**Diversity and Discipleship**

July 1, 2018

Genesis 12: 1-4 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Romans 10: 11-15

Matthew 28: 16-20

Recently, on World Refugee Day, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, [commenting](http://dailyhive.com/vancouver/justin-trudeau-trump-immigration-policy) on the US Policy of separating refugee families at the border said: “I can’t imagine what the families living through this are enduring. Obviously, this is not the way we do things in Canada”. He also said: “How we treat the most vulnerable among us defines who we are – as individuals, as countries, and as a global community. Let’s choose justice over fear and compassion over division – because to see ourselves in each other, all we have to do is look.” Statements like this reflect who we are as Canadians. We pride ourselves on being a land of diversity and inclusion. It may not always feel that way, but it is these ideals we strive for and work toward. It is something to celebrate as we gather on this Canada Day. As Christians, Jesus was always with and supporting the most vulnerable and calls us to do the same.

Our scripture reading from Romans has this kind of message. ‘There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, Paul, the attributed author of the letter to the Romans states. Greeks were considered gentiles and quite distinct from Jews in the culture of the time. However, the Christian community was coming to a place of welcoming all, and included gentiles into the Christian fold as they were being converted to following this new movement of The Way, the followers of Jesus. Earlier in the passage Paul tells the readers, that if you confess Jesus is Lord then you will be saved. To declare Jesus is Lord in this time was a bold and courageous statement to make, as it could be considered treasonous against Rome. Caesar was viewed as Lord and to declare anything different could cost you your life. In the context of the Christian followers, it had a very different connotation than how it was often used then or is used today. Jesus was not a traditional Lord over the people, but a leader of love and compassion with the people. It turned the understanding of Lord on its head, as Jesus often did with traditions and expectations. It did take a bold faith to declare that Jesus is Lord, when it could cost your life.

To claim Jesus as Lord, also connects with the Matthew passage, where Jesus says, he has been given authority over heaven and earth, and then he directs the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. How this has been interpreted and lived out over the years in the church has varied. It is about sharing the Good News, evangelism, which too often has been done at the expense of others’ culture and way of life, as in colonializing missions, including the Doctrine of Discovery which gave Europeans full rights to the land including the rule over and destruction of the people in it. This is what led to the residential school system. However, it was not always this way, and does not have to be this way, as good news can be shared in a loving and compassionate way. I know I have often felt it a challenge to think about talking with others about the Good News, especially if I don’t know them and am aware they could already have a faith themselves. I have come to a place where I am clear, I want to respect other peoples’ faith. I don’t think Jesus wants us to convert Muslims, Hindus, Jewish people or others who have a faith. I believe that we all follow the same God, but have different ways of expressing that faith and belief. So for me, being called to make disciples is about building relationship with those outside of my church circles. There are many today who have no church affiliation, no church connection, who call themselves spiritual but not religious. I think it is our challenge to figure out how to be church to these communities of people.

This past year I have taken a course called Leadership in the New Parish. It moves us back to the original understanding of Parish which is not the church, but the community the church is in, the neighbourhood. It is about how to be church in the neighbourhood. The Spirit is active in our communities, our neighbourhood, and it is up to us to find out what God is up to and join in. I believe this way of being is the way forward for the church. To be rooted in place, present to the community we are in, which in our case is Arcola East. The question is can we get to know our neighbours and build relationships to deepen our understanding of what they need, what the community needs, and share our stories? This can lead to a whole new way of making disciples and being church. Is it so threatening to get to know your neighbours? They may already have a faith, or they may not, either way, relationships build and community is formed which is an important part of discipleship. The early Christians gathered in community over a meal. This is ministry. This is the church. As we get to know our neighbours and the diversity in our communities, it is also part of celebrating all of who we are as Canadians. I invite you if you are at Wascana Park today, to take a moment to get to know the indigenous neighbours who are at the Camp seeking Justice for their Stolen Children. They welcome people to come and visit with them and are offering hospitality and want to share stories. This is also part of who we are as people of faith and as Canadians.

We can also explore what it means and looks like to give Jesus authority. What does it mean to trust in his message and way of life and truly seek to live it out? I think it would look different than a lot of what we see in our society today, both here and south of us in the US. Do we give authority to Jesus, or to political authorities or other leaders? What would it look like if we used Jesus’ example as a moral compass? There is a group of faith leaders in the US presently who are doing this. The [Poor People’s Campaign](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/demands/) is a movement that has been organizing for two years around a moral agenda that focuses on “the evils of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and the war economy and militarism, which are persistent, pervasive, and perpetuated by a distorted moral narrative that must be challenged”. It is a movement rooted in a Christian Moral imperative and committed to following the example of Jesus. They have been protesting unjust laws and policies daily in the US, most recently the separation of children from their families, practicing civil disobedience and being arrested. Contrast this with the mostly white evangelical conservatives, who call themselves Christian and who supports US President Trump. There are two vastly different ways of living out ones’ faith. Which one is following the authority of Jesus?

There are many challenges before us as we seek to live out our faith in these times. Abram faced a huge challenge when God told him to leave his country and his kindred, and promised that God would make his name great, and he would be blessed and his family would be blessed and be a blessing. In spite of being old, and his wife Sarai being barren, he listened and left everything to journey to a new land, and God was with him. We could ask, what do we need to leave behind to be faithful, to be church in these days and for our future? We are blessed here to be sharing this building as for many congregations, the building is a burden and is something that brings them to their end, that they need to leave behind or re-purpose for their future. What more could we be doing together as we move forward in ministry, that could benefit us all and help us live faithfully into the future? How can we connect with our neighbourhood and build relationship with those around us? One thing we are exploring together is a program called [Messy Church](https://www.wycliffecollege.ca/messy-church-canada). It is a family ministry which includes crafts and games, worship and a meal together. It is aimed at reaching families who are not attending church as well as those presently connected to the church. It thrives by families inviting other families. In the fall the three congregations will be working together to offer this program twice, once before Advent and once before Lent as a pilot project. It cannot happen without volunteer support so if you are interested in helping with this, let your ministry leader know. It is one way we can move out into new territory and seek to be a blessing.

We have much to be thankful for in this community and in this country. As we celebrate the diversity of Canada and how blessed we are to live here, may we remember those who may not feel as blessed and who struggle because of injustices they face. May we take steps to build relationships with those outside the church and in our neighbourhood, building community to make disciples. May we boldly step out into new areas as we seek to be faithful and follow God’s guidance in all that we do.