

## **Sermon September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

### *Our Companionship with Creation*

#### **Last week,**

we talked about how our words...

and actions...

not only have an impact...

on our human relationships,

but also,

they have an impact...

on our relationship with the non-human creation.

A prominent theme we hear throughout the Bible.

#### **This week,**

when listening to Isaiah's prophecy...

we see another prominent theme...

that is expressed throughout the Bible,

and that is,

when God promises to restore God's people,

God also promises to restore all of creation.

**We see this theme reflected in Isaiah this morning,**

when God promises...

that the day will come soon...

when the Israelites...

will be able to return...

to their homeland...

from Babylonian exile.

And with this return,

God promises to restore the land,

as well as the streams and rivers.

**In hearing Isaiah's prophecy,**

in hearing this theme expressed...  
throughout the biblical narrative,  
I believe that God envisions a world...  
where God's whole creation...  
is invited to work together...  
to create this harmonious,  
peaceful,  
safe environment,  
for every species to live.

**Since the ELCIC came out with a statement...**

encouraging us to take part...  
in the Truth and Reconciliation conversations...  
and actions...  
around Canada...

wherever we are.

I have met with several elders...

from different indigenous communities,

and a prominent theme stands out...

when we are talking about God's creation.

We need to stop seeing our relationship with water,

with the land,

with the animals,

with the trees...

in an Us versus Them...

or Us over Them mentality.

We need to stop seeing God's non-human creation...

as subservient to us,

as only serving our purposes.

We need to stop seeing God's non-human creation...

as threatening to us,

as needing to be tamed.

**Instead,**

Indigenous elders encourage us...

to see God's non-human creation...

as a companion to us,

in partnership with us,

for the hope of living out...

what God envisions us to be.

A harmonious and peaceful creation.

Or in other words,

we need to change our perception from...

Us versus Them...

or Us over Them mentality,  
to an Us with Them mentality.

**I don't know about you,**

but I really appreciate the Indigenous perspective...

on our relationship with creation...

and believe this is closer to the themes...

presented in the Bible...

then some of our interpretations of Genesis one...

that have dominated the church...

for most of its history.

**When we start to shift our perspective...**

from an Us versus Them...

or Us over Them mentality...

to an Us with Them mentality,

we are more motivated...

to do what we can...

to restore the land, the water.

We are more willing to speak out...

and act for the land,

for water...

when companies or individuals...

are speaking or acting in ways...

that are harmful to the land, the water.

**Whenever we start to see Them...**

as like or part of Us...

then we come much closer...

to becoming...

that harmonious, peaceful world...

God envisions for us to be.

**Unfortunately,**

as James states,

we have a strong tendency...

to fall into this Us versus Them mentality...

or this Us over Them mentality...

when we encounter something or someone...

that is different from us...

in some way.

And this often leads us to exploit,

devalue,

abuse,

and even oppress a species.

**In Jame's context...**



the rich Christians...

are devaluing and abusing...

the poor Christians...

by the way they are treating them in worship.

Making them sit in certain areas of the sanctuary...

that show their lesser status.

**Likewise,**

we have treated God's non-human creation...

with this same Us versus Them or

Us over Them mentality.

We see other species as lesser than us.

There to serve our needs.

Or we see them as threatening to us,

needing to be tamed.

**Instead, of valuing these species...**

as partners with us...

in some great cosmic plan...

to live in harmony and peace...

with one another.

To worship our Creator together.

**James goes on to say...**

that if we are partial to others...

we are failing to live up to our call...

to be disciples of Jesus.

We are failing to live out the impartiality...

Jesus lives out...

when he heals the Them.

When he welcomes the Them.

When he invites the Them...

to work with him...

to create a more harmonious...

and peaceful community.

**In our gospel this morning...**

Jesus spends some time in Gentile communities.

Maybe to get away...

from the heavy workload...

for a bit.

Of course,

word of him has spread into these communities,

and like the Jewish communities,

they come to him for healing.

**In his first encounter,**

Jesus is dealing with the temptation...

to see the Gentile Woman...

in a Us versus Them/Us over Them mentality.

It is not fair for me to take the children's bread...

and feed it to the dogs.

Jesus says.

But in hearing her humble response,

Jesus relents,

and heals her daughter.

Jesus sees the value of the Gentile woman.

In this action,

Jesus' mentality is now a Us with Them mentality.

And we see that his next encounter with a Gentile man...

is more gracious and loving.

**The entirety of the gospel of Mark...**

is to challenge us to go...

from seeing an Us versus Them/Us over Them mentality...

to an Us with Them mentality.

And we are encouraged to have this mentality...

not just towards our fellow humans,

but also,

towards God's non-human creation.

**We are encouraged to see us...**

working together with the trees,

the land,

the water,

the animals,

the sky,

to create this harmonious, peaceful, safe world...

God envisions us to live in.

**Because this is how the prophets,**

the apostles,

Jesus envisioned the new Zion,

the new Jerusalem.

As a place where all of God's creation...

lives together in harmony and peace with one another,

worshipping the Creator together.

**Why can't we experience some of this vision...**

in the now,

in the present? **Amen.**



## **Sermon September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

### *We Are God's Instruments*

#### **When I was a child...**

way back in the day,

I remember a popular saying...

that was going around the playground.

Sticks and stones may break my bones,

but names will never hurt me.

Have you heard this saying before?

Might be one of those sayings...

that have been around forever.

#### **Now this might come off as sounding like...**

one of those conspiracy theories,

but I believe some oppressive empire...

or a person who likes picking on others...



made this up...

to tell their victims...

to suck it up.

To keep their feelings to themselves.

So, they could continue to get away...

with their abusive behaviour.

**Anyways,**

over the years...

I learned that...

this saying is total BS.

Words do hurt.

And they can sting deep.

If you don't believe me,

is there something someone said to you...

years ago...

that still impacts you...

in a negative way today?

**Isaiah and James both see the power...**

and impact...

words have on us.

It is our words...

that empower us to act.

If we speak words of hate,

we will act out in hateful ways.

If we speak words of fear,

we will act out in fear.

If we speak words of love,

we will act out of love.

This is the whole premise...

around Jesus' sermon on the mount.

**In the creation story,**

we see that God spoke...

and the world came into being.

Showing how powerful and impactful...

our words can be.

They drive our actions.

**For some of us here...**

who grew up in 1930s Europe...

we know that the hateful words of a leader,

of a political party,

can lead to great tragedy.

**In fact, we don't need to look that far back.**

From 2016 to 2020...

we saw the impact...

the President of the United States words had...

on not only our neighbours to the South,

but also, on a lot of Canadians.

Charlottesville incident doesn't happen...

without the harmful words of the president.

January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection doesn't happen...

without the harmful words of the then former president.

**Our words can incite,**

empower people...

to sometimes act in harmful ways.

**James says taming our tongue...**

is our greatest challenge.

We often find it too easy...

to say something...

that we later regret.

I really resonate with what James is saying here...

when I am watching my sports teams play.

Especially the Blue Jays this year.

**As we continue with our season of creation theme,**

our words,

our understanding of certain words in the Bible...

have shaped our actions towards creation.

If we hear in the words of the Bible...

that we have dominion and power over creation.

Then we have no problem...

exploiting the land for our benefit.

Then we have no problem...

expanding our cities...

even if it means...

shrinking the habitat of certain plant and animal species.

**If we continue to speak about creation...**

in a way...

that says we are superior to it in every way,

then we don't see the harm...

in what big mining and oil companies are doing...

to extract the resources from the land.

We don't see the harm...

in chopping down big sections of rain forest to farm.

We don't see the harm...

in having a large carbon footprint.

## **Our words we speak about creation...**

as a faith community,

have impacted our actions...

and even our inaction towards creation.

Often, in negative ways.

## **Our theology that teaches us to believe...**

this world is temporary,

and that one-day...

Jesus will come again...

to renew the world.

Has at times led us...

into a place of apathy.

Into a place of inaction.

Then why bother trying to fix the current world...

if Jesus is coming back with a new world?

**Our words matter.**

Sometimes more than we think.

**But this doesn't have to be all bad.**

Yes. Sometimes it is difficult to tame our tongue.

Sometimes our words hurt others.

But as Jesus shows us throughout his life here,

our words can also empower people to do good.

Our words can uplift people.

Our words can heal people.

Our words can heal and restore the non-human creation.

**Isaiah says...**

that God uses us as instruments...

to reveal God's healing and redeeming love.



God helps us speak words of love...

that empower us to act in loving ways.

So, to give people hope...

when they are struggling in exile.

To empower people to stand up...

to the principalities and powers...

that are abusing them.

To reach out in love to our neighbours.

**Our words of love have an impact...**

on how we act as well.

Our words of love...

can tame someone else's words of hate.

**Unfortunately,**

when we speak out of love for someone...

who is being mistreated.

Including speaking out of love...

for God's non-human creation.

We face pushback...

from the very principalities and powers...

that continue to oppress others,

continue to oppress creation.

Because these powers are gaining something...

from their hateful words,

and don't want to lose any of their power.

So, they fight back even harder.

Sometimes violently.

**Growing up in a province...**

that relies so heavily on fossil fuels...

I often experienced persecution from my neighbours,  
from people in the congregations I served,  
if I started to talk about global warming...  
and how we need to move away from fossil fuels...  
to help in the fight against climate change.

**As leaders in these communities,**

we are often threatened by people...

in our faith communities...

if we continue to talk about anything...

that challenges the building of new pipelines...

or talks about transitioning to cleaner energy sources.

Our jobs are at risk.

Our reputations are at risk.

Sometimes our health and safety are at risk.

**Even when we are speaking words in love...**

these words can impact us in negative ways.

It is why we find it so hard to speak out in love...

when we see an injustice happening.

Because we are afraid of the consequences, we might face,

for speaking out.

Just like Peter is afraid...

when he tries to rebuke Jesus,

not wanting to hear that his friend and teacher,

is going to face consequences for speaking out in love.

**Our words carry with them...**

great power...and great responsibility.

**And we see this great responsibility being played out when**

Isaiah, along with other prophets...

keep calling out the injustices they witness.

They continue to speak out of love...

for those in their community...

who are being mistreated.

**Jesus, the early believers, do likewise.**

They know how impactful their words of love...

are on...

changing their community...

in becoming...

a more hospitable and harmonious place to live.

Despite the persecution they face...

they continue to speak out of love...

for those who are mistreated in their community.

**We are called to do the same,**

because as Isaiah says.

As Jesus says.

We are God's instruments in the world.

God breathes in us the words...

to bring healing and redemption to our communities,

to bring healing and redemption to all creation.

**Yes. As Jesus says,**

this comes at a cost.

But it also comes with this joy.

Joy in seeing people's lives change for the better.

Joy in seeing our communities change for the better.

Joy in seeing God's creation being restored.

Joy in seeing...

that even though there is hateful words out there...

in the world...

causing pain and suffering.

God's loving words are out there...

healing and redeeming us...

from this pain and suffering.

**We are God's hands and feet in the world.**

The climate is in crisis.

The plants, the animals, the waters,

the land, the sky, are hurting.

They are groaning.

They need our help.

Yes. The cost can be great.

But the joy can be even greater.

**So, may we feel empowered by Jesus' words of love...**

to stand with Creation...

and speak out in love for Creation.

Transforming our harmful actions...

into healing and restorative actions. **Amen.**





## **Sermon September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**

*Transforming our selfishness and envy  
into humility and hospitality*

**As we look at the state of the planet...**

it is no longer easy for us...

to ignore the negative impact...

our greed, consumerism,

and domination systems have had...

on God's creation.

More organizations and individuals...

are taking notice...

and have started to pull apart the layers...

to see if we can change...

what has become fundamental...

in the way we live as human community.

**As we start to unpack this triad of problems...**

in our world,

we see that these are symptoms and systems...

created from a greater problem,

a root cause...

that is at the essence of our being.

**Envy and selfishness.**

These two feelings drive our consumerist culture,

drive our greed,

drive our domination systems.

If we remember the very first murder...

that happens in Genesis,

it is over envy.

Cain is envious of Abel.

Envy and selfishness...

are at the root...

and are where we need to see transformation happen...

if we are going to see real change in our world.

**A more modern example,**

our need to keep up to our neighbours.

Our need to have a nicer house,

a more beautiful garden/flower bed,

a better-looking partner,

a fancier car,

a more stylish haircut and outfit,

a more financially rewarding career.

**This envy we feel...**

when we perceive our neighbour...

as outdoing us in some way...

drives us to purchase more,

to consume more,

to see our neighbour...

with an Us versus Them mentality...

or an Us over Them mentality.

Something we talked about...

in more detail...

the last couple of weeks.

**This envy drives our consumerism.**

It drives us to make decisions...

that at times...

have been very harmful towards God's creation.

More house means more trees to cut down.

More minerals to mine.

More gas needed to heat our home.

**This perceived notion of competition...**

that we have with our neighbour...

leads to more burning of fossil fuels.

Faster methods to extract...

what we need from the ground...

to meet the high demand,

without considering the impacts...

on the land and waters...

in the area.

**Likewise,**

our selfish ambitions,

our willingness to put the self...

above everyone and everything else...

blinds us from seeing the impacts...

our selfish decisions...

sometimes have on others.

**We can be so driven by our selfish ambitions...**

that we act in ways...

that are either neglectful...

or harmful to God's creation.

Not thinking about the consequences.

Instead, making sure our wants

(or perceived needs)...

are met.

Above everything and everyone else.

**In Jame's letter to the churches...**

he is overseeing,

James sees that our envy,

our selfish ambition...

are at the root of our aggressive and hostile actions.

These feelings often get in the way...

of us establishing healthy relationships...

with everyone...

and everything...

in God's creation.

Instead, we speak and act in ways...

that cause conflict, division, harm.

**In our gospel,**

the disciples,

like us,



are arguing over who is the greatest?

Who will get the closest seat to Jesus...

in the kingdom?

I listen to this story...

and imagine the great sibling rivalry...

many of us with siblings wrestled with...

growing up.

Who will be most loved by our parents?

Who will be most praised by our parents?

If we remember,

we probably did some nasty things...

to get a step up...

on our siblings...

in the eyes of our parents.

**Our envy, our selfish ambition...**

sometimes has a power over us...

that we wish it didn't.

**So, what is the antidote to our envy and selfish ambition?**

Is there hope...

that we can ever change...

what is at the root of our being?

What is at the root of all these problems?

**Well, in our gospel,**

Jesus does give us hope.

Jesus shows us a new way.

A way that will transform our envy and selfish ambition...

into something good,

into something...

that will help us heal...

and restore God's creation.

**In response to the disciples so called sibling rivalry,**

Jesus uses this...

as an opportunity...

to teach the disciples,

and us,

a new way of being human.

We don't need to let our envy and selfish ambition...

drive us.

We don't need to one up our neighbour...

or our sibling.

We don't need to compete with one another...

all the time.

**In fact, in the community Jesus envisions for us.**

The last will be first...

and the first will be last.

Meaning, in Jesus's community...

people work together...

to create a harmonious and peaceful community.

We live in humility with each other.

Meeting the other from a place of humility.

Remembering that we all fall short of the glory of God...

and we all have something to learn from each other.

And that it is okay to live as community...

trying to work together...

to get it right,

instead of competing for the ultimate prize.

When we let go of that need...

to have everything,

to be better than others,

then we start to let go of the envy...

that often drives our hostility.

**Humility is the antidote to envy,**

and when we live out this humility,

we are amazed how our conflict is transformed...

into a coming together with the Other.

**Second,**

Jesus shows us...

that to challenge our selfish ambition...

is to show hospitality to the other.

When our focus is on being a good host,

we are more likely to be considerate of the needs of others.

We are not so focused on meeting our own needs alone,

but on the needs of everyone we encounter.

**Hospitality is the antidote to selfishness,**

and when we live out this hospitality,

we are often amazed...

how our mentality shifts from...

an Us versus Them...

or Us over Them mentality...

to a Us with Them mentality.

**Humility and hospitality,**

transform us into a new way of being human.

One where we meet people...

where they are.

Where we work together...

to create a harmonious and peaceful community to live in.

Where we see God's whole creation in a new way.

Not as something that benefits us in some way...

or that we can exploit...

to get ahead of our neighbour.

But something that is a companion to us,

a partner with us...

as we all try to live out the world...

God envisions for us to live in.

**When we treat the trees with humility and hospitality,**

we put our superiority complex aside...

and try to listen to their wisdom.

We try to see what they can teach us...

about the world we live in.

We do everything in our power...

to preserve them.

To protect them from unnecessary harm.

To plant them. To help them grow.

To work with the trees...

to help reduce the amount of carbon...

in the atmosphere.

**When we treat the waters with humility and hospitality,**

we show appreciation...

for how much...

the waters do for our survival,

as well as for our joy,

and for our peace of mind.



We see that it is important to care for our waters...

when they are hurting from our harmful actions.

To protect our waters.

To help them live...

as they breathe life into us.

**When we treat the animals with humility and hospitality,**

we listen to their cries...

as their land is being taken away.

We learn how to share the land with them,

respecting their habitats.

Respecting their space.

Working with them...

to create a harmonious and peaceful environment to live in.

**When we treat the land with humility and hospitality,**

we feel the land beneath our feet.

We clean it up when our contaminants harm it.

We reduce our carbon footprint...

so the land will get the moisture and love it needs...

for plants and vegetation to grow.

We listen to its pain...

and strive to do better.

We work with the land...

to provide sustenance for all.

**When we treat the air with humility and hospitality,**

we embrace the breeze...

that cools us down...

on a hot day.

We work with the wind...

to create cleaner energy.

We cut down on the pollutants...

that suffocate the air.

**When we embrace the humility and hospitality...**

Jesus invites us to live out,

we see a positive impact on our relationship...

with God's creation.

We see our world being transformed...

into what Christ envisioned.

A world where we live in harmony and peace with one another.

Not just in our human communities,

but with all Creation. **Amen.**



## **Sermon September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

*Truth and Reconciliation Impacts Our Care for Creation*

### **Tomorrow...**

many of us will take time...

to reflect on our journey...

towards Truth and Reconciliation...

with the Indigenous people of this land.

### **We will reflect on what we have done so far...**

to hear the truths...

about the negative impacts...

our colonizing theologies,

ideologies,

and systems...

have had...

on the Indigenous people of this land.

## **My own journey towards Truth and Reconciliation...**

started in 2013...

when I attended a national event in Saskatoon...

to hear the stories...

of many residential school survivors.

There I heard some truths...

that honestly rocked my faith...

in the church.

Truths about abuses...

done by people...

in leadership roles...

in the church.

Truths about the neglect...

the indigenous people faced...

when they became ill.

Truths about the punishment...

they experienced...

when they tried to speak their language...

and/or tried to preserve their culture...

in some way.

Truths about being separated from their families.

Not ever seeing their siblings again.

**When the news came out...**

a couple of summers ago...

that many unmarked graves...

existed on residential school grounds,

many people were surprised.

Honestly, I was less so,

because at these national events...

the Indigenous people were already telling us...

about the many missing friends and relatives...

that never came home...

and were missing from the records of the schools.

**In 2018...**

I attended a blanket exercise...

at a church in Red Deer Alberta...

with my oldest daughter.

There we heard...

that through the reserve system,

the residential school system,

the sixties scoop,

and other systems of colonization...



the Indigenous peoples access to this land...

has shrunk...

and shrunk...

and shrunk,

while our access to the land...

has exponentially grown.

**In 2022...**

I became part of a group...

that consisted of religious leaders and elders.

There I heard...

how our colonizing systems...

continue to hurt...

the Indigenous people of this land.

For example,

many treaties are ignored...

for the benefit of extracting...

and transporting our resources.

The way governance is done...

on a lot of reserves...

continues to be shaped and guided...

by our colonizing systems.

**I'll be honest.**

It is hard to hear the truth.

It is easy to become defensive.

To deny or blame or ignore or get angry.

The Indigenous people have suffered a lot...

at the very systems...

that have benefited us.

This isn't easy for us to accept.

**But until we hear the truth.**

Until we are willing to accept our role...

in continuing to prop up these colonial systems.

It will be hard to see any real move...

from truth to reconciliation.

**Now, if we take a moment to think about it,**

In any conflict we get in with someone...

or with a group of people,

where we have wronged them in some way,

we find it difficult to repent.

To admit that we hurt someone...

or a group of people,

and that we need to change...

how we do things...

in the future.

Especially, when we are benefiting in some way...

from how we currently do things.

**It isn't easy to hear the truth.**

But it is necessary...

if we want a better future...

for our grandchildren.

We need to start decolonizing our systems...

so that we can move from truth to reconciliation.

So, we can finally become the Canada...

we all envision.

A place where everyone and everything...

can live in harmony and peace...

with one another.

**In our gospel,**

Jesus calls us to repentance...

when we have wronged someone.

Jesus says it is so important to our wellbeing,

to the wellbeing of the one being wronged,

and to the whole community,

that we are to attend to the conflict...

before coming to the altar.

Before coming to worship.

Before gathering as community.

**Truth and reconciliation...**

with the Indigenous people of this land...

is vital to our wellbeing as a community.

It needs to be a priority for us.

Not a second or third thought.

**In fact, I argue our ability to reconcile...**

with the Indigenous people of this land...

will go a long way...

in helping us reconcile...

with God's whole creation.

**We need to come together...**

to deal with the Climate crisis.

We need to listen to the wisdom...

of the Indigenous elders...

who teach us...

how to treat the land,

treat the creation with love and respect.

Treat the creation as a companion to us.

When we reconcile with the Indigenous people...

we reconcile with all life,

all creatures.

That is how vital truth and reconciliation is...

for the future of our planet.

**We need to listen to the truth.**

We need to repent.

We need to decolonize.

We need to see each other as partners,

Companions...

working together...

to heal and restore God's creation.

**We are all interconnected.**

When one group of people is hurting,  
we all are hurting.

When one species is hurting,  
we all are hurting.

I don't know about you,  
but I am done hurting.

It is time that we listen to Jesus' words,  
leave our gift at the altar,  
repent,

and reconcile with the Indigenous people of this land...

as well as...

with all God's creation.

We are all interconnected,  
and we need to start living like we are.



**And so, wherever you are in your journey.**

Maybe, you have been to a blanket exercise,

or have met with an elder,

or attended one of these national events years ago.

Or, maybe you have started...

by reading people's stories...

of their experiences.

Or, maybe you are just getting started,

and wondering where to go...

to learn and hear more.

Wherever you are in the journey.

Remember,

as hard as it is to hear the truth,

repentance is good for our wellbeing,

for the wellbeing of the people we hurt,  
and for the whole community,  
the whole creation.

**It allows us to be more fully present...**

in our worship with our creator.

It allows us to be more fully present...

with each other.

It allows us to be more fully present...

with God's creation. **Amen.**