

Homily September 1 2024 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in OT © Teresa Hanlon

Amos 8:4-6, 8-10; Psalm 15; Wagamese “Wolf Tracks”; Mark 7:1-23

I invite you to ponder: What are some recent changes in our society? When have we purposely changed our behaviour? Quiet. Wearing seatbelts. Protocol during the pandemic. Celebrating 2SLGBTQIA folks. Are there changes related to the climate crisis? Where and how often we holiday in consideration of our eco-footprint, what kind of jet fuel goes into aircraft or perhaps behaviours around what meats and plants we eat. Today begins a season which is a recent change in the Christian church – the Season of Creation. The World Council of Churches declared in 2007 that we examine our relationship with planet earth, our common home. September 1 to October 4. Pope Francis declared, in 2015, that today is the “World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation.” We are invited to change our behaviour in how we see and respond to the whole of Creation. In today’s gospel, Jesus chooses not to ritually wash his hands before he eats. He has purposely changed his behaviour.

What informs such changes?

In all of today’s readings we witness prophetic voices calling out behaviours that contradict what is not life-giving. Amos, Richard Wagamese and Jesus—all three in their observations of people’s behaviour – name the scandalous and suggest change.

Amos points out a selfish, miserly, greedy behaviour, impatient to take advantage of others, especially the poor. Richard Wagamese wakens to his, and so too, our, shocking dismissal of an intimate connection with nature, as technology replaces his conscious, close interaction with Creation. He substitutes screen time and electronic communication for his sensory perception and learning with what is just outside his door: the presence of a wolf. The message of the wolf in his neighbourhood, its habits as suggestions for human behaviour, physically demands his attention when he’s outdoors: “That charge in the belly” he feels. Indoors, that wisdom is totally lost as he moves to cyberspace and checks his email.

Jesus responds to criticism about a lack of ritual hand washing for himself and his followers. He is critical of pharisaical manipulation of laws regarding parental care: honour your mother and father. Those in power have found a way to let go of this responsibility of care for aging parents by making a monetary donation to the temple in the name of God instead. What is the name of God really, in their heads? Likely not a loving relationship, but a pledge of obedience to rules.

In each of these cases, a compassionate, just way of being, wholly attentive or responsive to someone else, whether that be community, in the case of Amos, or the wolf near Wagamese’s home or one’s aging parents in the gospel, is lost or forgotten. The call to a Season of Creation is because our connection in Western culture operates out of greed for resources rather than respect for all life, the land and air and water included. Brendan Byrne’s commentary on Mark’s gospel says what’s forgotten is “that the overriding principle ought to be what most benefits human beings”<sup>1</sup> – and I would add today, what benefits our respect for and intimacy with Creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 123.

Jesus points out that laws and rules which regulate our behaviour can be ill-founded. Rules and laws that are not life-giving, like refusing to ordain women called by Christ, persist for the sake of a patriarchal tradition that, according to earliest sources is not of Christ.

My reading of this gospel is that Jesus suggests we take a good look at the heart through our actions. Fastidiousness or insistence on how something must be done, are not nearly as important as the nature of our gestures toward others. If our actions and intent are rooted in a childhood wound – whether being made fun of, witnessing violence, being shunned or ridiculed or maimed -- the stored memories in the heart, those wounds, give rise to painful judgements of this world and the ways in which we treat one another.

Trauma to our soul in childhood can affect our generosity, our honesty, our perception of how much is enough, our world view in regard to our neighbour—whether down the block or from another country or culture or the coulee grasses—and how much control we need in a relationship with another person. Depending on how our young mind has interpreted the world, we sometimes ensure our happiness or safety with manipulation. We may be working from a deep-seeded mistrust and fear of hurt.

Jesus lives very vulnerably in this story. He risks disapproval in public and ignores the expectations of those around him in order to speak a revolutionary truth which challenges the pharisees' traditional laws.

Our challenge today is to take a good look at our own behaviour and, in light of the Season of Creation, to pay attention to how we view and interact with the land: plants, water, animals and the air. Is our connection in need of attention, change or healing? In the land acknowledgement video we heard the ancient wisdom of how Indigenous people understand they cannot be separated from the land. To do so is to miss its messages for life and survival. To intellectually separate ourselves from Creation is to lose the message of the wolf, and the cry of the needy and the hungry with unwashed hands. We need experiences of intimacy and listening with the land to change. How might we individually and as a society change our behaviour in regard to our relationship with the land and ultimately with the Creator? 'Tis the Season to make those choices.

#### QUESTIONS for discussion

What did you notice in the readings? When did you experience a learning from or a relationship with Mother Nature?