

Sermon Bytes: The Kingdom of the Strangely Blest

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We are the salmon people

We recognize the way the salmon run inland from the sea, and return to the sea. We respect the cycle and we celebrate it in our lives. We centre our rituals, our art and our festivals around it.

We are the salmon people.

That is how Alberta Billie, from the First Nations community of Cape Mudge, British Columbia began her address to the 1986 meeting of The United Churches General Council. Her statement is one that all communities, and indeed all churches could look to when they are trying to figure out who they are and what they are being called to do on behalf of the Kingdom of God in the place they call home.

Think about it for a moment. How what we focus on becomes our reality if we see strangers as threats and believe that only the strong survive, and that you have to look out for number one all the time? That kind of focus has the effect of narrowing the experience of our lives and we become small and defensive about everything.

“Let’s build the walls around what we have, and at least keep that going”. But such thoughts while seemingly rational, make our world smaller and smaller.

If on the other hand we welcome newcomers, not just for how they help us to continue being who we are, but for who they are - and the passions and the possibilities they bring to the table - our vision and our world and our life tends to expand.

On Tuesday nights we have an International Youth Group that meets at the church. They spend a lot of time socializing and playing, but some also get help with homework and others get introductions to a variety of community services and some of the kids themselves and some of the parents take turns cooking supper.

So one night they had a turkey dinner, and the week before one of the parents had made home-made tortillas. And the week before that falafel, as the kids open themselves to new foods and tastes. The kids have a whole new appreciation of one another, simply in the sharing of food and the preparation and the clean-up.

A world which had gotten to the size of a refugee camp in Lebanon, of Syria or Africa, where they had only their one staple food is expanded by the simple act of breaking bread together. Their world expands but their own stature grows as they share of their world too.

In Matthews Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount takes place early in the story. And the first part of that are the beatitudes, where over and over Jesus poses a series of seeming riddles:

Matthew 5:3-12 The Message (MSG)

3 “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God.

4 “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you truly embrace God.

5 “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

6 “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. God is the best meal you’ll ever eat.

7 “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

8 “You’re blessed when you get your inside world —your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

11-12 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. “

Seven times you are blessed. Now I don’t know about you, but that seems like some of the strangest way of being blessed. And then Jesus continues, and at the end of that he litany he adds this strange analogy of the purpose of their community of The Strangely Blessed:

You are the salt of the earth. But beware that salt that does not spread itself around. Becomes hard and drab and bland, so if you lose your saltiness, how will people experience the kingdom of the blessed? Or to put it another way, you are the light of the earth. Light is not about black and white. Light is how we experience all shades of grey as well. But more importantly it allows us to experience colour.

This is not a secret. Spread the story - bring the light. But don’t wait until you are perfect. Share your blessings - your God zest-ness, if you will: your blessedness, your light, your hallowedness and your haloed-ness. For the kingdom of the blessed is not when we have it all figured out. It is when we are struggling. When we find God – not in the midst of our success, but right there in the midst of our struggle. For we are the of the kingdom of The Strangely Blest.

When we share our struggles, we then begin to realize that it we figure out this faith thing. Not in great big swatches of surety, but rather in hints of flavour of spice. Not in the brightness of the mid-day sun, but in the darkness of the night – when a little glimpse of light, a little glimpse of God, is enough to show us the way. And when we do so our understanding of God widens and deepens, within and without. Our faith is not just for the shadows and the problems but rather our faith is for the everyday

possibilities, with just a dash of God flavouring to make our lives zesty and full of potential and just a hint of God-light is enough to show us the way home.

We are the people of salt. We are called by God to bring flavours of the kingdom into a world in great need of the zest of hope and grace.

We are the people of the light. We are called by God to bring hints of light and colour into a world with too often shuts out the light of the other

We are the people of the Kingdom of The Strangely Blest, sharing our experience of God's love with all that we meet.