

February 11, 2018 – Light for the Journey

Mark 9:2-9

For the last three Sundays we have been reflecting on Jesus' actions at the very beginning of his ministry: calling his first disciples from their boats in the Sea of Galilee, removing the unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue, healing Simon's mother-in-law and then travelling throughout Galilee performing miracles and preaching the good news.

Well, today we are jumping to a time much later in his ministry. Things are starting to get difficult for Jesus and his followers: Jesus' cousin John has been murdered by one of King Herod's bodyguards, the Pharisees are questioning Jesus and trying to prove that he is breaking their Jewish laws, and Jesus has told his disciples that he will be rejected by the religious leaders, that he will suffer greatly and will eventually be put to death. These are dark days for the Jesus and his disciples.

We all have dark days, days when we are feeling the pain of loss, the fear and uncertainty of illness, the anger that comes with injustice, the stress of financial burdens, the disappointment of goals not met. None of our lives are exempt from darkness. It is impossible to live and not feel the pain of grief, sadness, fear, anger, stress, and disappointment. Many people in this world, like Jesus, fear for their very lives because of where they were born, what they believe, or what they say. Darkness is a part of our lives.

In the past couple of days our news has been filled with two major stories: the opening of the Olympic Games in South Korea and the not guilty verdict in the trial of Gerald Stanley. Both of these stories have highlighted areas of darkness in our world and in our country. The Olympic Games are being held just 40 miles from the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. North Korea is, of course, a reclusive nation that has been heavily criticized for human rights violations and for the development of nuclear weapons. There has been great fear over the past few weeks and months of a nuclear war breaking out between this country and The United States of America.

The other story is much closer to home. At 7:35 p.m. on Friday evening a not guilty verdict was announced and the courtroom in Battleford, Saskatchewan erupted with cries of pain and disbelief. Since August 9th, 2016, the day that Colten Boushie died, racial tension has been high in this province and in this country and, as yesterday's demonstrations have shown, it is now even higher. An article on the Star Phoenix website quoted Chris Murphy, a lawyer representing the Boushie family, saying:

“We will be going to Parliament Hill this month to describe the systemic injustices that this case has revealed. But for now, I ask that you trust that Colten's family has legitimate reasons for these deeply held beliefs. There is a darkness that exists in this country and I believe we are going to have to feel our way out of it.” <http://thestarphoenix.com/news/local-news/gerald-stanley-trial-jury-delivers-not-guilty-verdict-in-murder-of-colten-boushie>

No matter what you believe about this case, it is certainly true that it has polarized our province and our country.

So where do we find hope in the midst of darkness? What do we do when the pain is overwhelming? Here's what Jesus did. Six days after announcing his upcoming death, "Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain to where they could be alone. And there Jesus was transfigured before their eyes; the clothes Jesus wore became dazzlingly white – whiter than any earthly bleach could make them."

In their time of great fear and uncertainty, the disciples were allowed to glimpse the incredible light that existed within Jesus. A light that was whiter and brighter than any they had ever witnessed before. This was, of course, the sacred light, the light of the Holy Spirit, the light of love, and justice, mercy and compassion. It was a light and a power that Jesus had been using for healing and for preaching, but this was first time that the disciples were able to truly see it.

In times of darkness, light comes to us in many forms. Sometimes it is warm and soft like the glow of incandescent bulb. It may come in the form of a hug from a friend or a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes the light is flaming hot like a fire – a situation that forces us to move and try something new because where we are sitting isn't comfortable anymore. Sometimes the light is clear and direct, like the beam of a flashlight – a cure for an illness or a new job when the old one ends.

Sometimes the light is held high in the air like the flame of an Olympic torch. As I watched the opening ceremony of the Olympic games on Friday, I heard the hope for peace in the speeches and in the words of John Lennon's "Imagine" and I watched as two young Korean hockey players, one from the North and one

from the South, together, carried the Olympic torch to the top of the stairs. Is it possible that these games could be the beginning of a new, harmonious relationship between these two countries? Is it possible that the dream of peace could spread from the Olympic cauldron in Pyeongchang (Pee-yon-chong) to the world? Is it possible?

Sometimes the light is small like a flickering candle – an idea or a seed of hope that can help us find our way in the dark. As Colten Boushie’s lawyer said, “There is a darkness that exists in this country and I believe we are going to have to feel our way out of it.” It’s fascinating that this verdict happened just one day after Bill C-262 passed second reading in our House of Commons. This bill is an act to ensure that Canada’s laws are in harmony with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It’s the classic one step forward, one step back. For this particular issue, we are not going to have the help of a flaming torch, the direct beam of a flashlight or the constant soft glow of a lightbulb. The light will be small and flickering, and it will come from people like you and me. It is up to us to find the light within ourselves and to allow it to flicker as brightly as it possibly can. It is up to us to struggle to understand the plight of our First Nations people and to work towards justice and healing.

Jesus allowed the disciples to see the light within him and we are called to let our light shine as well. Within each of us is the light of hope and understanding. Within each of us is the light of peace and justice. Within each of us is the light of sacred love. May we light the way for each other in this journey we call life.