

## Sermon – Taste Our Bread: Hospitality & Reconciliation (MCC at 100)

26 Jan 2020, 10:00am

Osler Mennonite Church

Contact: Patty Friesen

Theme: creation, abundance, food, hospitality & reconciliation, MCC 100 years

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Luke 24:13-35, 2 Cor 5:16-20

Read: Gen 1:1-5, 27-31; Lk24:13-17, 21-23; 2 Cor 5:16-20

Resources: MCC Centennial resources

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Good morning! Thank you for your warm welcome here this morning. I'm so glad to be with you as we celebrate MCC's 100 years, and I'm really looking forward to your storytelling in the hour following our worship time.



Like any 100 year old, MCC has been witness to so many world events and generational and technological changes, we've celebrated beautiful births and grieved tremendous losses, we've experienced some aches and pains, some regrets and mistakes, and we've had so many opportunities to share God's love and compassion in the name of Christ.



*Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation.*

Mission statement– a reminder of who we are/who we want to be - owned by you and other Anabaptist churches, supported by many more ...

If someone asks me what does MCC do? I could answer – what Osler Mennonite Church does ... we financially support partners in 53 countries to carry out activities like education projects and water security projects.



We invest in food aid and food security development projects with Canadian Foodgrains Bank, because we are people of the land, and the smell of healthy earth in our nostrils makes us want everyone in the world to be well fed.



We send our own people to be Service Workers and SALT participants to walk alongside church and community partners around the world, because we believe that together with people unlike ourselves we will learn how to build healthy and peaceable communities.



We collect school kits and relief kits and sew comforters with our hands, for people we may never meet, because we hold this crazy notion that if we pour our love into these physical gifts, the people who receive them will know in some small way that they are not forgotten, they are not alone, even when they are facing displacement and great uncertainty.



We resell, reuse, repurpose our clothes and Christmas trees and give all kinds of volunteer time to our Thrift Shops, because we have learned over the decades that these Shops become community spaces where we learn to know each other, and where dollar by dollar we transform tshirts and dresses and lamps and picnic blankets into funds for health clinics and trauma recovery workshops



and peace clubs



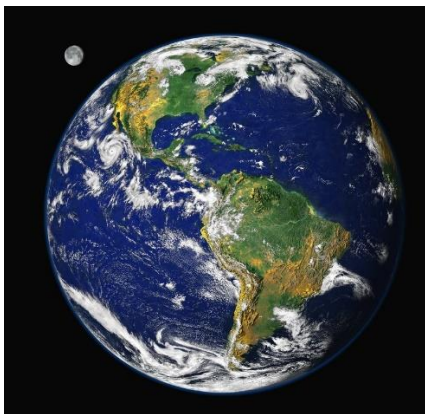
and home reconstruction after earthquakes. We put on fun festival events like the Relief Sale and cook thousands of vereniki and gallons of smaunfat because we enjoy working

together for a shared vision of a world where basic human needs are met and we can work together toward peace and justice. We support refugee families coming to Canada, walking alongside them as they enter our education and health and employment systems, listening to their stories and sharing our own, crying and laughing together as we recognize our common hopes and dreams.



What does MCC do? We do what Osler Mennonite Church people do, sharing God's love and compassion for all, in the name of Christ.

Why do we do these things? I'm going to offer three reasons this morning using three scriptures as starting points.



The first reason is our origin story. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth – the light and the darkness, the waters and the sky, the land and the plants, the sun and moon and stars and seasons, the birds and the fish, the animals and the humans. And God saw everything, and it was very good.

This story, at the very beginning of the bible, frames our understanding of the world and of God and of all the stories and invitations that follow. The world has a Creator. That Creator God is interested, not only in humans, but also in light, water, land, stars, trees, fruit, birds, cattle and fish. The created world bears the imprint and likeness and presence of the Creating God. The created world is interconnected. We all breathe the same air and drink the same water. The created world is God's world, and is good, is full of God's love and abundant goodness.

The creation story is one of the foundational stories that shapes our MCC ministry. We are moved to act by God's love, the Love that created the world, that continues to create in the world, the love present in people everywhere created in God's image.

There are incredible stories unfolding in our created world every day. Some of them are beautifully generous, reflecting the goodness of creation. Some are horrifyingly violent and ugly. And some stories last far too long, like the war in Syria which is now in its 8<sup>th</sup> year. Nearly 7 million people are displaced within the country and more than 4 million have left Syria as refugees. Next door in Lebanon, which has a population of 4 million, they are hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees. Imagine.

And in the midst of these stories, just like 100 years ago in South Russia



where people were starving, we are called to be the church. What does it mean to be the church in our world that is both created in goodness and also full of broken stories?



This is Rev. N, pastor of the National Presbyterian Church of Aleppo. When Aleppo was under siege, Christians and Muslims died defending each other's places of worship, Rev N says, "This shows how we are living together, and how we are suffering together . . . during the crisis people forgot their religion and remembered one thing: we are all human beings." The building of N's church was destroyed in the siege of 2012. Yet through the siege church members continued to worship and to reach out to the community around them. Today, N's congregation continues to distribute monthly cash allowances and shipments of blankets, hygiene kits and warm clothes from MCC coordinated by the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches.



This image is an example of a kind of Japanese artwork called kintsugi. It is the art of repairing broken pottery with gold. The mended piece is believed to be more beautiful, more valuable, and stronger, because it has been transformed through suffering. The damage is actually made more visible, by filling the cracks with gold. Something that has a history, has suffered damage, can become more beautiful. Sharp shards can become beautiful and treasured, if they are cared for.

In so many ways this speaks to the activities that we have been able to do together over the decades through the presence of MCC. Together we have been glinting gold. We, ourselves, are wounded people, broken in various ways, but also mended, healed and full of grace. Together we have seen glinting gold in others. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks about the least of these – the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the incarcerated ones, and invites us to see his face in their faces. And we have, again and again, seen beauty in pain. We've seen Jesus. We stand with the least of these because that is where we belong. The world may be broken but it is also our beautiful home, and God is here with us, love is here with us, loose in the world, flinging hope around.



Our second scripture this morning, the road to Emmaus, is from Luke 24 and is part of the Easter story. I know, it's too early in the church year for this, but just work with me.

I find this story fascinating. After the dramatic events in Jerusalem, which we now call the Easter story, Cleopas and his buddy are walking along the road, north and west, to Emmaus. And they were “talking with each other about all these things that had happened.” I’m so curious about what they were saying ... Something about a parade with a donkey? About a leader who washes other people’s feet? About women with unbelievable words? I really wish we could listen in on their conversation, but there are some interesting clues. When Jesus, whom they don’t recognize, joins them it says they were sad. Clearly they were struggling to understand, and they were talking things through trying to make sense of it all. But they were sad. They must have been thinking



that the Jesus story was over. And they weren't convinced that the story had ended well. Jesus joins the conversation, walks with them, shares stories, trying to help them understand.

Perhaps they were tired. Perhaps they were like us and more words weren't necessarily helpful for understanding. But then, a beautiful thing happens. They had convinced Jesus, who at the time they just knew as a fellow walker, to stay with them because it was getting dark and they obviously knew their Middle Eastern manners and wanted to be hospitable, to take care of this sojourner.



And when they settled in for a meal together, Jesus took the bread, made from the grains of this good earth, and blessed it and broke it and shared it around. This small action, after all those words, this small action ... picking up the bread, thanking God for it, and sharing it ... this, this was what brought understanding. The bread, blessed and shared, let them recognize Jesus, let them see Jesus.

Recently, a friend of mine was travelling in the Kurdish area of Iraq to visit her son and daughter-in-law who are serving with MCC there. And my friend, Ann, learned that the Kurdish greeting when someone comes to your house, translated into English, is, "Taste our bread." So if I was a Kurdish person living in Iraq and Patty came to visit, rather than saying "come in" or "welcome here," I would say, "Patty, taste our bread." This greeting is very striking to me. There seem to be so many rich layers of meaning in those simple three words. Taste, enjoy, savour. What is ours, we will share. Bread. The stuff of life, stuff of the earth. Nourishment. Taste our bread. Then we will see each other.

Think about times when you have learned to know someone better as you ate together.

Ann shared several stories with me, of women and men in Iraq who had shared their bread and their lives with her. Iraq is one of those places in the world, like Syria, that we sometimes consider too complex, too violent, too difficult to understand. But Ann experienced the presence of God there through bread blessed and shared, with now beautiful new friends, all of whom are created in the image of God.

I think, like Cleopas and his companion, we do still struggle to understand Easter. We are much more easily convinced about the stories of death and destruction around us than we are about resurrection ... that turns into hospitality and reconciliation.

The farmer philosopher Wendell Berry talks about “practicing resurrection.” I love that phrase. And that is I think what the gospel writer Matthew was listing in chapter 25, ways of practicing resurrection ... ways of living like Jesus in the midst of a broken world, ways of being shaped by the least of these ... feeding the hungry, giving fresh clean water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoner. Witnessing to God’s love for all the earth.



Fawzia is an ethnic Yazidi woman in Iraq. They are a religious minority who have been targeted by ISIS and have moved out of fear of their lives. Fawzia is a participant in an MCC-supported beekeeping project. She received five bee boxes 2 years ago and now has 16 bee boxes which provide her livelihood. And not only that, she has taken two displaced families (25 people in total) into her home. When asked why she was willing to

set aside so much of her home, her answer is simple. “Where would they go if I don’t accept them?” Sharing food and shelter with others created in the image of God on this good earth. Creating hospitable spaces to reconcile relationships.



Dr. R runs one of the community organizations that MCC supports serving Syrian refugees. R says the war has not left anything as it used to be; however, the food assistance that MCC is providing is allowing some people to stay in Syria. He said the food not only keeps them alive, it also gives them dignity, and it brings Christians and Muslims together, protecting each other. R shared the words of a Syrian Christian man who said that now people know he is a person of God because he has MCC resources to share with his Muslim neighbours. R asked for our prayers for the churches in Syria who are trying to maintain a Christian presence in this very difficult time. When we share our bread, others can share that bread among their neighbours, creating new communities, practicing hospitality and reconciliation, witnessing to God’s goodness in the world. When we share the resources of this created world, we see each other more clearly.



This is our scripture card at MCC for this year, from 2 Corinthians 5 which is our third scripture for this morning. The apostle Paul wrote these letters to the new Christians in Corinth, almost 2000 years ago. The group, interestingly enough, is made up of both

Jewish and Greek converts to Christianity, two communities that didn't logically interact. The Jews prided themselves on their religious group identity and the Greeks just naturally knew they were superior to everyone else. But all these folks had somehow become intrigued with the gospel of Jesus Christ which Paul says is calling them to reconciliation across divides.

Now today some Christians have put Paul into a pretty small box and insist on interpreting his words about reconciliation within an individual, spiritual realm, as though his concern is only for our eternal souls, and not for our everyday lives in our very real and complex world. But when we look at Paul's words within his own historical context, we can see how courageously Paul is challenging the political and social structures of his time. Paul has experienced the Spirit of God moving and making deep connections across differences. The ekklesiai, the church, is to be a witness to a "beloved community" which crosses and challenges lines of race, and class, and gender. Everyone is invited. Everyone can belong.



These words from Paul continue to be a really radical message today in our own divided up world. God's ways of loving and forgiving may seem foolish to our society, but when we enter the story through God's eyes, we recognize God's wisdom, and we're called into God's community. Boundaries and borders created by people crumble when the Spirit of God blows through our lives and our world. Our small lives are redeemed into a large, an expansive story of God's grace for all created in the image of God. Don't be afraid. It's God's world and God is making all of us new.



Refugee sponsorship and newcomer settlement create new communities with an amazing diversity of languages and cultures, as you know well. This photo is from our summer day camp called Raise the Peace, which is intended to give children opportunities to build peace skills together, across quite an array of differences, to build communities of hospitality & reconciliation.



As we look forward to MCC's second century of ministry, may we continue to build strong relationships beyond ourselves, creating hospitable, gentle spaces. And, like the children, it won't always be perfect, but it will always have the potential to witness to God's Spirit of amazing goodness and reconciliation.

This is God's world. And it is good. And in this good and broken world we are invited to offer our bread and accept the offer of others' bread. Let's follow the Holy Spirit into an array of relationships in this broken and beautiful world. Don't be afraid. This is God's world.