

June 28, 09, (after announcement of Lloyd's resignation)

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION, Mark 5: 21- 43

- Life does not stay the same. It's been said that the only constant in life is change itself. We're sorry that Lloyd is leaving us. We would not choose this particular change. Lloyd has found a place in many hearts here. And we will grieve Lloyd's moving on.
- Life does not stay the same. Life moves on. With new possibilities. Always, always new possibilities. Life moves on.
- In the gospels we find Jesus, who is life itself, Jesus is always on the move. This morning's scripture opens with the words, "Jesus crossed again in the boat to the other side". Again and again, Jesus crosses over the water- leaves one shore, crosses over to another..
- The image of an expanse of water in scripture has a particular significance. It denotes dangerous forces, death, chaos, evil- those powers that can suck us under and destroy us. Jesus is portrayed as MASTER of those forces – he crosses over water frequently – sometimes by boat, sometimes on foot.
- Jesus is the one who crosses over from life to death and then again to life- and who brings life into every dead place.
- Let us consider those places where death and destruction prevail, in our lives and in the world, we listen for God's Word of life, crossing over to us, coming to us in the gospel of Mark 5: 21- 43

SERMON, "Will you bring Life?"

Garbage is piling up in the city, and in our back yards. As you walk along Dundas, there is a definite odour already. People are getting a little anxious. Some are even afraid to eat fresh food and so create more smelly stuff. We don't want the stench, the wild life it attracts, the health issues..We can't help creating SOME garbage, but we DO choose not to live WITH it!

Now there's another kind of garbage, and we may not be quite so particular about it- because it's hidden from sight. Spiritual garbage. We all create it, we all keep it, mouldering in the basements of our hearts- little bits and pieces that we've gathered over years:

Resentment, anger, bitterness, judgment. For some of us, it may little things that we've stored up- someone didn't keep his word, a phone call wasn't returned, and we've never forgiven them.

For some of us it's big, dark stuff that we're storing. Abuse we've suffered, deep harm that we carry with us every moment, that colours and affects our every response to others.

And, of course, tucked away inside of each of us are the utterly foolish, shameful things that WE have done- real harm that WE have inflicted, that can't be undone. Our judgments of

ourselves. Even small pin points of regret, the little “could have, should have, never did” stuff. It all has a bad odour when it’s stored for a while.

It’s no healthier to carry this stuff inside of us than it is to leave garbage rotting on the curb side. It attracts wildlife- that is, undesirable behaviour, and it has a way of choking the life out of us, and those around us. This is what judgment does to us and to others: it drains the life out of us.

In today’s scripture, we hear about a woman whose life was draining out of her, literally. She was not only drained by her physical condition that exhausted her, but also by the judgment and rejection of others- you see according to Levitical law , a woman with a flow of blood was ritually unclean.

She could not touch a man, or objects that he would touch, or he would become unclean too. So she was cut off from community, - a pariah, an outcast, shunned and alone.

She’d born this weight of shame and rejection for 12 years, the whole life time of the little girl in the story who lay dying, and who Jesus was on his way to heal. For a long time she’s been shunned and shamed.

When the world shames us, judges us, condemns us, our life drains out of us. We die. Not physically, but the beloved child of God in us, bursting with life and possibility – that person dies.

There is something thrilling about the structure of today’s reading, where one story is woven into and framed by another, so that each story interprets the other.

Through the dying 12 year daughter of the synagogue leader, we see that the woman is as good as dead, the part of her that is a daughter of God is dead, cut off as she is, by societal judgment.

Jesus comes to give her life, and to demonstrate to his followers and to us how to give life to others , not death.

The woman has dared to touch Jesus garment. Jesus feels the power flowing out of him. He says “who touched me?” The disciples are perplexed- Jesus is surrounded by people, everyone is touching him, what kind of question is this? And then the crowd gasps as the unclean woman falls at Jesus feet.

She is not supposed to touch a man, not even his clothing. I imagine that kind of ripple of anticipation that is common when someone is about to get the judgment they deserve.

And sure enough, Jesus gives her what she deserves: He calls her “Daughter,” the only person Jesus ever calls “daughter”- “beloved daughter of God,” he says, “your faith has made you well. Be healed”. Sweet words of grace. Life giving words of acceptance.

“Your faith has made you well”- faith is a gift of God, a sign of God’s spirit working in her- when the world has shunned and abandoned her, God has not- her faith is a sign of God’s presence with her, God’s love for her.

And God's presence and power working in her to give her faith, this presence and power has made her well. Sweet words of grace.

She is not garbage to be cast aside. She is a beloved daughter of God. It's for her that Jesus came- "I came not for those who are well, he says, but those who are sick". "I came not to condemn or to judge, but to bring life, to those whose life has drained away."

And he comes to teach us, his followers, how to BRING life to others. Elsewhere Jesus tells us that we have the power to bind and to loose.

We have the power to bind a person, to keep them small and stuck in their failures and wrongdoing, and we have the power to release them, to enable them to grow and to become everything they can be.

This week, I was sifting through the "garbage" in my house, preparing for a yard sale, and I found a book mark that I'd bought around the time when I first heard the call to ministry. I didn't know what the words meant when I bought it. I'm kind of slow that way. The words just resonated with me, beckoned me.

It says, "Belief in one another bids us live, lets us grow" (R). We all need someone to believe in us, to believe in the person under the garbage.

A youngster had not studied for an exam; and so he wrote his name on the paper and handed it in blank. When the paper was returned, he was surprised to see that the teacher had given him 14 %. So he asked her, "What did I get 14% for? "Neatness", she said.

When a person looks beyond our failure to see something of value in us or in what we do, that we don't even see ourselves, they give us life. The most life giving thing that we can do is to refrain from judging another. Refrain from dumping garbage on another. And to believe in their goodness.

Last week in Toronto a man was murdered. I knew Jim peripherally through the Dismas circle, the community of ex-offenders, that some people from this church are involved with.

I attended his Memorial service at a Mennonite church this week.

There were flowers at the service for Jim. And there were also flowers for Ed, the man who had killed him. Words were spoken honouring and loving them both. It was as if two men had died. Or, as Harry Nigh, the chaplain said in an e-mail, "maybe their lives were lost a long time ago".

Tom, who'd given a job to Jim and to many other ex-offenders, spoke about how as boys growing up both Jim and Ed had needed understanding, guidance, love, and instead they'd received abuse, reform school, foster care and ultimately the hell hole that is our prison system.

Buried under all the garbage that life had dealt them, there were two human beings. But society and the justice system only saw the garbage.

It took the Circles of Support around Jim and the Dismas community to SEE the human being and to love him. As one person said, it was that love and support that kept Jim alive at all.

Our prison system is populated with human beings buried under garbage, struggling with burdens too heavy for any one person to carry, burdens of abuse, rejection, shaming, lost in the addictions they've turned to, to dull the pain.

Sure, they have done some pretty dreadful, horrible things, and they have deeply harmed others. No question. The real question is "how does it end? How does the piling of garbage on one another STOP?"

When Harry Nigh met the man who had murdered his friend Jim, he says he didn't see a dangerous man; he saw another victim. A person to embrace and support, and to help emerge from under the garbage of his life.

We end the dumping of garbage on one another by ceasing to stand in judgement of another or of ourselves. Judgment is the work of the Holy Spirit, not us. It is only the Holy Spirit who can show a person their wrong without harming or hurting. Our job is to bring life.

To reach out our hands to those who are flattened by life, to reach out as Jesus does and to say, 'come to life, get up, get up'

Some of you here may have contributed to the Back Pack ministry- through Garry Glowacki of Bridge ministries, we give to men coming out of jail a backpack with personal items. It's hard to know which is scarier, to go to jail, or to come out of jail.

When a man comes out, he has nothing to start off with. So receiving a back pack with personal items is a real Godsend! This week I received some thank you notes from Garry. They're from young offenders. I just picked out a few:

Mark says, "I am writing this letter to express how much I appreciate the care package that was given me from you through Bridge. I lost all of my belongings at the time of my arrest in 2007. I was worried about what I would do to start off with, and you have made it a lot easier for me. Thank you very, very much. You're in my prayers. God bless you. Sincerely,

Tom writes, "Thank you for the care kit. I was very happy to receive these things. They will help me until I get back to work and am able to buy these things on my own. Thanx again,."

Dustin says, "I would like to say thank you for the kindness in your heart, to be able to help me get back on my feet, by donating some hygiene products. It is very much appreciated, and words can't express how much your thought means to me.

I hope that one day when my life gets back on track I can help someone like myself, because it would mean so much to me to be able to give back! Once again thank you very much, it meant a lot! Sincerely, Dustin R. Thanx!"

Our reaching out our hands through the Bridge ministry has given to these young men encouragement and hope that they may be received BACK into society, because SOMEONE out there believes in their goodness and is WILLING to forgive and to give them another chance.

I would ask you to please hold these young men in your prayers- It is so terribly hard to make a path straight after we've gone wrong –with the very best intentions, we cannot do it on our own.

Pray for supportive community. Pray for people to come into their lives who will give acceptance and guidance and encouragement. And most of all bring them into Jesus presence in your prayers. Just as the father in today's story came running to Jesus to draw his daughter back to life.

Pray for Jesus to come into their lives. Because Jesus is the one who crosses over from life to death and back to life, Jesus comes to us wherever we are , in deep, stuck, dark, hard places, Jesus comes and finds us.

When we cannot move to go and find him, He comes to where we are. Pray for Jesus to find these young men, because Jesus Christ is the power above all powers- his love is stronger than death, and to know him is to be called into life.

To God be all the praise the honour and the glory.
Amen.