

Sunday, October 17, 2010

Church of the Advent, Colwood BC

Rev. Ken Gray

Pesky Prayer

MEDIA: CHILEAN MINERS RESCUE AND FAITH (Globe and Mail, prior to release of miners)

It is the race within the race: While rescuers inch towards the trapped miners, rival churches tussle over the miracle in the making. Evangelical, Adventist and Roman Catholic clerics are vying to stamp their own particular faith on a surge in religious fervour as the drama nears a climax in Chile's Atacama desert. The three Christian denominations have each claimed credit for what they say is divine intervention in the survival – and imminent rescue – of the 33 men who are spending their 68th day beneath the earth.

“God has spoken to me clearly and guided my hand each step of the rescue,” said Carlos Parra Diaz, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor. “He wanted the miners to be rescued and I am His instrument.”

Metres from where he spoke, Caspar Quintana, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Copiapo, prepared an altar to celebrate an outdoor mass for a small congregation of miners' relatives and phalanx of TV cameras. “God has heard our prayers,” he said. “I have received encouragement from all over the world. Let us give thanks.”

A little bit further up the hill of Camp Hope, the improvised settlement of miners' families, rescuers, government officials and media, an evangelical preacher, Javier Soto, wandered from family to family with guitar and songs of praise. “He listens to the music,” said the pastor, gesturing to the sky.

The word PATHETIC comes to mind . . . and one wonders why people throw up their hands in disgust about the church at times . . .

That said, PERSISTENCE is noteworthy and in concert with today's gospel:

GOSPEL TEXT

‘In a certain city there was a judge **who neither feared God nor had respect for people**. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “**Grant me justice** against my opponent.” For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, **I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.**” ’

And the Lord said, ‘**Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?** Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.

INTERPRETATION - BILL LOADER

Luke's focus: **we need to be like the widow and persist in hope and prayer.**

Greatness, God-likeness, as Jesus reminds us elsewhere in so many ways, is about **self giving and responsiveness**, about **love and care**.

Jesus links the widow's approach with ‘**the elect who cry out day and night**’. This is traditional language. It is used of Israel, God's people. **The image of God's people crying out in need belongs in the context of community lament and prayer.**

So it is missing the mark if we treat the passage as a general teaching about intercessory prayer. It is primarily about the **yearning for change**. It was very appropriate that the story told of a poor widow. She **represents a behaviour**, but she **also represents the poverty and vulnerability which is the point of the parable's**

message. The story has been shaped in the **cruelty of exploitation and the arbitrary abuse of power.** It belongs in the world which Jesus is addressing. **Jesus is reading the signs in the wounds of the people.** The **contours of their devastation shape the structures of his thought,** because this is where he belongs and these are the people whose cries he hears.

Does a God exist who cares? The paralysis of hope can occur at many levels.

- rampant defense of economic practices which cause sufferings for humans, non-humans, and creation causing indifference to climate change
- as technology develops and its marvels are revealed, more of its benefits are available to fewer and fewer people outside the developed countries
- people who try to make a difference through their vocation, who aim to live different lifestyles, who seek to work co-operatively in an increasingly competitive social politic receive little or no support, especially in the churches

AGAIN, BILL LOADER

People do not need to avoid pain. It is our role to be there with them in it and not to collude with the alternatives. It means being in touch with the struggles, with the poverty, with all that makes people cry out in our world. It also means **living with the affirmation of a God who cares . . .** In that sense we are to be **building supportive communities where people can sustain the crying day and night and not lose heart.**

TODAYS SERMON

- Still Good News **through the lens of a bad-news experience**
- **Nowhere to turn but to God,** in Christ, who in both the ancient and modern church, has introduced me to amazing persons, like the pesky praying widow, Sr. Margaret O'Donnell, Rev. Susan Hayward Brown, Dr. Cathy Campbell – yes, all women, all leaders, people who have paid a heavy price for their convictions and actions, and for their inspiration I give hearty thanks