

Thursday in the Nineteenth Week after Pentecost: October 15, 2020

Jesus walks in the hills and on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, teaching the 12 and those who journey with them. The Hebrew Ruler Herod is curious about how the crowds identify Jesus of Nazareth whose teachings, healings, and miracles stir up a great deal of discussion and debate on the streets, in the marketplaces, and in the synagogues. Most recently, 5000 people gather to listen to Jesus and to watch what he does. Jesus challenges the 12 to feed this crowd, taking five loaves of bread and two small fish, looking upward to the heavens in prayer, blessing these gifts of food, breaking the meager loaves into pieces, and giving these pieces of bread and the fish to the 12 to distribute to the crowd. After everyone had eaten their fill, twelve baskets of leftovers were gathered, astounding the 12 and others in the crowd.

Read Luke 9:18-27. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?

When Jesus leads the 12 away from the crowds and finds a quiet place, he asks his disciples to tell him their own conclusions from their own observations and discussions about what they are learning on their respective journeys of discovery. The first question asks their perspectives about how the crowds understand Jesus. Their answers engage their apocalyptic imaginations and sound the waters of public opinion.

The 12 identify a variety of apocalyptic possibilities demonstrated in the beliefs of crowd. Some say Jesus could be John the Baptist raised from the dead with his head re-attached, calling the Hebrew People to repent while there still is time to experience forgiveness and enter into a new Creation in which Creator and the Great Spirit reign. Some say Jesus is the prophet Elijah returned to this earth without his fiery chariot to challenge the religious and political leaders who worship other gods of their own making and put in place laws to further their own interests in the 9th century BCE. A drought made the land arid and burnt the crops of the fields for three years due to the idolatry and crimes committed by the religious and political leaders. After the murder of all of the faithful prophets among the Hebrew People, Elijah fled to save his own life and was fed by ravens sent by the Holy One of Israel in the wilderness. On foreign soil, Elijah found a young woman and her child who are not of the Hebrew People but practiced hospitality in spite of their extreme poverty and lack of food security. Elijah responded to her generosity and gave her directions to follow. The widow not only listened but followed these directions. As a result, her jar of oil and crock of flour miraculously never emptied. When the widow's son fell ill, Elijah miraculously restored him to life and health. Elijah spoke the words of the Holy One calling the King and the Hebrew People to worship only the Holy One who brought them out of slavery in Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, across the desolate wilderness, and into the Promised Land, not any other god. On Mount Carmel, Elijah challenged the host of 850 false prophets to prepare their bull for sacrifice on their altar. When the bull refused to cooperate, Elijah spoke to the bull and then the bull moved and offered himself for sacrifice. When the false prophets cried out in prayer all through the morning and then cut themselves so their own blood mingled with the blood of their sacrificial bull, nothing happened. When Elijah built his altar with 12 stones, prepared his bull for sacrifice, dug a trench around the altar, filled the trench with water, thoroughly drenched his sacrifice and the wood underneath, Elijah prayed a short prayer to the Holy One of the ancestors Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. Fire fell from the heavens, consuming Elijah's offering, the wood, the stones, the water in the trench, and earth around the sacrificial offering. Afterwards, the crowds gathered for this dramatic event killed the false prophets. A small cloud appeared in the sky, growing to bring rain to the earth. Others believed that Jesus was another prophet from the past who spoke the words of the Lord God Almighty, called the Hebrew People to turn from their evil ways and walk in a new direction, to draw close to Creator and the Great Spirit, and to prepare the way for the Messiah to come to bring an end to violence, injustice, and suffering.

In answering the question about who the 12 understand Jesus to be, Simon Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One sent by Creator and the Great Spirit to this earth. Jesus warns the 12 to keep silent and to tell no one about what Simon Peter had said. Jesus speaks plainly about what will happen to him. Jesus gives directions to the 12, saying, **"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily, and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will save it."** Luke 9:23, 24. In that generation, many of the crowd were making use of their apocalyptic imagination, wondering when time would come to an end and creation would be transformed into a new creation, in the twinkling of an eye or at the blast of a trumpet. When would violence come to an end? When would the perpetrators of violence or injustice be held to account? When will hatred cease? When will viruses, diseases, harmful bacteria, and a multitude of human afflictions be eradicated? When will hunger and malnourishment stop happening? When will safe, clean water be available to every human being and water-borne toxins stop contaminating much of the planet? When will this creation cease to moan and writhe in agony? When will death be put down so that sorrow will be no more? What will human beings do in these last days before time ends and a new creation comes into being? Jesus teaches a way to live with integrity in the face of oppression and not only be close to Creator and the Great Spirit but be true to what Creator and the Great Spirit intend for human being to be and do. Jesus concludes this teaching, saying, **"But truly, I tell you, there are many standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."** Luke 9:27. Jesus not only teaches human beings a way to live with integrity but shows us this way in his own journey to the cross and to a new life in a resurrected body in the new and eternal creation. Jesus assures the 12 that some of them will actually observe the end of time and the beginning of this new and eternal creation come into being.

Reread Luke 9:18-27. What is God saying to us in this gospel passage?

In this past week, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation shared the news of the 36 page judicial finding of Justice David M. Gibson of the Ontario Court of Justice. 6 members of Pikangikum First Nation argued that their right to equal benefit of the law under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as other Canadians had been violated since they were unable to serve their sentences in their home communities as their ancestors had done in their Indigenous way of addressing instances when other members of the community were harmed by the actions of a particular member or members of the community. The current criminal justice system sentenced these 6 members to journey to serve their time in the local correctional facility and to pay themselves for this journey from their fly-in community to the jail in Kenora. After listening to 8 hours of testimony, Justice David M. Gibson maintained that "the corrosive effects of colonization" inherent in administration of the criminal

justice system needed to be transformed so that a culturally relevant way for Indigenous Peoples could be put in place based on thousands of years of the practice of Indigenous laws in keeping the peace among members of their communities through the leadership of Elders, including Grandmothers. The current criminal justice system perpetuates the experiences of historical disruptions due to over harvesting animals on the land and fish in the waters, the systemic separation of children from their parents in forcing them to attend residential schools, causing the destruction of family structures and ancient oral traditions which strengthened these complex family and clan relationships, establishing dependency relationships on federal and provincial governments, fueling substance abuse, perpetuating violence, and contributing to the epidemic of youth suicides. The judicial finding was translated in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwa). Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler hopes that a complete transformation of the criminal justice system will begin with further consultation with Elders from Pikangikum First Nation and other Indigenous Peoples in remote parts of northern Ontario. In this way, Indigenous communities in northwestern Ontario will participate in the creation of a new way for trial courts to harmonize approaches to sentencing in the criminal justice system with an Indigenous understanding of justice. Chief Dean Owen from Pikangikum FN informed me that plans to construct Transition House in order to keep members of the community within Pikangikum who had received sentencing had been approved by the federal government but had not yet been constructed. Perhaps other living arrangements can be explored to rebuild healthy, strong relationships in Pikangikum.

Reread Luke 9:18-27. What is God asking us to be and do?

Seek examples of instances in which new ways of living together are being constructed bringing life and light into the world. Provide whatever support that you are able to offer so these efforts move our common life forward. Celebrate with those who experience new possibilities on their journey towards the end of oppression and the wonders of a new creation.