

First Mennonite Church Edmonton
Peace Sunday
November 8, 2020
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Since marrying Christine I've needed to shift from talking about I and me, and have slowly been shifting my language to talking about 'us' and 'we'. This is no easy shift, especially having been single for just about the first 40 years of my life, I'm very familiar talking about my home, my money, my car, my...stuff. But now, Christine and I both are learning to talk about 'our' home, 'our' money, 'our' car, 'our' stuff. This shift from individual to corporate language is new for, me, maybe for us, but I don't want to speak for her. And yet, it's a reflection of how we've joined together and how we're connected to one another.

Peace Sunday is usually a Sunday that we set aside to provide a counter narrative to Remembrance Day. As a traditional peace church, Peace Sunday is our opportunity to focus on Jesus' call to peacemaking and to living lives which reflect that. Typically we've focused on Peace as the absence of violence or war, but peace is so much broader. The Hebrew word for Peace, which many of us are already familiar with is Shalom. A word that is best translated as wholeness and I think this sense of wholeness, for self, for the world, for humanity, and for all of creation ties in well to a sense of we are connected to one another. On this Peace Sunday, I think it's important for us to think of the many ways and facets that we are linked together as God's people. And not only as God's people, but as a people who share a common humanity.

In the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, we focus' in on how the church, the Body of Christ, is so interconnected, that all the parts are important. Paul pushes the body imagery to it's limits imagining different body parts reflect on their place in the body, ears for instance that lament that because they're not eyes, that they are not important, or having our feet feel that they are unimportant because they're not hands. The Apostle Paul emphasizes that the Body needs all the different parts with their different gifts and their different talents to make up the Church.

This is poignant for the Corinthian church because there was a great deal of classism in the church. Some felt that they were part of the 'in' group, more than others, and Paul's letter is reminding them that no one member of the church is more important. The church needs everyone, there are no lesser, and there are no greater members. Each person is a valued member of the church. And as a counter narrative to the growing classism, Paul suggests that those who are more vulnerable, those who may be considered lesser, may, in fact, be more

valuable, may have more to offer, and more to teach the larger body. Paul's letter emphasizes in this chapter, how the Gospel is not something just for individuals, rather, the Gospel is something that is for the community, and for the world.

Andrew Suderman writes "If we are interested in embodying God's peace and justice in this world, what happens to one should also matter to others. If we seek to be a Peace church, we must therefore recognize our interconnectedness, challenge injustice, while accompanying those who suffer."

Simply put, we need everyone. Everyone is important, everyone has a place. The 'I' isn't as important as the 'we.'

Rosthern Quilt - Years ago I was given a quilt, made up of scraps from old quilts, the sewer named the quilt Rosthern, because hoof the diverse blah blah blah

There is a South African phrase, *ubuntu*, which is shorthand for a phrase that I won't try to pronounce because I'm likely to butcher it, but this phrase means, "a person is a person because of other people." Or to say it in another way, I am because we are. This sense that we are members of, parts of something larger. That we intrinsically need each other, that we are intrinsically connected to each other. And I'm not talking about the "Mennonite Game" where we trace our connectedness, through family trees. I'm talking about our shared humanity, and the way we are connected by the Holy Spirit.

This is true on the micro level, it is also true on the macro level. We are all connected. This is important when things are going well, but is also more important when things aren't. And it's when things aren't going well that we need each other even more.

Our world is embroiled in a number of struggles. There is the ongoing global pandemic, we have a presidential election to the south of us which has only begun to resolve and in Canada systemic racism, whether it be against our indigenous neighbours, people of asian descent or coloured people continues cause suffering and pain. The world, is not peaceful, it's not whole, shalom it would seem, is out of reach.

And Paul reminds us, that when one member of the Body suffers, the whole of the body suffers. I think about the last time I stubbed my toe, how the pain radiated up my leg, how I doubled over, how I had tunnel vision, and how I could only focus on the pain. I think about

how it effected my balance, how all of my attention was on this little appendage that was in the wrong place at the wrong time. How my whole body suffered in that moment because one part, one usually insignificant part, was in pain.

Now, let's expand our gaze, when the hole body suffers, we all suffer. I think of the church, our particular faith community, and I think about how we both worry for one another, and how we both celebrate with one another. I think about how, in times of hurt, or grief, or mourning, how the community gathers around, and tries to care for those members who are in pain. I can't help but think of the familiar hymn "Bless'd be the tie that binds" and the verse that says "We share each others' woes, each other's burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear." As a church family we are inextricably tied together. When one member hurts, we all hurt. When one member celebrates, we all celebrate.

But let's extend our gaze further, beyond the walls of our community and congregation, to our neighbourhoods and to the many other people we connect with. Let's remember how we're connected to them too. This pandemic is revealing to us, I think, how connected we really are with one another, whether it is through the limits that we have to place on our socializing, or perhaps the other side of the coin, the complexities of contact tracing, we are beginning to see how connected we are and how what one person does can ripple throughout so many more lives. And we can see how some small actions, like masking or keeping distant, or stying home when feeling unwell, can protect and keep people safe, while other actions, carelessness around health guidelines, large group gatherings, etc., can cause so much more harm that we can imagine.

And our connectedness is beyond this too! As a people, created in God's image, we are connected to many others. Canada continues to struggle with racism. And systemically, Indigenous people are victim to a particular pernicious racism, imbedded in Canadian Law and policies. And while there are efforts underway to right some of the wrongs, there is an incredible amount of work that needs to be done with and alongside our Indigenous neighbours to correct. I believe it's important for us to recognize that we are not separate from our Indigenous neighbours but are instead connected to them. That part of our calling to be peacemakers in this world is to join with and come alongside our indigenous neighbours in their quest for justice.

I could go on. Having a brother, sister-in-law and nephew living in the US, I can't help but feel that what happens in the US with this election will also effect our family in some fashion, and

this is not to mention economics, or politics or other aspects. Humanity, as much as we say we're individuals or independent or free, isn't, we are connected. And it's these connections offer us opportunities and invite us to embody God's vision for God's church, that is, to be in solidarity, to come along side, to abide with others, in whatever their struggles are. To practice both solidarity, and compassion. To weave our being and our doing together.

And when we can embrace this invitation, to be the church, we participate in God's vision of hope and healing for the world. It's a testimony to the world that God has not forsaken the world, that God has not forgotten the goodness of creation, rather it's a radical voice that says that God is intimately concerned with the world, with creation, and God is continuing to be involved in the world through Christ's Body, the church. This is our witness, this is our mission, this is our calling.

May God guide and lead us to be the church God is calling us to be.

Amen.