

Holy citizens gathered – be reconciled

Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

There's a lot to unpack in this morning's scripture, and you're all probably wondering what one thing has to do with the other. And frankly, I had a little bit of a challenge wondering what to do with the circumcised and the uncircumcised. What does that mean? And in the end, I landed in the place of realizing that what both of these scriptures point to, at least in my mind, is the way through which Jesus brings diverse groups of people, maybe even warring groups of people together.

Now, if we take a look at some of the most recent kinds of scriptural studies, they give us some pretty clear examples of how Jesus saw his life as being one of both teaching and healing. But he also saw his life as being about justice and right relationship. So sometimes it depends on who the preacher is and sometimes it depends on what the scripture is we will focus more heavily on one area than the other, but today's scripture, it seems to me, asks us to focus on all four. Jesus teaches the crowds who have gathered on the hillside, but then they all rush to bring all of the sick and he spends time healing and then we get the reflection back from the author of Ephesians who says, basically, "and all of that is about justice and right relationship, my friend." We teach, we heal, we embrace. We feed, we clothe, we struggle, we work, we do it all in order that there might be justice and right relationship.

And if that is not the result of our teaching, something, somewhere went wrong. If our teaching leads to anger, if our teaching leads to judgement rather than justice, if our teaching leads me to see you as less than...then I wasn't teaching Jesus. I was teaching somebody else, or something else. Probably me, because that's mostly where we get in trouble, isn't it? I get in the way of truth, of beauty, of hope...and I certainly get in the way of justice.

I want us to look again for a moment at the passage from Ephesians near the end. It says: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation". It says, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets". Built upon a foundation laid by the Christ. The Messiah. A structure built by God through humans.

Well, as I hope you've noticed, I've been spending time in the Still Spirited articles this month directing us to the ways in which the United church has been participating with Indigenous folk for, certainly the last forty years and possibly earlier, in an attempt for us to find ways by which we might become better at being friends. And that means that us settlers have to get a whole lot wiser about how we treat one another, but especially about how we treat the land that we moved onto and took over from another group of people. And one of the ways that we tried to acknowledge at least the involvement of the Indigenous community in the United church – because that, my friends, has a long long long history – was through the redesign and the reconstruction of the United church crest and that is on the front of your bulletin. And we did that in 2012. I'm not saying we're fast about what we do; I'm saying we attempt to be faithful in what we do.

The redesign in 2012, as I fleshed out in the Still Spirited article, incorporated the four colours of the medicine wheel. But the most powerful moment for me at that general council was the

introduction of the words – and I sincerely apologize to my Indigenous friends as I stumble over saying this in...I believe it is Mikmaq. Anyway, well, here it is. Oh, it's a Mohawk phrase; it says right here. Ha! It says Mohawk in what I wrote for you. If only I'd read my own stuff. In my stumbling pronunciation: akwe nia'tetewá:neren. Akwe nia'tetewá:neren. All my relations. All my relations. You see, the Indigenous folk of this land understood scriptures way before they were ever introduced. The Indigenous folk of this land understood way before we ever came. Everything is related. In fact, yes, we are all one in God's creation. And no one needed to come and tell them that. We do, however, need to understand the teachings of Jesus in order that we ourselves may live into that. Today's scripture invites us to overlook all of those things that we believe separate us. That's what the whole circumcised and uncircumcised thing at the beginning is all about. It doesn't matter; it's not important. It's a who cares? What's important is that every being is related to every other being by nature of being part of God's creation. Thanks be. Amen.