**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

**July 7th, 2019**

**Title: The Way of Peace**

**Passage: Luke 10: 1-20**

**Rev. Sharon Smith**

Friends you and I are called to walk in the way of peace. To be peace makers.

A young girl from Israel offers words of wisdom to Naaman’s partner, providing a way of healing.

And decades later, Jesus instructs his followers to enter every house and say: “Peace, Peace to this house”.

In the gospel according to Luke, we read words of instruction from Jesus to an additional 70 followers.

Jesus is aware that this group of people following the Way, heading out on foot in First Century Palestine, were walking in the presence of danger. The story of the Good Samaritan follows this passage, a fictional parable situated in this same terrain where bandits leave a man on the side of the road as good as dead.

“Go out” Jesus says, “as lambs among the wolves”. For my friends when we are called to live the way of Jesus the Christ in our violent world, we stand out.

The late Jean Vanier, founder of L’arch (homes for people living with disabilities), writes a compelling book called “Living Gently in a Violent World.”

For though most of our streets do not have bandits around each corner, we live in a society where most people are consumed with their own wellbeing.

* Try waiting a few seconds before taking off at a green traffic light,
* or dropping your change at a cash register in the grocery store.

Working in the corporate world can be cutthroat – everyone trying to get ahead,

the non-profit world is all about survival by competing for resources and funds from grants and donors,

and even the religious world can be an institutional hierarchy of climbing ladders with clever words.

Vanier writes that the Vision of Jesus was to break down these walls of competition and bring peace. Walls that are motivated by fear of rejection, not succeeding, failure, deterioration.

He writes that empires have through the ages attempted to impose ‘peace’.

The great Pax Ramana was imposed by the armies of Rome in Jesus’ day and yet there was conflict everywhere.

Just as the Romans imposed their peace, so the British empire and the American empire and the Chinese empire attempt to do the same.

*Living Gently in a Violent World, by Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas*

But imposed peace is not the peace that Jesus taught, my friends.

In our gospel reading today, we hear Jesus’ words to offer a blessing of peace and then to pay attention to how it is being received. To respect the other’s choice. And if it is not accepted, to walk away.

O how I wish the colonial missional era would have heeded these words. Instead through violent means we imposed the so-called Peace of the Church onto many nations.

Instead we are called to meet people just where they are. Respectfully and attentively.

The lure of being right, can lead us to push our ideas onto others.

And every gesture and every word we utter has an impact.

We feel the words of others, we relive words, we even embody words that we have been given. For better or for worse.

The Genesis story of creation suggests that there is a God-like power in the Human’s naming of the creatures. Adam named what was seen, just as Creator had who called it good.

Words create or words can destroy.

Jean Vanier tells a story of a young boy living with a disability who was making his first Communion in a church in Paris. After the liturgy the young boy’s Uncle said to his mother: How sad that he didn’t understand the beauty of the liturgy. The boy overheard his Uncle’s remark and with tears in his eyes he had the courage to counter the negative words with these truer ones: Don’t worry Mummy, Jesus loves me as I am.

Words can wound, and words can bless.

Oh that we would say: Peace, Peace to this house.

**John O Donahue in his book *To Bless the Space Between Us*, describes the practice of blessing.**

“Blessing is the art of harvesting the wisdom of the invisible world and offering it as a gift in our visible world.” Making the invisible visible.

“Blessing is intentional.”

“Blessing invokes wholeness upon a person. Wholeness or Shalom is that state where everything comes together – where all the losses are made good and the damage is made whole, where our blindspots are restored with vision.”

Blessing surrounds a person with health and wholesomeness.

We can always be prepared to utter a word of blessing.

And anyone can bless.

John O Donahue describes when he was a new 25 year old Catholic Priest and he was invited to visit a contemplative community. A sister, an elder in the community, who had spent over 60 years in this community bowed to receive a blessing from John. When he had finished he knelt before her and asked for her blessing. She uttered something and ran away. She was not used to doing this.

What a sadness that our tradition has prevented us from daily practicing blessing.

*To Bless the Space Between Us*

I have a practice of carrying words of blessing in my mind whenever I encounter a person.

And I urge you to do the same.

One may say:

* May you find peace today
* May you have the courage you need today
* May you see the world differently today
* May you be all that you were made to be today
* May your journey be safe
* May you encounter kindness today
* May the work of your hands be fruitful

Take a minute and imagine a person in front of you. A neighbour, a friend, a family member, a person who irritates you. Choose one.

Now think of how you might bless them.

*Pause*

Every week in our Anglican Liturgy. We get to practice a blessing.

We call it passing the peace.

Repetitive rituals can lose their meaning. So much so that we may use this time to have conversations or to get around the room quickly and greet everyone.

But this is not the point.

When we turn to another and utter the words: “The Peace of Christ be with You”

We are blessing each other. Let us respectfully and attentively offer a word and a gesture of peace. Some may want a word only, others a handshake and others a hug.

It is our opportunity to learn to attune to the other’s needs.

When we pass the peace, we are naming that even though hurts and rifts and pain exist in among our community, Christ’s peace is still upon us.

Friend’s uttering the peace to each other, helps us to practice right relationships. The giving and receiving of blessing. The giving and receiving of forgiveness.

We are in the process of becoming peace makers.

And maybe as we walk out of this place, we will have the courage because of what happens in this room, to engage in the difficult conversations so that peace can be realised in our relationships.

**I invite you now, to receive a blessing (written by Jan Richardson)**

When the path is simple, peace

When the way is complicated, peace

May Christ not only show you the way

But also be the way you travel:

Way of blessing, way of peace.

**Amen**