

Jordan Station United Church

September 19, 2021

Creation Week 3 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: “Passing on the Gift of Service”

(James 3:13-4:3,7-8)

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission (SJM) residential school commemoration event which was held in Williams Lake, BC, Canada, in the spring of 2013. It grew out of Phyllis' story of having her shiny new orange shirt taken away on her first day of school at the Mission, and it has become an opportunity to keep the discussion on all aspects of residential schools happening annually. September 30th was chosen because it is the time of year in which children were taken from their homes to residential schools, and because it is an opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year. It also gives teachers and religious leaders time to plan events that will include children, as we want to ensure that we are passing the story and learning on to the next generations.

September 30, 2021 marks the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day honours the lost children and Survivors of residential schools, their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process. Adam Grant said, “It takes curiosity to learn. It takes courage to unlearn. Learning requires the humility to admit what you don't know today. Unlearning requires the integrity to admit that you were wrong yesterday. Learning is how you evolve. Unlearning is how you keep up as the world evolves.”

“Who is wise and understanding among you?” James writes in his letter to Christians. What a question, but wouldn't it be great to be remembered as wise? Wise like our Indigenous siblings. If you're going to be wise, you're going to have to be humble, because humility comes from wisdom, heavenly wisdom that is. Earthly wisdom is envious and selfishly ambitious; earthly wisdom is where you get disorder and every evil practice. If you're going to be a follower of Christ, says James, if you are going to be like Him in heavenly wisdom then you are going to have to show humility.

Jesus-like wisdom has nothing to do with how much you know, it is all about how you live. Sometimes Christians are far more focused on being right than

righteous. We might claim to have Godly wisdom but in the process are so focussed on being right that we forget to be compassionate. Can we be surprised then when we are ignored and discounted?

In this passage James gives us valuable advice on how we can be sure the wisdom we follow is heaven focussed. If you are going to be Christ-like, if you want to be holy just as He is holy, then you have to work at this kind of wisdom. You have to continually ask yourself the hard questions.

Am I pure in motives and actions?

Is my reason for doing things Godly or worldly?

Is my reason for what I do because I'd like to do it this way, or is it because this is the way Jesus would do it?

Am I looking for common ground?

When I need to speak, can I do so in the right manner?

Am I teachable or am I someone who always has to be right?

Is it obvious that I am a Christ follower without even opening my mouth?

How fair am I? Do I stand for justice?

Do I give everyone every opportunity regardless of who they are?

Do I really live all of this in daily life as well as in a church context?

James challenges us too about how merciful we are. We're often very happy to receive mercy but not so keen to dispense it. Sometimes the most merciful thing we can do is say nothing and walk away, praying that God will act in justice, for revenge belongs only to God. We should give mercy because we have been shown immense mercy. James reminds us that to really serve God we need to make ourselves humble before God. Only then will we be truly wise.

In today's reading from Mark, we are reminded of service and humility by Christ once more. He instructs us that if we want to be the greatest, we have to become the least. "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (9:35). We must even submit ourselves to serving the little children because by serving others we directly serve the Lord.

Service is an essential component of the Christian faith and Jesus made it clear that it was not optional. It is also clear in scripture that we cannot consider anyone lower than ourselves or undeserving of our service. When you serve, what are you contributing to any community you are part of so that the name of Jesus can be glorified through your actions? People will see God in your humble actions more than they ever will in flashy statements.

One of the vital ways Christians have been serving Jesus is by acting to care for and protect our environment. The destruction of the natural environment has

had a terrible effect on many creatures and communities around the world, as well as the unknown impact in the future. When we try to act as stewards of our earth, instead of its owners, we serve both our planet today and the generations to come, passing on the gift of creation that God gave us to our children and grandchildren. All Christians are people called to service, and no one else can do what God calls you to do for God. It is up to all of us to pass on wisdom to all the little children. Thanks be to God. Amen