

United Church in the Valley: May 5, 2019
Student Minister: Matthew Heesing
Making Space for the Sharing
Pt. I: "...through Peace"

Scripture Reading:

John 20:19-22:

The evening after Easter,
the disciples of Jesus were gathered together behind locked doors.
They were hiding in a barricaded room,
because they were afraid.

Then Jesus appeared and stood among them, saying
"Peace be with you!"

After he said this,
the disciples were overjoyed!

Jesus said to them again,
"Peace be with you!....
Just as God sent me,
so I send you:
...go to the world!"

Sermon on following page.

Sermon:

All the way back on Christmas Eve
we began a sermon series called *Making Space*.

And all the way back on Christmas Eve,
we heard how, in the Christmas story, the character of Mary
made space for the spiritual,
and in January, we made space for the spiritual too—
through wonder,
through worship,
through weekly practice,
and through work of justice.

But also back on Christmas Eve,
we also heard a story of how the animals
made space for the strangers at the manger,
and in February, we made space for the stranger, as well—
not only through sermons on the subject,
but also by welcoming special guests
like Rev. Paul Douglas Walfall
and various First Nations facilitators
for the KAIROS Blanket Exercise.

Furthermore, just as the character of *Joseph*
made space for the *struggle* in the Christmas story,
the struggle of wrestling with difficult realities,
we too, through the season of Lent,
made space for the struggle in our lives—
including the struggle of interruptions,
of anger, of living with less,
the struggle of grace, new directions,
the cross, and resurrection.

And this morning, we've arrived at the fourth and
final segment of this *Making Space* series:
making space...for the sharing.
For just as the shepherds on Christmas Eve
embraced an invitation from the angels
to go and share the good news of great joy,
we too, have been given an invitation from God,
from the risen Jesus whom we also call the Christ,
to go to the world and proclaim the Gospel,
the story of new life that we have found and received.

In other words,
the next five weeks are all about
evangelism.

That's right—the “e” word,
almost a curse word in the United Church of Canada:
evangelism.

Be honest: who here just became a little bit uneasy?

It's understandable—evangelism isn't a word we use very often.
We avoid it and ignore it
for the notion makes us nervous;
when someone starts speaking about “evangelism,”
we back up slowly,
we feel self-conscious and uncomfortable,
perhaps because we've seen it done so poorly in the past,
or perhaps we have encountered others
who were quick to confuse evangelism with conversion,
or perhaps the idea of evangelism makes us uncomfortable
because we don't even
have a place to start
when it comes to sharing from our heart,
the incredible light and life of Christ
that we have experienced
and feel compelled to follow,
the Way of JESUS that we participate in gladly.
Sadly, we are so often scared of evangelism—
of making space for the sharing...of our faith with the world.

But as the angels said to the shepherds,
out in the field that fateful night of Christmas Eve:
“Fear not”—
for over the next five weeks,
we are going to lay a groundwork, a foundation
for a healthy and positive approach to evangelism,
a way of making space in our
hearts, minds, and hands
for how *we* ourselves might share the Good News
that we have received,
and that we have believed,
and that we have been called
to continue passing on.

And it all begins with peace.
*The evening after Easter, the disciples of Jesus
were gathered together behind locked doors.
They were hiding in a barricaded room,
because they were afraid.
Then Jesus appeared and stood among them, saying
“Peace be with you!”*

...*And Jesus said to them again,
 "Peace be with you!
 Just as God sent me, so I send you:
 go to the world!"*

Much like the story of the shepherds
 to whom the chorus of angels sing
 "Peace on earth and to all people,"
 Making Space for the Sharing
 starts with peace—
 the peace that we are given,
 before we even step out to respond.

After Easter, the disciples were afraid.
 They were absolutely preoccupied and anxious
 precisely because of two distinct worries:
 they were worried about being too much.
 But they were also worried about being too little.

For one the one hand,
 for right outside their barricaded walls
 was the world that had recently crucified Jesus.
 The world that had punished *Jesus* for being too much,
 too intrusive, too challenging of the status quo,
 too public with his beliefs and positions,
 too passionate about issues of social justice,
 too critical of the current power structures,
 too imaginative of other possibilities and ways to be,
 and as a result, the disciples are worried
 that the world outside their walls will see them the same way.
 In fact, one reading actually says
 that they were hiding out fear of the *authorities*—
 those in the world that viewed their ministry,
 their voices, their beliefs
 as far too much to handle.
 The disciples are worried of being overbearing,
 of scaring off, of being too much.

And yet, at the very same time,
 the disciples are also worried about being too little.
 For they know that they abandoned Jesus,
 they know that they fell asleep in the garden while he prayed,
 they ran away, and they betrayed him in the midst of his trials.
 The disciples are painfully aware
 that they have failed and fallen short.

In their minds, *they were not enough* in the past—
and therefore, aren't enough for the future.
They are worried about being too little, too unqualified, or incompetent,
for the way that they've been called to live.

It seems to me
that when we are wracked with those very same worries—
when we are worried about either being too much
or about being too little, not enough—
evangelism can be tough to practice.
If we presume and anticipate a hostile response,
a rejection
objections from those around us,
of who we are and what we believe,
or if we perceive ourselves
as insufficient, inadequate or lacking in some way,
when it comes to the call today to spread the Good News
we will find it difficult to respond.

When we are in a place
of feeling like we are too much or too little,
evangelism can feel impossible to face and embrace,
it's hard to thus make space for the sharing.

But Jesus appeared and stood among them, saying
“Peace be with you!”
And Jesus said to them again,
“Peace be with you!
Just as God sent me, so I send you:
go to the world!”

I think it's safe to say
that in one way or another
most of us don't make a lot of space for the sharing of our faith,
for we too, in large extent, are afraid like the disciples—
worried about either being too much,
and—or—worried about being too little.
Maybe we worry what our friends will think
if we start talking about the sermon from last Sunday,
or we worry about being rejected
from certain individuals in our social circle
if we invite them to join us in worship,
or we worry about making the conversation awkward
at the supper table with our family—
I know that I occasionally worry about being too much—
how about you?

Or maybe we worry about what to say,
 or even if we have anything to say at all,
 or how we might respond
 when more vocal, confident individuals,
 Christian or otherwise,
 criticize our own positions on different issues,
 or try to somehow correct our thinking,
 and all the time our heart is sinking
 because we feel like we don't have the right answer—
*I know that I occasionally worry about being too little—
 how about you?*

It's in those moments, that I try to remember
 the words of Jesus to his disciples
 "Peace be with you!" "Peace be with you!
 Just as God sent me, so I send you:
 go to the world!"

Peace be with you, Jesus says—
 and this preliminary gift of peace,
 is such an important first step
 in making space for the sharing of our faith.

For without that peace, I think two things can happen:
 either we stay put, completely paralyzed, like the disciples in that room,
 our fearful sense of being too much,
 freezing us and shutting us up completely;
 or because we worry that we are too little,
 we go out feeling like we have something to prove,
 and our sense of inadequacy comes across as assertiveness,
 a need to absolutely convince, propagate and pressure others—
 but what if we started from a place of peace?
 What if our sharing of faith came from a space
 where we knew that we were not too much,
 and we knew that we were not too little,
 but to view ourselves as Jesus does—simply enough, as we are?
 If *that* was our feeling, well, our worry would decrease—
 and we might have the courage to leave our rooms with peace,
 and maybe even *come* in peace to others, as well.

Brother Roger of Taizé once said,
 "The peace of your heart
 makes life beautiful for those around you.
 Being wracked with worry has never been a way of living the Gospel."
 And it's never been an effective way
 of *sharing* the Gospel either.

Making Space for the Sharing
starts with a gift of peace from Jesus:
a gift of peace that says
we are enough,
a gift of peace
in which our worries and insecurities can cease,
a gift of peace that helps us to prepare
to leave our rooms and go to share
the good news of great joy
the Gospel story of life
for all people.

And as for how and what to say?
Well, that's the subject for another day.
For now, we simply start with peace.

So people of God,
may the peace of Christ be with you—
(and also with you.)

Thanks be to God.