

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark 1:1-8

Sermon December 10th, 2023

The Peace within Us

In our gospel, the people coming to see John are people who are living in conflict with their neighbours, with their families, with their friends, as they have been kicked out of their communities, and sent out into the wilderness to live (**Image One:** people arguing). The wilderness representing a place where people are sent because they are seen as unclean, and because the community fears that they have the potential to make others unclean.

An unfortunate consequence of being treated in this way is being in conflict with themselves, as they deal with the shame that comes with being rejected (**Image One**). With being unwelcome in their community.

As well, they are in conflict with God, as their priest has labeled them unclean, thus separating them from the Holy presence. Not allowing them to enter the Temple gates. That is until a priest names them clean again.

So, they are living in conflict with God, with their community, with themselves, and this becomes a barrier in their capacity to love God and neighbour (**Image One**).

They are desperate for someone to come and free them from this conflict. They are desperate for someone to come and heal them from this conflict.

Well, like the people who are flooding to John, hoping for a messiah, a saviour to liberate them from the conflict they face. We know how difficult it can be for us to live out our lives loving God and neighbour when we are living in conflict with one another (**Image One**). With ourselves. With God.

This conflict becomes a barrier for us in our capacity to follow Jesus. In our capacity to love one another as Jesus loves us. In our capacity to reflect the grace and hospitality of Christ in our world. Instead, our hearts are filled with turmoil, anger, sadness, frustration, pain, doubt. We build metaphorical walls around our hearts to avoid getting hurt further. Therefore, keeping people out. Keeping people at a distance. This makes it a lot harder for us to welcome new people into our lives. This makes it a lot harder for us to trust.

Also, the shame we feel from living in perpetual conflict leaves us feeling unworthy (**Image One**). So, we avoid good people, because we think we don't deserve to have them in our lives. Or, we subconsciously say and do things that push these people away.

When we are in conflict with our neighbour, ourselves, God, we are unable to be all God created us to be (**Image One**). People who love God and neighbour. People who live in a perpetual state of peace and harmony.

Well, in our gospel, people flood to John the Baptist, because they are hoping John will be able to help them in dealing with this conflict. Or at least point them in the right direction.

In response, John offers them an opportunity to repent, to share their hurts, and receive forgiveness, receive healing through the waters of baptism (**Image Two**: people embracing each other with a hug). So, to, prepare their hearts to receive Jesus' invitation to love one another as Jesus loves them. To live out the grace and hospitality of Christ in the world.

When we repent when we hurt someone. When we forgive someone who repents for hurting us. When we have an opportunity to share our hurts, and feel listened to. Then healing is possible. Then we can let go of that shame, that anger, that stops us from loving one another. Then we can let go of the behaviours that arise from this shame, this anger, that cause conflict with our neighbours, with ourselves, with God. Then we can be all God created us to be (**Image Two**).

Likewise, when as a community, we repent, for creating systems that hurt people. Or when we forgive a community who repents for creating these systems that hurt us. When we are given the space to share our hurts, and feel listened to. Then we can let go of the systems that have caused us so much hurt, anger, and shame. We can finally heal from the conflict that has arisen from these systems (**Image Two**).

Like the crowds that flock to John, John offers us a chance to repent and receive forgiveness. And then passes the baton on to Jesus who will invite us to follow him. To love one another as Jesus loves us. To treat one another with grace and hospitality.

Through repentance and forgiveness, through the love Jesus offers us, through the community/person who genuinely listens to our hurts, we experience healing and growth from our conflict (**Image Two**). We experience peace in our hearts, with our neighbours, with God. And when we are at peace within ourselves, with our neighbours, and with God, we are more capable to trust. To hear Jesus' invitation to love one another as Jesus loves us. To love one another with grace and hospitality.

Let us pray, loving God, when we are caught up in conflict, call us back to the baptismal font where we are reminded of your invitation to repentance and forgiveness. Where we have hurt others open our ears to genuinely listen to their hurts. Where we have been hurt open the ears of others to genuinely listen to our hurts. Help us seek out the peace we need to hear your voice. Empower us through this voice to love one another as you love us. Living out your grace and hospitality in the world. **Amen.**