

A New Community for a New World

Ps 138 and Galatians 3:21-29 – Sermon Text = Gal 3:27-29
563, 548, 530, 556

***“As many of you as were baptized into Christ
have clothed yourself with Christ.
There is no longer Jew or Greek,
there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male or female;
for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
(Galatians 3:27-29)***

I can't really imagine
what it must have been like to be a student in a residential school in Canada.
I've listened to and read some of the words
that survivors have spoken and written.
But I'm sure they conceal as much as they reveal.
Yet, what they have revealed is horrendous.
Thank God for the Canadian judicial system
that directed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
be established to hear the truth of what happened
in those institutions.

The churches involved in running those residential schools –
Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, and Presbyterian –
issued a response to the report this week.
You have a copy in your bulletin this morning
and I urge you to read it over several times this week.
Perhaps you could read it once a day and say a pray
for the aspect of that statement that strikes you most powerfully
in that reading.

For this morning's sermon,
this is the passage that hit me hardest:

*Notwithstanding the good intent and care of many who worked in the Schools,
it is clear the Indian Residential Schools, in policy and in practice,
were an assault on Indigenous families, culture, language and spiritual traditions,
and that great harm was done.
We continue to acknowledge and regret our part in that legacy.*

The church's report concludes with a commitment
to share in the work of healing and reconciliation:

*May the Creator guide us as we continue
In the work of healing, justice, and right relations
for the generations it will take to address that harm
“and guide this country on a new and different path.”*

It's that phrase 'guide this country on a new and different path'
that connects so strongly with our text this morning
and Paul's vision for the mission of the Christian church.

As we have seen over and over this year,
Paul preaches that, in Jesus Christ,
God saved the world.
It's that simple and that significant.
God acted to fulfill all of his promises to the earth.
A new world was conceived
and, in God's good time, will evolve to its final flourishing
as God's beloved creation.

To help with the evolution of that new world –
“a new heaven and a new earth” as Revelation puts it –
God called and equipped the church,
the continuing Body of Christ in the world,
to be the new community in and through which
God works to reconcile the world to himself.
It is not the only way in which God works in the world,
but it is the primary witness to and agent of this new thing that God is doing.
That humility and confidence, paradoxical as it may seem,
is crucial to healthy church life and work.

The ideas in our text this morning are powerful.
Here are the two that struck me most clearly this week.

The first is Paul's image that baptism is being clothed with Christ.
The literal Greek translation is 'put on Christ.'
Our faith in Christ is the first thing people see.
We are new people in a new community serving a new world.
We'll talk more next week about what that newness looks like,
but suffice it for today to say that the style of that clothing is 'Love.'
We put on, are clothed, in love of God, love of others, and love of ourselves,
all woven together into a style of being that blesses the world.

That blessing is seen primarily in the way we treat all peoples
with the dignity and worth God gave them in their birth.
This is not simply about the human rights of others,
though that is a crucial part in all of this.

The Commission's report calls on the government of Canada to sign onto the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples. That's another vision of a new world worth pondering and praying for.

But for the Christian community, this is not simply about human rights. This is about God's rights to the creation he intended.

I went back to a document that meant a lot to me when it was first written in the 1970s.

It is an essay called 'A Christian Declaration on Human Rights' by Jurgen Moltmann, one of the seminal Protestant theologians of hope and social renewal.

I think it captures beautifully what Paul means by being 'clothed in Christ.'

Christianity understands itself as witness to the three-in-one God who liberates human beings from inward and outward inhumanity, who allows them to live in his covenant, and leads them to the glory of his Kingdom. Christians, therefore, stand up for the dignity of human beings, out of which emerge their rights and duties. For the sake of God they will stand up with all means at their disposal, acting as well as suffering, for the dignity of human beings and their rights as the image of God. For their service to the humanity of persons, they need the right of religious freedom, the right to form a community, and the right to public speech and action."

All of us on this earth are one in Christ Jesus, in this Jesus who is the world's redeemer.

That is already a fact in God's time and mind.

And by God's grace, we are enlisted to live that fact here and now.

We are incorporated into that mission of building a new world,

clothed with the love of God in Christ Jesus,

through this new community that is the church.

With this new way of being in and for the world,

a way of being that overcomes all human divisions,

we can be part of guiding this country on a new and different path.

I sincerely hope to be part of that particular mission.

I sincerely hope to be part of the mission of reconciliation envisioned this week.

I sincerely hope that you will join me.

Together, by God's grace, we can make a significant difference.

For that mission, difficult and long as it will be,

we are fed frequently and fully at this table.

Come. Jesus is calling. Let us gather around together and eat with joy.

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