

Expanding Minds: The Pain and the Possibility

Luke 4: 14-21; Corinthians 12: 12-31a

Precious...precious. Precious for me is one of those awkward words. I want it to mean “like a precious metal:” rare, strong, everlasting. And yet, I don’t know if you have ever been told that you were precious, but any time I am told I am precious, I hear that I am fragile; that I am a snowflake that will melt away when reality comes calling. And then there are those of us who were of an age to go and see all of *The Lord of the Rings* movies. In those movies, if you don’t know, the ring is loved, caressed, carried by Gollum. And Gollum says the word precious 500 times in the movie; each time with just a little different nuance.

English, and actually every language, has these weird words that depend so much on intent, on how we say the word and the context we are using it in. The most interesting time someone used the word *precious* for myself was at Naramata Centre (which is a United Church continuing education centre). I was reading scripture for the first time there. A woman came up to me after and asked, “may I please give you feedback?” Now, I had grown up in one of those churches where anytime anyone under 16 wants to read the Scriptures they are praised highly, it doesn’t matter how well they do, they are just so excited that a youth wants to be involved. So I said, sure you can give me feedback. She said, “you read scripture as if it is *precious* and you need to read it as if it was **precious**.” She wanted me to read scripture as if it was important and eternal and could not be broken even by the worst reader (and this is not about you Bob, you did great today by the way.) And she didn’t want me to read the Bible as if it was *precious* and brittle; fragile, might fall apart at the slightest wind.

Words have great impact, but they are themselves, quite fragile.

We have discovered this especially as we become a society that texts and emails a lot. In a hand-written letter you could always tell by the force of the pen how someone was feeling. They might use the dreaded ALL CAPS, going into writing where all the letters were the capitalized version, so as to sound louder in the reader’s mind. But the big joke among us (and I hear there is one), is the need for a font for when we are being sarcastic. So, I could text someone and say, ‘isn’t the weather glorious today’ and they would know that I don’t actually think that today’s weather is glorious.

Language trips us up and yet is absolutely essential. Those folks who talk by way of the sign language, they too have contexts and accents. I watched a woman once, say with hand gestures, the one word three times, and each time her facial expression changed; even though her hands were doing exactly the same motion. And I realized she was saying *precious*, precious, **my precious**. Again, the expression and the context gave the words meaning.

People are like this as well. We like to think of ourselves as ourselves. I have one personality. While occasionally she can be the grumpy version of Leigh or the happy version of Leigh, there is one of me. But I grow and then I change and then someone else changes my opinion on something and I am a completely different person. Any of you who have ever watched a two-year-old and then met them later as a 5-year old or an 18-year old, know we totally change. Of course, there are those kernels of things that stay the same, but we are meant to grow and to change; as is language.

We are meant to get uncomfortable, feel threatened and then stretch a bit. Each time becoming more comfortable, perhaps in our own skin or perhaps becoming more comfortable with something in the world. Oh, this is so hard because with each change comes grief. We often think of grief as something that only comes when something bad happens, but it is not true. Upon getting your dream job, you actually have to show up there for hours at a time; when your unemployed self was using those hours to read or garden. It is a dream job and it is most wonderful to get paid, but there is change and grief involved.

How do we as a community support people through the pain of either growing into their true selves or loving the people around them (who seem to be changing) or loving our ever changing community.

The community of *Robertson-Wesley*, as Karen said this morning, is made up of a membership that is made up of whomever participates. And so, our membership is shifting and changing always. I wanted to tell you the three things we have discovered in this journey of acceptance and that we have learned from our Christian tradition. They help in these times of change where we all seem to be using the same language, but differently. And these things are ritual, time and play.

Today's reading speaks a lot about the baptism into one spirit, one body and the spirit of the Lord which Jesus talks about having come true; this is the spirit we are given when we follow Christ. We become one body and we, as a Christian community, create **rituals** to help us along our journey. It may be the ritual of bowing your head; it may be the ritual of finding out what Tammy-Jo has up her sleeve this week. There is the ritual of Baptism, of Communion; of coming into church and seeing these tables lined up which means we get to hear the bells. These are some of our rituals.

It also takes **time**. Each of us need to share with one another our need for time. Each change will bring about different needs in different people. The people who are using the Robertson-Wesley

kitchen on a regular basis are thrilled to know that a renovation is coming; we are all quite thrilled. But I am not someone who uses it on a regular basis so once they have renovated it, I am going to walk in, discover where the coffee is and make coffee and drink it because that is what kitchens are for. But there are other people who are going to go in there the first few times and open up that drawer where the spoons are and discover that, oh no they moved the spoons. They might even move where the stoves are going to be. This is all wonderful news, if you know how old our stoves are, but it is going to take us time. We are going to have these odd moments of nostalgia; remember when Leigh couldn't reach anything, oh I remember those days. We need to allow ourselves to grieve. Now I will use that kitchen because the grief will be light but there are heavier griefs. Give yourself time.

The story I want to use today is about a grandmother who taught me what to do when your granddaughter asks you if you could call her by a new name. If you could indeed call him by his true name. This grandma had the strength to say yes to the child and then came running to the church and asked me how. I, of course, honestly said, 'No idea, let us discover this together.' My job wasn't to help her love her grandchild. She loved her grandchild. My job as a pastor was to give her a **ritual** and permission to take **time** for her to grieve. Not to grieve her grandchild, her grandchild was alive and well. But she, like many grandparents I have spoken to, had in her mind these little pictures that she didn't even know she had. She had a picture of her granddaughter graduating in a dress; she had a picture of her grand-daughter getting married in a dress. She knows that these images meant nothing in reality, but they were invested in; she had already thought about them.

The other thing she had already done a lot for this grandchild was sew. She was one of those grandmas who would send you a new pair of pyjamas every Christmas and those pairs of pyjamas would have been sewn by her hands; a prayer in every stitch. So, as Christmas came around, she looked at me and said, 'I am assuming he doesn't want a flannel nighty.' (And, of course, in my head I am thinking, 'Does anyone really want a flannel nighty?', but I didn't say that.) I said, 'True. So, what shall we do so you can send him something you've sewn that doesn't just say I put a prayer in every stitch, but says: you are awesome.' Bow-ties were her choice and that year that amazing grand-son received three bow-ties. Two were for fancy occasions and of course the other matched his sister's linen nighties. This grandma still trips over pronouns and she always follows that up with a hug and a confession of her deep love for this amazing young man and his courage. And this young man has taught her and taught me and so many others about forgiveness, courage and style, which leads me to the third piece.

When the world around you seems to be changing too fast or someone particular in your circle is changing too much, I remind you about Paul's **sense of humor**. We don't often think about it because well it's not really big, so you have to grab it when he says things. When he says, 'The ear can't say to the eye, 'Oh I don't need you.' The foot can not say to the hand, 'I can pick that up.' Paul did not have the resources to know people with differing abilities very well. We all know of the people who can play the piano with their feet, if they weren't gifted with hands. We

know people who speak with their hands because their mouth doesn't work the same as you or I. But what Paul's humor reminds us of is that it's pretty silly if you are going to emphasize the little things when we really are one body. **Find ways to laugh at yourself.** Ask those you trust to help you. We have a wonderful new office administrator who raises her eyebrow when I get a pronoun wrong. She is not saying that I am a bad person, she is saying that I just need to remember.

Take time, create rituals and play. We are one, and although it is hard many days, it is a gift from God. Thanks be to God. Amen.