

Numbers 11:24-30

Psalm 104

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

## Sermon May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### *The Holy Spirit Empowers Us to Be a Grace Filled Community*

The arrest, mistreatment, and death of Jesus has the disciples hiding out in fear from the Imperial guards, as well as, from their Judean neighbours. Unfortunately, this fear that they feel towards their Judean neighbours makes it harder for them to love their neighbours as Jesus loves them. Makes it harder for them to be a community that is hospitable and grace-filled.

What we see instead when the disciples are driven by fear is a community who keeps their doors shut (**Image One:** Locked Door). Preventing their neighbours from entering the community. What we see instead is a community that starts thinking, speaking, and acting in ways towards their Judean neighbours that is judgmental, negative, and at times, threatening.

The fear the disciples feel towards their Judean neighbours is stopping them from being the community Christ invites them to be (**Image One**). A community that is supposed to be hospitable and welcoming to others. A community that is supposed to genuinely listen to people. A community that tries to understand where people are coming from. A community that is supposed to be forgiving. A community that through this forgiveness, frees people from the shame they feel. A community that is supposed to reflect Christ's love in the world.

The fear the disciples feel towards their Judean neighbours is stopping them from being the community Christ invites them to be (**Image One**).

Likewise, when the fear we feel towards our neighbours drives our thoughts, words, and actions, we too, struggle to be the kind of community Christ invites us to be. For example, social media posts, television shows, movies, the news, charismatic speakers within the Christian faith have created a caricature of Muslims that has people thinking many of them are terrorists ready to harm us in some way. Has people thinking that the Muslims in our country want to take over the leadership in this country, and ruin our way of life. Unfortunately, these messages have led many of us in this country to be afraid of our Muslim neighbours (**Image One**). These fears have driven us to think, speak, and behave in ways that have been judgemental, negative, and at times, threatening. According to statistics Canada, recorded attacks against Muslims rose 71% from 2020 to 2021. Going from 84 incidents in 2020 to 144 incidents in 2021.

When our fear towards our neighbours drives our thoughts, words, and actions, we struggle to be the hospitable, grace-filled community Christ invites us to be (**Image One**).

Another example that comes to mind for me, is how many of the old western movies portray Indigenous people in a way that has led many of us to fear the Indigenous people of this land. How the way we have learned about our Canadian history has portrayed Indigenous people in a way that has led many of us to fear the Indigenous people of this land. How social media posts, the news, has portrayed Indigenous people in a way that has led many of us to fear the Indigenous people of this land. Unfortunately, our fears have driven us to think, speak, and behave in ways that are judgemental, negative, and at times threatening to the Indigenous people of this land. Unfortunately, our fears towards them make it harder for us to listen to their story (**Image One**). To hear and see where they are coming from. Especially when they share the pain they have endured from the systems that we have created out of these fears. Like the residential schools. A system the church played a big part in instituting and keeping going for over a century.

When fear drives our thoughts, words, and actions, we struggle to be the hospitable, grace-filled community Christ invites us to be (**Image One**).

Well, in our gospel, we see that Jesus has a response to us when our fears drive our thoughts, words, and actions. Jesus comes into our hearts, our minds, and extends words of peace to us. Not once, but twice. Jesus invites us to come to a place in our hearts, and in our minds, where our fears and anxieties are no longer driving us (**Image Two:** people from different faith communities coming together). “I am here” Jesus says. Look at my wounds. Death has not stopped us from being a hospitable, grace-filled community. Neither should fear.

When we get together with our Muslim friends like we did a few years ago, we find ourselves in a place where Christ’s peace can be experienced. When we take the time to get to know our Muslim neighbours as people, we start to see the commonalities we share. We start to see that the diversity between us isn’t something to fear, but something to help us learn and grow as community.

Getting to know the people we fear goes a long way to relieving these fears (**Image Two**). This is one way we can experience the peace the resurrected Christ has to offer us.

When I attended a national event in Saskatoon where residential school survivors shared their stories, the fear I felt toward the Indigenous people of this land dissipated. Instead of feeling afraid of their anger and frustration towards the systems that have harmed their people. I started to genuinely listen to where that anger and frustration was coming from. I started to understand their story more deeply. I started to see that

we have more in common with the Indigenous people of this land than I was led to believe. I started to see how the diversity between us is beautiful, and when embraced, helps us grow as a community. I started to feel compassion for them in response to everything they have had to endure.

Since this event I have met many indigenous leaders along my journey, and have to say, that with every relationship I enter into, I am more and more driven to be the hospitable, grace-filled person Christ invites me to be (**Image Two**).

Now. Yes. I know. Some of us have a story or two to share about having a bad experience with someone who is Muslim or indigenous that feeds the fear we are feeling towards our Muslim or indigenous neighbours. But how many bad experiences, bad relationships have we found ourselves in with people who are like us? The only difference is we know them as Bob, as Joe, as Jill. The only difference is that we are less likely to generalize these people, because they are like us.

In every race, every religion, every ethnicity, there are some people who are driven so much by their fear and anger that they act out in violent ways towards others. But this isn't anywhere near the majority of people.

Most people genuinely want to do good in the world. Most people don't want to be afraid of their neighbours. Most people long for the day they can feel Christ's gift of peace. Most people long for the day they can feel empowered by the commonalities they share with their neighbours to do good in their communities (**Image Two**).

As the gospel carries on, Jesus breathes on the disciples the Holy Spirit. This empowers the early believers to open their doors. To proclaim God's forgiving love to their Judean neighbours, as well as, their Gentile neighbours. To be the hospitable, grace-filled church Christ invites them to be (**Image Two**).

In our baptism, Jesus breathes on us the Holy Spirit. Empowering us to be the hospitable, grace-filled people Christ invites us to be. To not be driven by fear, but by the Holy Spirit. To be a community that is welcoming to our Muslim neighbours. Like when we invited them to celebrate an Iftar at our church a few years ago. To be a community that is welcoming to our Indigenous neighbours, like when a group of us got in a car to attend a church in Red Deer to take part in a blanket exercise there.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be the hospitable, grace-filled community Christ invites us to be (**Image Two**).

Let us pray, gracious God, when we fear our neighbours, come into our hearts, come into our community, and grant us your peace. Point us to the work of your Spirit within us. So, to open our hearts to be the hospitable, grace-filled community you invite us to be. **Amen.**