

SEEK AND PURSUE PEACE

During 1963, new neighbours moved in next door, which was really nice because they had kids around my age.

However, our new neighbours made my mother a bit uncomfortable.

Their last name was Tagahgki(sp); the children were born in Canada, but their parents were from Japan.

I didn't think anything about my mother's discomfort with them.

I just assumed "mothers" are always tense about something.

Nevertheless, my mother's burden became too much for her to contain; she had to share it.

She told us that during the war, she worked in a government office, in Vancouver, that oversaw the relocation of the Japanese to internment camps. Almost everyone living near the west coast, with a Japanese heritage, regardless of place of birth, was forced to leave everything they owned and live in those fenced in camps.

My mother was suffering from a lot of guilt for her part in processing the paperwork, yet at the time, she thought her job serving her country was a just and honorable duty.

Strange how it was deemed acceptable in the 1940's, but brought guilt in the 1960's.

I've talked with people who lived in the segregated Southern states.

Most, asserted that they treated their "coloured" neighbours well, and never ever questioned the "separate" conditions and standards.

Segregation was just the way things were.

A few admitted that they did not like the civil rights movement because it upset their culture / their apartheid. "Coloured" people were the majority, in many places, and it was believed they were not ready / that they couldn't handle having equal power.

I think the real excuse was that they—the fair skinned, ruling class, liked the way things were. They liked having the power and privileges.

And, closer to home: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has brought the horror of the residential schools to the fore front of social consciousness.

Today, our culture is hearing what was once silent crying. Silent because we did NOT listen / we did not ask questions / we just went along.

I suppose, there was a time when the residential schools made sense to the dominant culture, in part because they were sanctioned by the government.

It is strange how it was acceptable then?

I wonder why?and, where the questions / where was the compassion, and where was the devotion to justice?

And, what about now? What cries are we not hearing? What are we not seeing, and what questions are we not asking?

Rarely is the book of Numbers the focus text for the message. Nevertheless, our text today is a good one.

The passage is obviously declaring a new inheritance law. A man, apparently a widower, had died, and he did not have sons to carry on his name,..... **and** to inherit his property. In such as situation, according to the tradition and the laws, the man's brothers would get his land,..... leaving the daughters with nothing.

The man's five daughters petitioned Moses, the leaders and the entire congregation, asking that they be allowed to receive their father's land because the law and custom was not just.

Moses took their request straight to God, and it is important to note the power and authority in this new declaration. As the text states, "Yahweh, the Lord, told Moses that the daughters are right. The law must be changed, and it was.

From that point on, daughters were allowed to own and inherit property. This is a huge leap forward in the long journey toward equality. The old way / the old law was made null and void. Women had be given rights, including the right of participation in the nation and heritage. Land ownership gave them that right.

To be sure, it was still a patriarchal society, and if there were brothers, then they would get the land. Still, it was a step forward,..... and much more than that.

We are cogently taught, from this lesson, that justice—God's justice is not in what **was** the law / what **was** the rules, but rather evolves AND is determined by guiding principles, such as equality, fairness, compassion and desire to give life and not take it.

The Numbers text is not a new law for us to follow. It was a statement of divine justice nearly 3 thousand years ago. Things have changed. We have progressed since then, and that is critical to remember.

Back then, God nudged the Hebrews a step forward, and they had a long way to go, as do we, in many ways.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the service, peace is dynamic because it is about relationships / living relationships ... that constantly change. Doing / engaging in God's justice moves us in that progression to peace.

And, God's justice is not about following rules or being obedient to the old ways..... because situations change and people change.

God's justice is love based, with the constant passion to bring healing and wholeness to all of creation. That is what we call peace, and we could call it salvation.

Christ demonstrated God's justice. He was willing to break the rules and challenge those in power in order to help the weak and the hurting.

The way of Christ / the way of God's justice is not the dominant pattern in our society. The base guiding principles are different. The motivation and definition for justice is different in our secular culture.

Those outside of God's will / the secular world **live for money and use people.**
Those who strive to follow Christ / God's way **use money and live for people.**

Healing, restoration, love, grace and wholeness are not the driving force behind our country's norms and laws.

Order, stability and avoiding change is at the core of most our laws... because the rules are made by the powerful, and they want to keep the system tilted their way.

It is not surprising that we are taught that justice is obeying the rules, which includes rendering punishing judgements, that usually fall on the weak.

Moreover, we are conditioned to submit to laws and the customs of our culture, and for most of us, doing so is no big deal..... because we are part of the controlling / reigning group. We tend to benefit from the laws and customs; they are ours; the rules keep things the way they are.

And, when our guiding principles are to obey the laws, maintain the status quo, and to avoid the potential chaos of change, then:.....
daughters will not inherit their fathers land;

Good, God fearing women will contentedly work for their government sending innocent people to detention camps;

Churches will operate residential school and non aboriginals will approve with their silence, and....

Minorities, the weak and powerless will be exploited and abused, and well intentioned people will learn how to enable and do war.

Going along, being a good citizen, keeping silent usually is not doing God's justice. God's justice, more often than not, means asking probing questions, standing up for the weak and engaging in never ending change.

The title of this sermon is from the Psalm passage: Seek and pursue peace.

We have to seek peace because peace is not stationary and static.
Peace is not a trophy, and not simply the absence of violence and hostility. The conditions are changing. Life is moving forward and so is peace.

Peace is dynamic. It's alive because it is a condition for the living / for all of creation with God.

Therefore, we have to seek / look / find and discover peace each and every day.
Peace is a daily choice, just as love is.

Seek peace with love, with compassion, with good questions and with God's help.

And as we constantly seek peace, we must also be incessantly pursuing it with our actions and words.

God calls us to do justice: to live for peace, and this demands that we defend the weak and powerless, including our environment, and it means that we don't engage in unjust laws and practices that are counter to God's justice.

To be sure,..... pursuing peace is NOT the easy road to take.
Keeping a low profile / not questioning authority and the system is certainly a lot easier,..... in so many ways.

Most of us decided a long time ago that we like the Christian label and the Christian ideals, but we are **Not** really going to follow the way of Christ.

If we were to live that way / to truly do justice, then how would we respond to all the perks and benefits we receive by being in the dominating culture?

Those with money can get a better break in all sorts of ways, including with loans and investments, while the poor suffer.
Who's willing to tell the bank, NO, I refuse that advantage.

Many people want to pay less taxes,.....regardless if it means the reduction in social services for those who need it the most.

The affluent / those with power want the government to serve them and to keep the present system in place.

For example:

The "semi-paved" road to my place needs lots and lots of patching, NO, it needs to be re-paved so that I can smoothly cruise along it at 90 to 100 km/hour.

A Smooth road is important, after all.

Or,..... maybe the money to repair the road should go to providing affordable mass transit for those who can't buy a car.

Dare I add 5 minutes to my travel time,..... just so someone can get to work? Ouch.

And, if we were to examine all aspect of our culture and our laws, and ask probing questions, then I imagine we would truly be surprised, ...even appalled by what we discover,..... in our pursuit to peace.

I won't get into the issue of the national budget that was recently passed, but I will put out there the question: why is our government spending millions of dollars hyping up and promoting the War of 1812. I'd like to know the good and just reasons for doing that.

And,..... where are the questions / the protests the pursuit of justice?

This is Not partisan politics; I'm simply asking questions to bring things to the light.

Which brings up an important point: those with a passion for pursuing justice must be reminded of the nature of that journey.

Seeking and pursuing peace and justice arises from divine guiding principles of love, healing and grace. The journey is to wholeness: wholeness with God, creation and with everyone.

The secular domain / those not seeking God's will tend to divide / to separate, and therefore are moving away from wholeness.

Many believe their way is good and honourable, yet their methods and their path are counter to wholeness—peace and justice.

Away from wholeness asserts the notion that there are good guys and bad guys, a right way and a wrong way, and winners and losers.

The journey **away from** wholeness invites conquest and domination, and so we must remember not to join them on their journey.

Debating and defending the position of peace and justice usually creates more division, more anger,..... and is heading in the wrong direction.

Karen Armstrong in her book, "12 steps to a compassionate life", points out that all fundamentalist and neo-conservative movements are motivated by fear, and any sort of confrontation will only serve to enrage them,..... thus broadening the separation, and hurting the prospects of wholeness.

Careful, sensitive questions are good, yet debating, devaluing and accusations are all counter productive, even destructive.

We are not called to win. We are not called to prove that we are right and they are wrong, and we are not called to destroy the opposition.

We seek and pursue peace and justice, and we are on a long journey.

To be sure, many peace and justice people lament the concept of losing the battle,... and how the other side is winning.

That way of thinking is not based on the pursuit of wholeness.

Besides,.....we've come along way from merely allowing women to own property,..... and we have a long way to go,..... and we'll never get there..... because "there" is always changing and ahead of us.

As Jesus did, question authority, and even challenge unjust customs and rules, but always,... always invite people in, instead of causing more division.

Include the tax collectors, invite everyone to join in the pursuit of peace and justice. Assume the best in others, and nurture the good.

Doing Wholeness / peace is bringing people together. It's restoring brokenness. It's healing the environment, and..... it is walking humbly with God.

We don't own this journey or the destination. We merely serve God by seeking / pursuing the path of healing and wholeness.

A personal confession:

Too many times in the past, I've demonized my opponents, including political leaders, I've berated those who I thought were wrong, and I've argued that my perceptions were right,..... and my debating did nothing but cause more division.

My journey to justice and peace demands that I bury my arrogant sword that slashed away wholeness, and that I strive to bring healing by finding ways to invite people to join in the pursuit of peace and justice,. ... and they can join in where ever / whatever stage they are along that path.

Moreover, I need to embrace justice even if it hurts.....like hitting potholes on a broken road. Because peace includes everyone, and not just me.

I'm not there yet,..... so I must ask more questions,.....and ask God for advice, too, as Moses did.

And,..... I need help. I can't do this alone.

WE are not alone..... We are in this together.