

Sermon August 20th, 2023

God shows us mercy!

Many of us have probably gone hiking or biking in the mountains at least once before. And if not, think about that time when the elevator was out of order, and you had to walk up a long flight of stairs to get to where you were going. Remember that feeling you get in your chest when your heart starts pumping hard and fast? Remember that burning sensation you feel in your lungs as you try to breathe in that thinner air? Remember that muscle fatigue you feel as you push your leg to take one more step? Remember that sheer exhaustion you feel, as you stop to take a breath?

When I reflect on my past experience with the mountains, with the stairs, I can't help but think about how similar it feels when we try to change how we do things. For example, trying to change the way we eat or trying to introduce exercise into our daily routine or trying to recover from an addiction or trying to walk away from an abusive relationship or trying to change the systems that keep harming the indigenous people of this land or trying to act in ways that will have less negative impact on the planet. It can be very hard to change the way we do things even when what we are doing is hurtful to the people around us, to God's creation, and/or to ourselves.

During the process of change, we feel our heart pumping hard and fast as we deal with the anxiety that comes with change. We feel the burning sensation in our lungs as we deal with the guilt that comes with knowing that we hurt someone, that we hurt God's creation, that we hurt ourselves. We feel the muscle fatigue and sheer exhaustion as we struggle to let go of that guilt.

It isn't easy to change our behaviours. Partly, because our guilt, when left to fester, can turn into shame. Unfortunately, shame can keep us locked into a perpetual cycle of repeating the same hurtful behaviours over and over again. We see this when we try to change our eating habits or try to start up an exercise program. We spend too much time looking in the mirror, body shaming ourselves. We spend too much time standing on that scale, getting angry with ourselves that we can't lose more weight. We eventually give up, which often leads to more weight gain, which then leads to more shame.

We see this with addictions, where people go through periods of recovery, but often find themselves returning to the substance they are addicted to, because of the shame they feel.

We see this with people who have been traumatized by abuse. They keep coming back to the relationship, because the person abusing them, has led them to believe it is their fault. Not the abusers.

We see this in our struggle to change those systems that keep harming the indigenous people of this land. Many of us want to change these systems, but we feel shame. Every time we hear someone's story of how they were/are hurt by this system. Every time we have to deal with their anger. Their frustration towards us for not doing more.

We see this in our struggle to change those behaviours that are hurting the planet. We feel shame, because we hear constant messaging that the job we work in is hurting the planet, or the materials we keep using are hurting the planet, or the vacation we go on is hurting the planet, or the truck we are driving is hurting the planet.

I invite you to take a moment with the people around you, and share something you have heard from someone where you felt shame.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, we hear that God is a merciful God who forgives us. Who frees us from this shame, because God knows what this shame does to us when it is allowed to fester. God wants us to be all God created us to be. To be loving people to one another. To be loving people to God's creation. And we can only do this when we believe that forgiveness is possible, that God is a gracious God who gives us room to fail. That God isn't there judging us every second of the day.

When we believe in this forgiveness then we can heal from this shame, and be freed to do the things we are invited to do. Like take care of the earth.

Take a moment again with your neighbour to share a time where you felt God free you from shame, and how this motivated you to act in loving ways towards God's creation.

Thank you for taking time to share.

God's mercy, God forgiveness that we hear about in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, is like that feeling we get when we reach the top of the mountain, and see the beauty all around us. We take a moment to catch our breath, and then look out on God's wonderful creation with awe. We feel like we have accomplished something. Like we can do anything.

When we believe in God's mercy. When we see that God lifts us from our shame. We believe that we can live out the life God has in store for us. A life where we give thanks for the body God has

given us. A life where we love ourselves as God loves us. A life where we show ourselves a little grace when we step on that scale. A life where we are not controlled by our addictions. A life where we no longer have to tolerate abuse. A life where we can be active participants in truth and reconciliation with the indigenous people of this land, helping change these harmful systems. A life where we can act in ways that help heal and redeem this planet.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we feel shame, heal us. When our behaviours hurt the people around us, God's creation, and/or ourselves, turn our hearts towards repentance. Forgive us. Make us new. Help us change. **Amen.**