



## **The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost**

Sunday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### **The Primate of Canada, Archbishop Linda Nicholls**

Sermon Transcript

May the words of my lips, and the thoughts of our hearts, be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

First, let me say its a joy to be with you here at St. Mark's in Orangeville. One of the curiosities of the pandemic is that it has allowed me to be present with congregations across the country that I might not have had an occasion to visit for some time. Either by video from my living room, or in this case, being able to be physically present with your clergy here at St. Mark's itself. Blessings and greetings.

There is a popular story, often attributed to Indigenous teachings, possibly Cherokee. It is a story about a young man and grandfather in conversation. And the young man says something like "I feel like there are two wolves fighting withinside of me. One that is drawing me to do what is wrong, and one that draws me to do what is right. Which one will win?" And the grandfather sits for a moment, and then looks up and says, "The one you feed".

I think that quite well sums up the life in Christ that is described by St. Paul in our reading from Romans 8. Continuing the readings from the

last few weeks and on into the next, in which St. Paul talks about the life in the spirit, and life in the flesh. In last week's reading, St. Paul cried out "What I do not want to do I do, and what I want to do I do not". There is this tension within. And its not a tension that says that the flesh or being human or being imbodyed is bad, for we are incarnational beings. We are beings given life made in the image of God; and called to live out that life in this material world, with the gift and the help of the Spirit.

And so Paul can say at the beginning of our reading today, "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus". We are called to live out that life in the Spirit here and now. And that is a daily challenge. It is a challenge to see the world as God sees it - moment by moment, day by day - and respond to the world, to all of creation, to the people around us, to our own heart, desires, and needs, through that way of living, and not another. It is to continually feed the wolf of love, grace, compassion, forgiveness. And to remember that sometimes, unconsciously and consciously, we feed the other one. Or it is fed by all that is around us, for we live in communities and families and societies that feed selfishness, prejudice, fear, hatred – and we do not need to look far for that.

I have been quite flabbergasted and dismayed when I hear people say "I don't have to wear mask. Why should I have to wear a mask? It is my right and my freedom not to wear a mask!" Or when we see the pressures of communities and history that have led to acts of violence and racism. I know that I have been on a steep learning curve, about attitudes and assumptions, that I have drunk in deeply in my lifetime. Certainly as I have begun to learn more about working with indigenous communities and peoples, and understanding our history in Canada. Why do I always assume that the North American emphasis on efficiency and expediency is best? And that storytelling is a waste of

time? Of course, we have seen it, all around us – just a day or so ago, our province of Ontario has announced that they will stop streaming students between vocational and academic streams in high school. Because for some reason, black and brown students populate the vocational schools at a much higher rate – which has no connection to their capacity or ability.

We live in the midst of pressures and attitudes and social ideas and assumptions that are constantly changing and shifting. We have been shaped by history and events. I know that my parents were shaped deeply by growing up during the depression – and I still wash plastic bags. I know that those who lived through the Iraq and Afghanistan wars carry deep scares and pain and prejudices. Those that lived through 9/11 live with the fear of terrorism. And of course, now we all share the experience of Covid-19. We have been shaped by family, by the attitudes of our parents, by their strengths and weaknesses. If you grew up in a violent or alcoholic home, you carry the scares of that in your own life. Or if you lived in a home that was filled with love and compassion and grace, if you lived in home that focused on athletics, if you lived in a home that focused on music – those things have shaped and formed you. Like potter's clay, we have been shaped. And as we mature, we have to ask ourselves whether those commitments are consistent and good, to ask whether those things that have shaped us are feeding the right wolf within us.

Jesus spent three years forming and shaping the disciples, helping them to see their faith and their world through the lens of love informing law, and to stop feeding the assumption that they were not good enough, that sin broke the law and then they were done. And start feeding them from the perspective of that forgiveness. And three years was hardly enough – even at the end they did not yet see clearly. They were shocked when Jesus spoke to women, they misunderstood his actions,

they tried to interpret him within the framework of their expectations of a messiah who would free them from Roman occupation, not free them internally and in their relationship with God. And even at the end, in Gethsemane, they tried violence as the way forward. They needed the Spirit to shape their thoughts and hearts, as after the Resurrection they needed help in remembering what Jesus had said and taught.

To live in Christ, as St. Paul so clearly calls us to, is to feed the wolf of God. And how do we do that? We do that through all of the ways articulated in our baptismal covenant. To read the scriptures, to be fed by the body and blood of Christ, to pray, to practice repentance, and the forgiveness of ourselves and others, to love neighbor as self, to love for the dignity of every human being, to seek justice and peace, and to care for creation. It is through those practices that we feed the heart and soul so that it is shaped and formed for God's kingdom. And so we are called to be open, to seeing and hearing afresh, and I know how difficult that can be.

Last year, during the Primatial election, I heard a rumor that I was being accused of being racist. And everything in me cried, "No!". And I tried to find out what I had said, or done, that had led to that accusation. And in the end I came to realise that it wasn't any particular thing I had said or done. I needed to see my relationships differently. To see how assumptions I had made were shaped by colonialism, and not renewed under God. That my resistance to some changes, or some different ways of doing things, needed to be questioned. And to recognize that I have benefited from the embedded racism in our Canadian society, as a white settler, and that unless I stand firmly against them, I participate and support them, even unconsciously, even silently. And so it spurred me to make dismantling racism a priority for our church, for our council of General Synod. We have begun that work at every one of our meetings, and will continue it through, not only this triennium but

through every triennium, because this is work that will take us generations. To ask ourselves what barriers and attitudes keep us from enjoying the fullness of the gifts of all God's people, Indigenous, Black, Asian – all made in the image of God – so why do we privilege those who are North American or European, first? So I am grateful with St. Paul that the spirit of God in Christ is within us, is guaranteed to us, so that every day there is the possibility of listening afresh.

We heard also the Parable of the Sewer and the Seed. It is a wonderful parable that you can come back to over and over again, because you can ask yourself, "Are we the soil? Is it the receptiveness of the soil that gives the seed its fruitfulness? What is it in us that we need to do to make the soil in us ready to hear the word? To recognize it? And not allow it to be stolen or rejected for others?" "Are we the gardener? Making sure that we daily practice those things that will nurture in us the capacity for the seed to grow? To water and feed the right wolf?" Or, "Are we the sewer? Being called to indiscriminately and generously share the love of Christ to those who receive it well, and those who reject it, and those who do not want it, and those who we think don't want it, but may well receive it? To be generous in simply scattering it everywhere. So that there is the possibility that the fruitfulness will come."

There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. To everyone that is called, that we have the freedom to be transformed. For when we are wrong, when we sin, when we break relationships, when we give in to the other wolf, when we feed it far too much, we always have the opportunity to repent and return to the Lord. To not be condemned. And our baptismal life is a lifelong journey of shaping ourselves even more richly into the image of Christ in this world.

In a few weeks we will hear my favourite verse of scripture, which is at the end of Romans chapter 8. “I am sure, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor plight nor depth, will be able to separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus”. With that promise, that grantee that nothing can separate us, and with the call to feed the wolf within us with love, compassion, mercy and grace, and then feed the world – it is a promise that can and will be fore filled, thirty, sixty, a hundred fold.

Thanks be to God. Amen.