and expectation. What will come of this is unknown and the various experts in health and epidemiology are working hard to try and control outbreaks and infections. In some nations these people are very well supported by national and state leaders and others they are ridiculed and ignored. In some places the populace feels that they have a better grip on reality than health workers and epidemiologists, and national leaders are happy to follow suit. It is without question a strange and difficult time. In the midst of the most serious pandemic for over a century, the US has added to the plethora of regional protests on Covid-19 restrictions with the extraordinary protests and chaos surrounding the unjust treatment and murder of George Floyd. The US seems to have descended into chaos and there are few significant voices able to speak into the void with wisdom and compassion.

I read a piece written by the famous basketballer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in the Los Angeles Times. He writes passionately and with despair at these happenings, recognising that at the heart of the matter is an institutional racism and that people of his skin colour do not have equal lives and equal freedom to those with light skin. That doesn't justify the evils of anyone looting and rioting violently. It does however explain the depth of pain, anger and powerlessness experienced and surfacing in the coloured communities of the US. Of course, if we are prepared to be honest such racism and mistrust is not the exclusive of the US. It is present across the world and many indigenous people, in particular, have experienced and continue to experience the pain and powerlessness of exclusive power and domination through institutionalised racism and abuse.

Last weekend across this country we saw tens of thousands of people rally in support of our indigenous people calling for change and an end to black deaths in custody. Successive governments both federal and state have failed to implement recommendations going back to the inquiry in the early 1990's. And successive inquiries have met a similar fate.

Amidst these big picture stories, there is a world that is wrestling with its sense of being. Many struggle to understand where we fit and how we fit in, what our place and purpose is in this big and often difficult world. This is happening across many aspects of life, work, trade and finance to name but a few.

There are a plethora of messages and expectations that bombard us from every direction seeking to assert their truth and pushing us to the next level of hopeful ideology and hope-filled expectation that will bring comfort, security, hope and happiness – as if happiness has some ultimate lasting and meaningful place in human life.

There is more than one pandemic stressing people and claiming hope and peace across the world. We experience a pandemic of anxiety, despair, depression, suicide, domestic violence and increasing mental illness. People are stressed and life, hectic, chaotic and pressured as we seek to perform and match those around – keeping up with anyone and everyone and for many it is tiring just to think about it!! A positive in the Corona virus world of 2020 is that we have had more time to stop and ponder. Many have made new and positive connections with family, neighbours and friends. We have been enabled to look around us and recognise that all the stuff we have been told we need isn't actually necessary.

In this week's Gospel reading (St. Matthew 9: 35 – 10:8) the last part of chapter 9 speaks powerfully into the situations many are facing. “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their

synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. **When he saw the crowd, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into the harvest."**

Jesus' mission was to transform the world people experienced and to break open new possibilities. People across many parts of the world are calling for change and that call for change is coming from within, enough is enough, racism and division are no longer acceptable. There is a call for a fundamental shift in the way minorities are treated and rightly so, it has gone on for way to long. Those in power need to listen, step up and give the leadership that will hopefully enable and drive this change.

Change and transformation comes from within through people honestly facing reality and deep down experiencing grace, healing, and a new communal belonging and ultimately the way of love. We all need to be transformed and then together transform our part of the world for the good of the whole.

Jesus prayed for and sent his followers out into the worlds of human existence as transformative agents – yeast, salt, light, are some of the images He used. We have the mission of being sent into the worlds people inhabit to be transformative agents of love and grace in people's lives. This begins with each one of us as individuals and together as the community of Christ where everyone has a role, everyone belongs and where there is grace, hope, peace, love and justice.

Our mission is to enter places where people experience the oppression, hatred, racism, bitterness, where violence seems their only option to be seen and heard with an open mind ready to listen and to go with compassion, to be ready to stand alongside and be bears and makers of peace. Those consumed by hatred and bitterness are as oppressed as those who oppress them and both need liberation.

We are sent (this can happen in many different ways, it doesn't necessarily mean in a physical sense) into places where people struggle with loneliness, fear, confusion, sadness, grief, alienation to be people of hope and transformation. It is not that we have all the answers or all the resources. We can come with an open heart and mind, ready to find new understanding and even have our ideas and attitudes changed. We can come with real hope, faith and love expecting and working for the change that is needed knowing that the powerful Spirit of Pentecost is with us.

Around this frame work new community can develop and grow. As people begin to trust one another, listen to one another, understand the experience of the "other" then growth is possible and the signs of the God of transformation will be evident.

This week I would like to conclude this reflection with a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. I hope it speaks to you as it did to me.

**Ground of all being,
Mother of life, Father of the universe,
your name is sacred, beyond speaking.
May we know your presence,
may your longings be our longings in heart and
action.
May there be food for the human family today
and for the whole earth community.**

**Forgive us the falseness of what we have done
as we forgive those who are untrue to us.
Do not forsake us in our time of conflict but lead
us into new beginnings.
For the light of life, the vitality of life, and the
glory of life are your now and forever. Amen.**

God's love, Peace and Blessings to you all. Rev. Lindsay Sheppard.