

Rev. Simone Hurkmans, August 8 2021

When I was growing up, a man named Dr. Martin lived in the house directly behind us. He was retired, and he loved gardening. We could see him from our dining room. He spent lots of time in his flower beds. Now I'm not much of a gardener, but over the years I've come to appreciate it more. I do know that plants need water. Dr. Martin knew this too. What was weird was that almost unfailingly, he would water his garden while it was raining. My mom would look out the window and say: 'oh there he goes again, watering his garden in the rain'. She was puzzled. Why bother? Does he not know that he doesn't need to do that?

Fast-forward 20 years, when John and I moved into our house in Westboro. It was our turn to be puzzled. Our neighbour across the street was also an older retired gentleman. One late winter day, I looked out our front window and saw him shovelling the snow off his lawn onto his driveway. Reverse shovelling, you might say. I was like: what is he doing? And then I understood. Oh, he wants the snow to melt quicker. Every day he would go out and shovel another layer of snow off his lawn. It was my turn to ask: why bother? The snow will melt when it melts. Look at the big picture!

This week's readings made me think of these two gentlemen. We are all like them sometimes. We focus on the little things while being completely unaware of the huge giant thing all around us. The huge giant thing that is actually working for us. We think we have to do it all ourselves. The rain on the plants. The spring un on the snow. It's already happening!

Instead, we focus on the day-to-day grind. Our complaints, our to-do lists, while all around us is this amazing creation. While God is in our midst. While Jesus Christ, God enfleshed, lives and moves inside each of us. We focus on the small, even when we're surrounded by the big.

“Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves...I am the bread of life.” (John 6:43b, 48)

Jesus is essentially telling the religious leaders: listen, you're thinking too small, you need to think bigger. The Message translation says: “Don't bicker among yourselves over me. You're not in charge here.” Jesus is saying: instead of worrying about how I'm only Joseph and Mary's son, think about what I'm actually saying here: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever” (John 6:51a).

Now an older theology would stop right here: eat the bread that is Jesus, live forever. But as theological thought has developed, we've evolved to realize that it's about much more than this. It's about more than just some distant eternal life. Jesus spoke over and over about the Kingdom. About how the Kingdom is both now and not yet. Eating the bread that is Jesus sustains us. It sustains us now. It's not just some guarantee for some distant future. But why? Why do we need sustenance? We need sustenance so that we can rise above the everyday grind and create God's Kingdom here and now. This is what Jesus was trying to get across to the religious leaders of his day.

Please know that I'm not advocating for a "get tough" mentality here. It's not a "get over yourself" pastoral theology. Instead, I'm inviting us to relax into the knowledge that God is already at work. Our creator is already at work in a big way, all around us.

There's a discernment that needs to happen here. If we can't make ends meet each month because we're being underpaid, I'm not saying: "oh don't worry, God's got us covered and will pay our electricity bill". What I'm saying is that God loves us, no matter what injustice or discrimination we face. God loves us if we have

privilege, or if we lack it. And when we enter into relationship with God, something wonderful happens: we wake up to the big. We wake up to the big, and see God's movement in our lives and in the of the world. And then we can harness it to create the Kingdom here on earth.

So what does God's Kingdom here and now look like? This is what I'm hoping we're going to find out, right here at St. Albans. This is what we're going to find out as we start this part of the parish's journey together.

As I've started meeting with folks, I've gotten a few clues as to what the Kingdom might look like. It might look like a safe space for all God's people, regardless of race, sexuality, or gender. It might also look like right relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Like improved awareness and reduced stigma around mental health. Like caring for those who are street-involved or precariously housed. It might also look like fun, which is what I'm aiming for.

So how exactly are we going to do this? First, we need to remember to think big. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is essentially a how-to manual for thinking bigger: "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander,

together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted...Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love..." (Eph 4:31-5:2a).

We are in a time of major transition right now. As if our new beginning together wasn't enough, we're coming out of an unprecedented global pandemic, planning for a return to in-person church in September. There are still so many uncertainties. And where there's uncertainty, there are lots of emotions. Excitement, grief, trepidation, sadness, joy. And when there's lots of emotion, it's easy to stay thinking small. It can be a challenge to move from "me" and "you" to "we". For both me and you. On your side: "Does she not know that we don't do that here?" And on my side: "Do they not do that here?"

As Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber says to her new parishioners: "this church will disappoint you. Or I will fail to meet your expectations or I'll say something stupid and hurt your feelings. It's not a matter of if it's when."¹ I've often wanted to ask Nadia whether she ever applies this the other way around, that is the congregation disappointing the pastor too. It's a very human response. Nadia continues: "when we've been honest about how we will eventually disappoint

¹ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2013/05/sermon-on-why-hope-and-vapid-optimism-are-not-the-same-thing/>

[parishioners], we ask them if they are going to stick around after that happens.

Because if you leave because we've disappointed you, you will miss the way that God's grace fills in the cracks left behind from our brokenness."

Pastor Nadia isn't being a Debbie Downer here. She's challenging her new parishioners to think big. Thinking big will help us move from "me" and "you" to "we" at the speed of trust. So that we can build the Kingdom here on earth, together. Are we ready? Amen.

Question for Open Space: What does a shift from thinking small to thinking big look like for you personally? For our community?