

Sunday, June 17, 2018

Rev. Tom Nicoll – Sermon Notes

In the parish I served last as rector, one of my most devoted members had a daughter named Kristen. She was graduating from high school, so we put her name, with the other grads, in the parish newsletter. The Father sent me an email: “after 14 yrs in parish, can’t believe you spelled her name Kristin, instead of Kristen”. I was stunned. Felt bad and confused for a couple of days. I wrote a note of apology: then when I saw him next, he said he couldn’t believe I didn’t know it was all a joke.

Many have learned the hard way; there is a problem with emails: you can't hear the tone of voice, see the body language, Don't put the words in the right framework. You hear the wrong background music playing, and you have a failure to communicate. When we read the writings of the earliest Christian communities, the New Testament books, often miss something of the spirit, emotion within which were written. Have less than perfect communication. A handful of Jewish people had shared an experience that caused them to be alive and hopeful in a utterly new way. Even though joining this group, movement, was unconventional or even dangerous, people were coming in like crazy. They were joyful, energized, deeply moved: That's the framework for their words. It's worth asking: what was it about their encounter with God in Jesus Christ that produced this effect in them? What was the gospel ---for them?

Several things it was not for them: It was not that they had now had a new set of rules laid on them, or a more precise version of the rules. It was not that they had been informed that God had been planning to punish them with infinite conscious pain forever, but now didn't need to do that because He had taken it out on an innocent person instead, It wasn't that one admirable and wise, perhaps mystical, man had made a few additions to the world's collection of wise sayings.

It WAS that in what had happened to them through the life and death and raising up of Jesus, they knew and felt themselves to be set free, in this life, from the ways of living together that were deadly, set free from a pattern of life together that led to violence and death set free, that is, in the most important way they could be free.

We pick up the echo of this glorious, surprising breakthrough in both epistle and gospel we heard today. 2nd Corinthians passage: Paul talks about how his hearers were being urged on, are now motivated, by the love they had exp'd in Christ & had been given a new, heavenly way of *seeing...everything*: no longer from the old familiar human point of view, so that now--they recognized that If anyone is IN CHRIST, if they are seeing from that location, Then there is a new creation.

Which is to say, the world is new and different for us---our relationship world, where our life happens, is altered. All of those shared assumptions about life, expectations, rules, norms, about what is good and bad and possible, and impossible --that we get from the people around us, That everybody just knows---are undone.

For those first Christians, in the “creation” they were living in before, violence was just baked in: many were crushed by coercion, but that was just the way it had to be, had always been, would always be. God meant it to be that way: couldn't be otherwise: They had assumed there was a lot of violence even in the Creator. In *that* way of making sense of things, In that creation, everyone had their place, & had better well stay in it. God had decreed it, inscribed that in the stars. This old creation was still around when in the early 20th century a lot of Christian people believed that it was a violation of the way things had to be, of God's will, to give women any pain relief in childbirth. Imagine that! In the old creation, slavery was a given: They believed it could be defended by so-called natural law.

Of course it was *natural* for the strong to dominate and exploit the weak, of course, the only way to deal with violence was with greater violence. They had believed, they had assumed: “That's just the way it is,” as Ricky Skaggs sang. “Our hands are tied, with respect to just about everything.” The

first disciples had been living in that old creation and then Jesus had happened to them and communicated to them: "your assumptions about what has to be, are wrong as are your assumptions about how you have to react when someone wrongs you, about needing to overcome violence with violence

as though that will give you what you are really seeking about the necessity to divide your world into us vs them, about the fixed requirement that if you aren't about looking after just you and yours, you'll be lost and worthless.

Assuming that If you don't always go around looking to find and punish the guilty like the woman taken in adultery, everything will be lost." Jesus holds out another way, & lived another way, kept on living it, all the way to the end. Said that for all of us, living his way would work out better, get better results, would be more in tune with the heart of the creator. He said: It's not the violent conquerors who are really well off, it's the humble and the peacemakers, it's not those who have out-grasped and out-grabbed, ---and you don't have to BE a compulsive grabber and grasper.. That doesn't need to be who you fundamentally are.

God's Kingdom doesn't happen by being bigger and stronger, smarter, in world's terms, It *can* happen when a small simple change in human ways of being with one another, sets off an alteration for the better in our web of relationships. It's like the power of the tiny seed, we hear Jesus talking about this morning, the surprising bursting forth in nature, where life is released and multiplied,

That something so small could produce such a result. Seems miraculous, defies our expectations and assumptions. So it is with a small action making present the freedom of God. We still know what it is to feel bound and imprisoned, helpless, with a sense that we can't do much, That things are set, That we are too weak, not good enough, not strong enough, That is why we make a point to focus our minds on the breakthrough of Jesus, Reclaim it to be newly energized and hopeful, grateful and delighted.

A reason to remember, with joy, that if you take one small step, for the K, plant one small seed, amazing things can result. Back in 40's in South Africa, Fr. Trevor Huddleston, a white Anglican priest, was walking down the street: He met Mrs. Tutu and her children, among whom was young Desmond. He politely tipped his hat to her, a black woman, as he would to any white woman, and young Desmond's heart and mind were electrified, and liberated, and set on a path to being a great witness and worker for the freedom of God. The K gets a foot-hold, and who knows what will happen next?

Every time you are in a position to take selfish advantage of someone and you choose not to; Every time you decide to let go of an old injury and refuse to hold a grudge; Every time you choose not to go along with a racial slur AND also refuse to hate and abuse the one making the slur; Every time you choose to model your actions on the not resentful, not envious, not jealous, not retaliating and not vengeful way of Jesus and act otherwise than according to the old, hateful, bullying and unfair ways of the old creation, you are allowing the new creation to come into being. Our lives are so connected, interwoven, that the planting of any seed of God's freedom can do amazing world-altering things, hate- and violence- overcoming things. We are here, in this place this morning, saying to ourselves and to each other and to God, that we mean, in our incomplete, and immature, clumsy ways, we mean to be a people acting in and for this new creation, this new vision and understanding of what is good and possible for our life together as humans. We mean to be a people who are first of all about getting over ourselves, and about overcoming our own violence with patience and courage and forgiveness. Jesus broke into our minds and hearts, planting the seed of truth that God is only graciously for us, with an infinite love, That in God there is no darkness at all, no violence, ---that we can trust that, and live according to that good news. It is a great new possibility that has broken into our reality through Jesus, offering something new and wonderful for us and for everyone in the world. It is a reason for a lot of praise and alleluias.