

Sunday Reflection

3rd May 2020

Rev. Shannon DeLaureal

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13

The Ministry of Reconciliation

For five years, my family and I lived in Northern Ireland northeast of Belfast while I served in the Methodist Church in Ireland. We became familiar with the phrase “Peace and Reconciliation” as well as other phrases which pointed to this hope, such as cross-community work, power-sharing and ecumenical partnerships. We learned there are no easy shortcuts to peace and reconciliation for a region that has experienced so much heart-ache, pain, loss, and grief while trying to hold onto values that shape their various cultural identities.



We felt the majority of people we met, befriended and served, wanted a future filled with peace for everyone. So many are working toward that goal. It’s been 22 years since the Good Friday Peace Agreement was signed and much progress has been made for the sake of Northern Ireland. However, more is needed for at certain times of the year, sectarian tensions still rise and bubble over into riots and violence. Just last year a young reporter lost her life from gunfire in Londonderry/Derry while reporting on sectarian riots. Past transgressions and the call for justice are still very much a current day concern which makes more visible society’s wounded-ness that is in need of great healing. Reconciliation is a very difficult and complex work.

There is a bronze sculpture made by Josefin de Vasconcellos which sits in the grounds of the Stormont Estate in east Belfast. Stormont is the seat of the devolved government in Northern Ireland. I find this sculpture very moving because of the emotions expressed by the two in this embrace called reconciliation. Have you noticed the man and woman are on their knees? Kneeling can be seen as a posture of submission, where one submits to another’s authority. And here, both are submitting to the other, perhaps meeting each other in their point of grief, sorrow and anguish. I believe love and forgiveness are two of our most basic spiritual and emotional needs. What a beautiful image of forgiveness this sculpture portrays. I understand additional casts of this sculpture have also been placed in the Berlin Wall Memorial and in the Hiroshima Peace Park.



The Apostle Paul wrote about God’s reconciliation to humanity in his 2nd letter to the Corinthian church. He instructs, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” I understand Paul’s enthusiasm about this spiritual truth, but I get an inaccurate sense that this reconciliation is easy. I think we all know it’s not! There is always a cost to reconciliation.

One Biblical commentator wrote, “Reconciliation often requires the one least in the wrong to take the first and greatest steps; only once reconciliation has happened does the other realise how much it has cost.” How true this is for God and humanity. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Jesus told Peter that he (and you and I!) must forgive our brother seventy-seven times. Forgiveness and reconciliation can take much time and effort. Can you think of a time in your own life where you offered forgiveness to someone and it didn’t come easily? What did it cost you? What were the rewards? I pray that as you followed Christ’s

words faithfully in this difficult work, others saw in you a new creation, brought forth by the love and grace of Christ.

One last thought about reconciliation: Paul wrote that God has reconciled the world to himself . . .” When I think of the world, I think of humanity but also the natural world. During this time of lockdown, with most of us having to stay home and many not able to work at their normal jobs, something new is happening. Carbon emissions have fallen due to the closing down of industries, transport networks and many businesses. Back in late March, it was reported that New York City saw a 50% decrease in pollution because of measures taken to control the coronavirus. In early April, it was also reported that similar changes in France and Italy can be seen from space! There have been reports that skies over Wuhan, China are no longer filled with fumes but are blue and clear. The residents can now hear the birds singing for the noise from the factories has ceased.

Once the virus and the lockdown have passed, I wonder what things will remain so that this new reality may become longer-lasting. What things will return to their former pattern of our previous reality? Staying isolated in lockdown for the rest of our lives is not a realistic option nor would I say is going back to our fast-paced frenetic lives. I wonder what God is asking of our church at this time? How can we faithfully respond to the flourishing of the environment after lockdown? What new habits can we personally and corporately sustain so that a new creation is brought forth for the next generation? May we listen attentively and respond to the divine voice who whispers in our ears and nudges us to step forward in new directions.

Roots: Worship and Learning Resources for Churches website.
<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2013/64-march-april-2013-c/lent-4/bible-notes/bible-notes-aaa>.

Date accessed 28th April 2020.

Poem by Nadine Anne Hura on New Story Hub website.

<http://newstoryhub.com/2020/04/for-papatuanuku-mother-earth-by-nadine-anne-hura-via-jacinda-ardern/>.

Date Accessed 28th April 2020.

I close with a poem entitled “For Papatūānuku – Mother Earth” written by Nadine Anne Hura. This poem was recently shared by Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand.

☞ Rest now, e Papatūānuku

Breathe easy and settle
Right here where you are
We'll not move upon you
For awhile ☞

We'll stop, we'll cease

Draw each other close and be kind
Kinder than we've ever been.
I wish we could say we were doing it for you
as much as ourselves

But hei aha

We're doing it anyway

It's right. It's time.

Time to return

Time to remember

Time to listen and forgive

Time to withhold judgment

Time to cry

Time to think

About others

Remove our shoes

Press hands to soil

Sift grains between fingers

☞ Gentle palms

Time to plant

Time to wait

Time to notice

To whom we belong

For now it's just you

And the wind

And the forests and the oceans and the sky full of rain

Finally, it's raining!

Ka turuturu te wai kamo o Rangi ki runga i a koe

☞ Embrace it

This sacrifice of solitude we have carved out for you

He iti noaiho – a small offering

People always said it wasn't possible

To ground flights and stay home and stop our habits of
consumption

But it was

It always was.

We were just afraid of how much it was going to hurt
– and it IS hurting and it will hurt and continue to hurt
But not as much as you have been hurt.

So be still now

Wrap your hills around our absence

Loosen the concrete belt cinched tight at your waist

Rest.

Breathe.

Recover.

Heal –

And we will do the same.