

St James United Church



Message for February 2, 2025

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

“Be a Budde: How to Be Christian in the Age of Trump” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft
1 Cor.13:1-13; Luke 5:1-11; and James Finley *The Healing Path: A Memoir and an Invitation* (161-162)

I don't normally give my reflection a title until after it's been preached, but today I'd like to give it one before I start - “Be a Budde: How to Be Christian in the Age of Trump”. It is intentionally punny, referencing Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde who, as I mentioned last week, preached prophetically to the US president, but sounds as well like being a friend. That said, be assured it's not my intention to be partisan by also including in the title the name of the current American president, but to consider our call as followers of Jesus in a world that is very much shaped by politicians along with various other leaders.

As I said, I want to reflect on our call. Call is the main focus of our gospel as Jesus invites Simon along with James and John to be his disciples. Unlike Mark's and Matthew's telling of this story where Jesus meets these fishers along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and as he calls them out of the blue they immediately respond and leave everything behind to follow him, Luke places it in context, the fishers' decision to accept Jesus' call coming not from some charismatic divine pull but based on what they heard him say to the crowd followed by an abundant catch of fish. They respond not just to him but what they see as his mission and how they can share in it.

So that said, based on the story that we heard, is his mission putting out into the deep where together they will experience God's abundant and loving generosity? In a word, yes. Well, at least symbolically. The sea for Jesus, the fishers, those first hearing this story, stood for chaos. And the world they lived in was chaotic. It was a very stratified and unjust world. And a scary one with the Roman military ever present, people feeling threatened, running the risk of harassment, imprisonment, even crucifixion if they stepped out of line. This was how it was for most as an elite took advantage of their struggle to amass wealth and to gain power.

And this is increasingly our world. We may not have soldiers watching our every move, but tariff threats motivated our leaders to ramp up enforcement on our border, and south of that border ICE officers are arresting migrants, not just violent criminals like they said they would but saying that anyone without papers is a criminal. And to increase the us-them divide they're targeting trans and non-binary people, more generally discontinuing equity and inclusion programs, even blaming the tragic plane crash on DEI hires. There's much more going on as you know if you're checking the news as much as I am, about Canada too because as history has taught us trends in the US often eventually cross the border. It is chaotic, intentionally so say many analysts, so no one notices that democracy is being undermined.

So, what do we do? We again look to our story. They may be in the midst of chaos, but they are in it together. Jesus could have continued as he was, preaching and healing on his own, but he called disciples, inviting them to share in his work. And he didn't stop with fishers, but called people from diverse backgrounds into relationship, zealots who wanted to overthrow the empire befriending tax collectors who kept it funded, hard grafting day labourers working alongside folks employed by the palace, all of them breaking bread with each other. I am sure there were moments nerves got frayed and tempers flared, moments they had to put into practice the love Paul wrote about and so needed to be patient, show empathy, forgive each other. But Jesus knew that the antidote to the us-them society they lived in was intentionally living its opposite as they nurtured unity and cared for one another.

And he calls us into the same communities of support and solidarity. We need such places to be ourselves, to find our composure when things get rough, to heal when we take the judgements of others into ourselves and question our worth. This is the sense in which I hear Simon Peter naming his sin. Sin at its root is isolation, separation from others, wilfully amplifying that division by hurting others. But the core of that is most often an earlier hurt. As they say, "hurt people hurt people". But in community we create space where those hurts are healed as we befriend each other, extending to each other empathy, compassion, caring, where we can show each other the mercy that may be lacking in our world, not just once but multiple times, the healing path, as James Finley observes, one we circle back on until we trust we are loved.

And it's in the heart of that compassionate, loving and so healing, community that we experience God's abundant generosity. This is the end result of Jesus' mission, imaged in the abundant catch of fish. The chaos of the Roman world was rooted in the view that the world is a zero-sum game, the idea that resources are scarce and can only be shared so far, so for me to get more you must have less. It's a winners and losers view of the world seen in the US tariffs which assume I can only be great at your expense. But in the catch of fish we see an alternative vision, not scarcity but abundance. We get that when we support and share with each other, realize that a stronger, more prosperous you makes a stronger, more prosperous me. Again, it is what we are called to not just then, but now. And as we nurture community, we embody the love that is the gospel, choosing to trust rather than guard ourselves for fear that someone will take what I have or aggressively taking from them first. As we do this we model, even if only for a short time each week, what God's Reign is supposed to feel like. And we do it not just to shelter from the chaos but to help each other stand against it, inspired by what we experience together to be like Bishop Budde and speak truths our leaders often don't want to hear, to not just support those engaged in the activism that will be needed, but to organize as churches have long done, out in the wider community advocating for needed change.

So beloved, like those fishers in our gospel, let us push out into the deep, working together in the midst of chaos where we will nevertheless experience the loving and generous abundance of God. And more than just experience it, we'll show others that this is how we're to be with each other, that this is the way of God that Jesus came to teach us, not just to live back then but to live it now in the age of Trump. Amen.