**Gospel – Matthew 22:34-40**

On Christ the King Sunday, we celebrate Jesus as Christ – as the one who reveals both whom God is, and also reveals who we are called to be. I want to begin by asking you a question. What does the life and teachings of Christ revealed about who we are, how we are to live? What are our lives as Christians really about? These are the questions that we gather to not only ask but also to live out and form a community around. So what is your, our, lives about?

This is the question being asked in our Gospel. To Ask what is the greatest commandment? In context, where life is defined by God and shaped around the Torah, the wisdom, the law of God, is how one would ask what is life ultimately about? Jesus’s responds with two commandments. The First is the answer any good Jew at the time would give. It is from the Shema in Deuteronomy, Which begins Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, The Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might!” Jesus pushes this standard answer, and challenges us towards the radical heart of the gospel, when he adds “And a second is *like it*: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” [[1]](#footnote-1) What is radical is this little word “like and as” – Why do we love our neighbour *as* our self? Why is this like, or basically the same as loving God? In these little words, like and as are the heart of our call to justice and why I am inviting Grace to consider engaging the work of justice through community organizing with MACG.

What does the bible tell us about who we are? In Genesis When God forms the dirt/adam and breaths into the dirt person, God makes us, the coming together what is of the earth and of the breath, rauch or spirit of God. We are made to be the image of God on Earth. We are made to be how God is present, revealed and acts on earth. In the Gospels this message becomes even more beautiful. For what does the cross reveal to us? It reveals that it is precisely in our brokenness, in our suffering, in the healing of our sin, that God is present and most clearly revealed. At Pentecost, God’s Spirit, God’s Ruach is poured out, and who we are is restored, ordinary sinners become again the very people in who God dwells and through whom God loves and heals, that is bring salvation to the world. The story of salvation is a story of God pouring out God’s self as grace filled love, restoring us, healing us, filling us, so that God’s love might pour out through our lives to our Neighbour, to the broken, to create life giving communities. This is what our lives are intended to be about? This is what we mean when in church we speak about justice.

How do we begin? It begins with prayer. True prayer shapes how we exist in the world. So let me teach you a way of paying, based on the prayer of recollection that St. Teresa of Avial speaks. Close your eyes. Breath deeply, Remember, imagine, Christ dwelling in you. When you get distracted, return to this, God is dwelling in you.

Now if God dwells in you . . . as you open your eyes, where do you see God? In each other.

Love, and the presence of God in each other, is what community organizing, and the leadership skills it teaches, places at its heart of how it does justice. It does this by placing relationships, and its unique practice of 1-1 meetings at the center of its work. What do I mean by this?

Let me tell you a story. When I studied at Harvard, I was introduced to Community Organizing while working for Resurection Lutheran Church in Roxbury. The pastor, John Heinemier, is one of the grandfathers of faith based community organizing. This was a church that was once almost dead, down to 15 largely white families. By integrating the practice of community organizing into its life and ministry resurrection had become a vibrant place, that not only reflect but had become a part of the heart of the African- American neighborhood it was in. When I was there, the neighborhood was becoming Latino, and the joke was that, this now African American church hired a white boy from Canada to help them with out reach to the Latino community. It would have been easy to come up with or support some program to address the needs of the Latio community, but that wasn’t were we began- John Heinemeier instead sent me out to 1-1 meetings, knocking on doors, to build relationships and find leaders.

In the bible, justice is, as Cornel West and others have said, simply what love looks like in public life. Love is about relationships. So to do justice, we have to begin by building relationships. So I went out, to have conversation after conversation, just like I do now as a community organizer. Not just any conversation, conversations where I am looking for the spark of God in people. Why, because If God wants to heal the world, heal a community, God has been preparing and forming people to be leaders, and placing in them passion, love and anger to drive transformation and heal their community? So we place at the center, 1-1 conversations to discover this fire, and to practice true love, which both unconditionally sees the presence of God in someone and works to challenge that person to become the persons God intended them to become.

We also do these relational meetings because community organizing is a love, is a form of public justice, which does not want to help some poor person out there. No, it calls us to build relationships, across the diversity of our community, so that we are no longer us and them, but instead so that it is simply us. So that it is not their issues, which we address or support for them, but rather our issues which we address together. For example MACG is focusing right now on Supporting Seniors and Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Both of these focuses are led by seniors and younger folks, indigenous leaders and settlers–relationships have been built so that we can have begun to see these as our issues, that we all have a stake in.

If we are to work together, at some point must we must ask, are those in whom God dwells, willing to make the commit that is necessary to heal our communities? The work of justice, the work of healing, and love is not easy. If there is not real commitment of time, of resources of people. What in practice of community organizing takes the form of a commitment to membership, to providing leadership and paying dues –– then lets be honest there is simply not enough strength in the community to accomplish much of anything. In Calgary that is what MACG represents –it is a question – are there enough leaders, enough communities willing to make a serious commitment to work together, to combine their strength to develop their shared strength to address not just the symptoms of injustice, and poverty but its roots?

If there is, then we listen and we discern together. Why listen? People often say to us? Haven’t’ we already listened enough? I am tired of listening and talking I want action. So why insist on listening first?

When the Holy Spirit was given at Pentacost - was it given to an individual or to a community? Both, It was given to a community. We do not transform the world, we do not realize justice or fulfill our calling in life as individuals on our own, or through reports with the right answers. The Holy Spirit works through the quality of relationships that are created amongst a community, whether that community is a congregation or the communities that make up our city. We take the time to listen together so that our individual pain is witnessed, and we discover our shared pain, so that our individual hope, becomes our shared hope. As I listen to you, and you listen to me, we begin to overcome our divisions as we build the bonds of trust, of understanding and love so that we can take what we hear together and have the ability to act together.

When you listen you discover amazing things. In Roxbury, we discovered that the need at the top of many Latino’s heart, for a variety of reasons, was to have a place that would baptize their children, and not the afterschool program we thought they wanted. MACG just finished its listening campaign in October and during it we discovered amazing things. I have seen big tough union leaders cry about the mental health challenges of their children, I have heard the beautiful anger of indigenous leaders who want their daughters to be safe and seen as valuable human beings, and I have heard people who have been homeless, pastors, social workers and people who have lost their job all talk of how their greatest suffering comes from isolation. And we heard about the pressures that seniors face as well as thouse that care for them. In all of this speaking and listening – the relationships, the trust, the passion, the Spirit which gives us the fire for taking action is growing.

Listening must lead to action. From Abraham leaving Ir, David with a slingshot, Paul’s blinding trip to damascus, to us gathered today. God call us to act, and to act with all our being. The Bible is not primarily a book of theology, it is primarily a book of stories, of how God is revealed when people hear God’s call and act. It is a book of Action. If we are to be a people of God, a people of scripture, we too must from our listening, discern God’s call and act. For it is when we act that we are brought into the dynamic story of God. Sometimes our actions start small. When I was in Boston, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organizing, which became famous for their housing campaigns that resulted in over 317 million, being set aside for and getting built 17,00 affordable housing, for getting a republican govener, Mitt Romney to lead Health Care reform in Massachusetts. – which Obama care would eventually be modeled on. It began though with something small, getting up to date textbooks for the schools in Roxbury. Judging form the textbooks I saw, I don’t think they one that one. Still, taking action, action that involved the members of the church I served, began a cycle of action and reflection, that developed people and a shared organization has become a powerful force for the common good. And in the process it brought new life to what had been a dyeing church on the corner and it brought life to people that others had written off. In Calgary from our listening, we have discerned our first focus areas to be on reconciliation and on seniors, and we too are take these on, not as isolated issues, but as a way of building the common good for all.

What is key is that we act, not just to change the world out there, but to change us. As we enter public life, as we act, then evaluate, learn from our actions and the reactions they get, what organizations like MACG are about is developing public leaders. In fact my primary job description as a community organizer is to find and develop leaders. Why? There is something about entering public life, not for our own aggrandizement or enrichment, but for the common good, out of love, that develops us into the people, into the church, and into the communities, that God dreams that we may become.

For me, catching a glimpse of community organizing in Boston, and seeing how it transformed not just Boston, Ressurection Lutheran Church, but also the people who made up that little church were transformed. It is in part why I became a pastor, and an organizer and why I think they are the same thing. It is the possibility of how God can work powerfully through people like us, that I am inviting you, Grace to consider becoming a part of MACG.

Who are we? You and I. All of us together. What is our life called to be? Are we not the body of Christ, how God continues to enter into our world and heal our world. Are we not healed as we build relationships of love and agitate each other to become the people God intended us to become? Are we not knit together as a body as we take our own pain and hopes, our own calling and blessings and by listening join together as a community? Do we not enter God’s story by our actions, by the living and acting body of Christ in the world? Is not true theology the reflection on our live of faith, as we live with God, and as God acts through us. This is the work of MACG, this is the work I am here to invite you to consider join in with.

And to join with others, for this is a calling shared much more broader then just by Christians. So Let me end with a quote from the Rabbi Jonathan Sacks – the former head Rabbi for Great Britten.

Faith is in the willingness to stay together and argue our way though, to recognize that that world that is, is not the world that ought to be. And therefore the truest faith is a protest, against the evil, the violence and injustice in the world. And therefore to be religious is to right those wrongs. To be a teacher fighting ignorance, a doctor fighting disease, a businessman fighting poverty or a therapist fighting depression and despair. When you do that, that is what we call in Judaism being God’s partner in the work of creation. And that is a grown up religious faith for grown up human beings, who understand that faith is not a tranquilizer designed to lower your blood pressure, it is a summons to collective responsibility for building the human future.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks – Tapestry from CBC 2016-03- 31

**Amen**

**Justice**

Christ the king – Reveals to us both who God is, and how we are to live.

**Incarnation/Holy Spirit**

1. Prayer – of recolition

**Relationships Trinity/Love**

1. 1-1 Conversation – pressures/hopes

**Disciples/Church/Community**

Share pressures/ Hopes – what is common

**Healing/Salvation/Justice/Righteousness**

Action – what could you do?

Challenge of the cross – engaged, challenged, shaking up unjust structures – cost.

**Eternal Life –** Shaping of our soul for eternity

Learning -

1. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (1989). (Mt 22:39–40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)