

SERMON National Indigenous Sunday 2nd of Pentecost ©Gyllian Davies

When I was younger I used to listen to my friends who were raised Roman Catholic, working to free themselves from the guilt they'd acquired growing up in their church. They called themselves 'recovering Catholic'. I used to whisper to myself - thank goodness I don't have to work through all those layers of guilt! And then one day I realized - I did. My mother had been raised by Catholic nuns and even though as an adult she rejected everything they stood for - guess what! All those values still hung out inside her. It was a gloomy day when I realized that I too was "Closet Catholic!" YIKES!

And it was a marvellous day when I encountered the idea of Original Blessing instead of Original Sin. You know that one, right? We are all blessed! Right from the moment of our birth. God's grace. Jesus on the cross. LOVE flowing all around us. Wow What a concept. So I began to wonder... what if **sin** is simply ... us-uns not *seeing* the blessing. What if sin is *not seeing* God's presence everywhere we turn, in everyone we meet... From our reading in Isaiah, I'd say it's pretty clear - God is telling us. "Open your eyes. Look. See? God's presence is everywhere? In *everyone* you meet."

Of course, being blessed, be-ing a blessing in the world does not change us into perfect humans. I suspect you're already figured that out for yourselves. We are ordinary. Being human...we are fallible. Doing our best. And making mistakes.

So then, we might ask - what are the mistakes we make? Who might we have wronged? And how? What if we seriously asked ourselves: when have we seen ourselves as better than 'those others'? When have we not seen God in another person? I don't like admitting it but... I've done that. I know **I** can be blind to God in another. Blind to recognising God's blessings standing right in front of me, in another person, big as life. I've had times when instead of operating as if we are all in it together, all of us God's people, I've acted as if there was me... and them.... You know - 'those others'. And the hardest part is - I think - that often I'm oblivious. I don't even realize I'm doing it...

Back in high school I ran smack dab into that very thing. My best friend & I were assigned to clean the blackboards in our home room. It was Friday afternoon, the beginning of the weekend, wintertime... We had some of that end-of-the-week goofiness going on with the erasers - remember those blocks of felt used to erase the chalk? We started banging them on the blackboard to make patterns. And then in a mad moment of mischief I banged one on my friend, leaving a big white chalk mark on her new winter coat.

And to my shock she flew in anger at me. With great outrage she told me how I was so ignorant. I got a new winter coat every year while her family couldn't afford such luxuries. Nor could she get new snow-boots if her old ones didn't fit anymore. Her family wasn't like mine. They had to be careful with money. And she stormed off in a rage. Ouch! I stood there feeling small, ashamed, confused, angry, hurt... My friend

had shown me a different view of the world. For the first time I saw how I had been totally oblivious. Her words rang with a painful truth about what separated us. I didn't want that separation. And I didn't know what to do about it. I didn't know how to find God's presence there.

What I had run into was one of those squirmy words - **privilege**. And you know, I'm not crazy about how it feels when I think I come from privilege. But... guess what. First of all, I'm white. And in this world, power and wealth are predominantly in the hands of those with white skin. Secondly, I did not grow up poor. I always had enough to eat... When I outgrew my winter coat or my shoes there really was enough money to buy me new ones. I have a university education and most of my life I've owned my own home. I've had choices.

So while all along I thought it was fairly easy to engage strangers through smiles and friendly comments... now I have to wonder... have I simply been coasting on my privilege? the colour of my skin? the condition of my clothing? the assumptions I make about my own worth, about my right to take up space? – all of which I convey by the ways I stand and walk, and by more assumptions – that I have a right to make eye contact, a right to speak to complete strangers in a friendly manner and to expect a friendly response... (pause)

When I lived in Saskatchewan I heard another story that shook me at how easy it is to be oblivious. I was at an event focused on the TRC - you know, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action for the Churches. Many indigenous elders had graciously agreed to be present as resource people and educators for the rest of us. One man, a residential school survivor, told a story that I will never forget. He told us how he agreed to travel with a white person – a settler (that's us. You know – our ancestors came to this land and settled here around and among the First Peoples). It was the first time he had ever travelled with a white person. Along the way they stopped for a coffee, and when they walked into the restaurant they were greeted with a hello and a friendly smile. He'd never had a white person, a stranger, treat him that way before. It was startling. Amazing.

The waitress who took their order was cheerful and polite and even came back to refill their cups. He shook his head in wonder as he told us that. After... they went to a grocery store to pick up snacks to eat on the road. No-one followed them around – you know, to make sure they weren't stealing things, and when they couldn't find what they were looking for someone actually helped them look. At the checkout the cashier made eye contact and responded as if they were valued customers, almost family. That night when they checked into their hotel no-one asked them for ID or told them there was no vacancy even tho the sign out front was flashing "Vacancy". He recounted his experience in a quiet voice, filled with thoughtful wonder. He had never thought this kind of treatment might happen to him. He could not have imagined how it would feel.

Listening, I felt such a deep sadness for all the ways in which we thwart God's kingdom. I felt a great sadness for all the ways in which we create separations between

ourselves, purely based on appearances or maybe on stories we've heard. I grieved all the ways in which we, forget and view those who seem different from us with contempt. with impatience. Or suspicion. Maybe fear... how we forget the person standing before us is one of God's children.

So how do we heal these terrible separations? How do we act to bring the Kingdom on earth? I think we might begin by acknowledging the infection, the source of the actual wound within us. If we can't (or won't) see and name this wound of separation it will continue to fester. And maybe our greatest wound is this – we live in a society that despises, judges, and rejects imperfection. And this harms all of us. (pause)

I suggest to you that our job as Christians is to acknowledge our woundedness, our imperfections with grace and humour. Maybe our hardest work is to offer up to God the ways in which we don't measure up, with humility with gentleness towards ourselves. Cause here's what I suspect: **Our willingness to be vulnerable, to admit our flaws, is holy work**

And here's where the **good news** comes in! We get to remember we're not in charge. Thanks be to God! GOD IS IN CHARGE. Our God who pours out abundant life. Our God who tells us "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" I will pour out my spirit on all.' And then God promises even more:

*those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint*

One scholar says this means an entire society... living in harmony **with God**. Just as we pray all the time: *Your kingdom come*....This means we get to put down our terrible labouring to be perfect. We get to release the expectation that we have to get it right all the time. It's really ok to make mistakes – as long as we own up to them. It's ok to be wrong! – especially if we admit it. And when we do? I think it just might get a whole lot easier to see God in everyone we meet! Personally? I'm not ready to go so far as to call myself 'a sinner', (that word still makes me squirm!) but I'm happy to admit to imperfection **with the full intention** of learning how... to act justly as well as I possibly can, how to love mercy as much as my heart can bear, and how to walk humbly with my God. And THAT I believe we can all do together. Together we can learn to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

Amen.