



3050 Rosemont Blvd.
Montreal, QC H1Y 1M2
(514) 721-1830

welcome@trinityuc.net
www.trinityuc.net

Anjou UNITED CHURCH

7951 Place Dade
Montreal, QC H1K 1R4
(514) 352-7790

www.facebook.com/AnjouUC

“Source of Our Sustenance”

Read Sherman

Trinity-Anjou Pastoral Charge

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Scriptures: Isaiah 58:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:20 - 6:2

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be a witness, O God, to your Way of love, justice and faithful walking with us. Amen.

Friends we come again to a hungry time in our walk through the Christian year. Easter beckons to us from a distance. Christmas rebirth is becoming a distant memory of sparkling energy and light. The Epiphany star still shines above us but at least here in Montreal, we've had too many gray, rainy days and nights to really get out and look for its brilliance.

So many of us too are living hungry kinds of lives whereby we wouldn't notice the star even if it were to be a clear, starlit night. We hunger for spring, the re-greening of the earth, for true friendships that are deep and abiding, to be known and loved deeply and truly, for who we are, warts and all. We hunger for justice and peace where around the world so much of what we hear is all selfish bluster and fear-mongering. Warring and terror continue unabated. We hunger for security but when power and wealth are shared so unequally among the so-called 1% and the rest of us, at what cost to others or the earth comes such a feeling?

Yes, here at the beginning of Lent, we feel a pang of hunger. We find ourselves walking down off the mountain with Jesus and his disciples after his transfiguration. They must have been starving after such an unexpected and transformative experience, lasting a few minutes, or days or maybe even weeks! We know Jerusalem is their destination. Do we have food, water, sleeping bags and the like? Besides Jesus and each other, what resources do we have with us to help us go the distance?

One thing we clearly do not need to take with us is stuff, either of the material kind, or mental, psychological or emotional baggage that tends to clutter our minds and dull our hearts. Clinging to this stuff literally is killing us, in my view. It is robbing us of chances to connect with God, nothing held back. It is robbing God of the opportunity to love us unconditionally, which is surely the beginning of all the healing we and our world needs, and not sometime later, or in a next life, but right now, right here, in this moment.

Is not this the wisdom of Isaiah? This prophet from the 7th Century before the common era had his finger on the pulse of our human tendency to deceive ourselves and others, did he not? He knew God could see through

all the false vanity, the overblown piety of a people trying to do all the ritual right, to starve themselves with fasting, to tear their clothes, to go unwashed. He knew God knew the truth: that behind the facade of being a righteous Jew, were men and women who allowed envy, jealousy, and pride to twist their good hearts into sickly hearts. Friend secretly despising friend. Neighbours bad mouthing each other behind their backs, allowing their sewing circles and religious festivals to become occasions for gossip. He could see the all too human tendency to tear other people down instead of examining one's own conscience and priorities.

And so he spoke a word from God about the people's rebellion from relating rightly to God, to each other and to the earth. "Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? It is not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house...." Friends, these words convict me, for sure. They make me tremble at the thought of doing a nightly inventory of every word that came out of my mouth during the day, or every act I did or did not do. They set a high, high standard, and yet, doesn't Isaiah point out that this is the way to the fast that is acceptable to God? How would remembering his words change us? Change how we treat each other? Stop us from dwelling in a pool of negativity, clinging to old resentments, because life is short and we have only this moment to reconcile with ourselves, others and with the God who we block from relationship with every slip of our tongue?

Paul speaks of himself and his church at Corinth as being ambassadors for Christ. He talks about the need to be reconciled with God as a key to such a way of life. What a worthy challenge for us! But what a humbling, fearful task as well. To goad us on our way, Paul offers his own theology about the lengths to which God would go to get our attention. In the work of Christ, he says, God signals that the gap between our gloriously imperfect living and the gloriously divine life of Christ is actually as paper thin as one man, the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. It is he that shows us the way forward, his life that becomes the pattern for our own. He becomes for us the fulfillment of Isaiah's acceptable fast and the model for our own in this Lenten 40 days that begins tonight and in all the days of our lives.

Is anybody hungry just now? Can this be a night where we truly let go of all the baggage we are needlessly carrying, let go of all the hurt and negativity and resentment, to instead try a new strategy? To sit down with the neighbour we have a problem with and beg their forgiveness? To welcome the stranger we have rejected without even getting to know them? To do everything we can to reconcile with each other so we can free our hearts to love again, connect again, hope again? Friends if we can embrace such a fast as this tonight, what won't God make of it, and make of us? Amen.