**Neighbourhood Incarnation**

**Narrative Lectionary Pentecost 5**

**June 24, 2018**

John 1: 14-16

1 John 1: 1-4

On Monday the Justice for our Stolen Children Teepee was dismantled and the indigenous people physically removed and arrested. The police had come on [Friday](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/justice-for-our-stolen-children-camp-dismantled-friday-1.4707617), packed up peoples’ belongings, taken down everything except the teepee and given 48 hours to remove it and vacate the park. The camp had been set up 111 days previously as a protest against the acquittals of Gordon Stanley in the Colton Bushie shooting, and Raymond Cormier in Tina Fontaine’s death. It expanded to identifying the concern about the number of indigenous youth in foster care. The camp was seeking a meeting with the government on the site, but the government would only agree to meet with them in their building. The members of the camp were quite upset that the dismantling happened during Aboriginal History Month, and 4 days before National Indigenous Peoples Day, but is reflective of the relationship Indigenous people have had with Canada.

Monday night, our son Tyler was dropping off my car that he borrowed while I was away and shared his interesting day. Tyler is Ojibway and his girlfriend is Cree and they were at the camp when it was dismantled. Tyler was quite upset at witnessing the elders and Colton Boushie’s mother being dragged off by the police and had heard it was being taken down so they can have the beer tent there for Canada Day. It seems clear that they did not want the camp there for Canada Day. Tyler and Jessica will not be celebrating Canada Day as a result. It is sad that we can not acknowledge on Canada Day that not all our history is good, and that while we celebrate who we are, we recognize the work we need to do. It is part of working together and honouring all of who we are.

Our scriptures today remind us that God is with us and we are with God. They actually go further than that in naming that the Word was always in the world, became flesh and according to the Message translation, moved into our neighbourhood. The incarnation, God becoming human, Christ in and with us, lives with us where we are. This is about love coming into our communities and dwelling with us, calling us to do the same. First John recognizes that God “speaks” an embodied word, which will repeatedly be identified as love. Authentic love is not an abstraction. It comes through speech, action, and presence. That is the manner of God’s communication. It will characterize authentic faith and authentic community as well. If we truly saw Christ dwelling in our neighbourhood, in one another, would we not treat one another differently? Especially those who seem different from us, or who we don’t understand, or who annoy us, or bother us?

Last week I was at the last Leadership in the New Parish session, which included a trip to Portland Oregon where we visited a variety of expressions of Parish. One of them was the home of James Helms. James came back from serving in the military in the early 2000’s and felt a need to find faith and have a relationship with God, but had no idea how to do that. He started reading the bible and read that the church is to equip the saints. He went to see the pastor at a local church and said, “now I know I’m no saint, but I want to be equipped”. The pastor suggested he come on Sunday. After four Sundays he realized that wasn’t working or equipping him so he stopped. He began having BBQ’s in the neighbourhood out in his front yard with his neighbours, once a month. After a while, others wanted to host, which got them meeting other neighbours. Soon a wide community of friends had formed. This was in an area of Portland that is near a pretty seedy strip, known for drugs and prostitution but together they worked to improve their neighbourhood. They developed community gardens, had bible studies and prayer groups, painted murals on the roads, and now are starting a farmers market. He is now working with the Navigators, a para-church discipleship forming organization and offers Bible studies in his front yard.

He told the story that one day he was having a community BBQ and there was a parking issue that one of his neighbours was really upset about. The neighbour came to the BBQ site, and lit into James, yelling at him and cursing him in front of all the other neighbours about this parking problem he caused. James apologized but the neighbour stormed away and did not talk to him for a year. One day the next year, he said something in his direction, but did not look at him. The third year, he came to his yard and they prayed together. James said, that was fast! Reconciliation is part of being community, and can take time, depending on your perspective. James has the perspective that this entire ministry takes time. He has a goal of opening a coffee shop in the neighbourhood by 2030.

Jesus, the word of Life, as identified in First John, was witnessed by the disciples as a life of love and compassion. John talks about the word becoming flesh and moving into our neighbourhood and seeing the glory of God with their own eyes. According to 3rd Century Bishop, Irenaeus, God is glorified when we care about men. Later others said God is glorified when we care about women, creation, the poor. In essence God is glorified when we care for others. This is so important these days with all the struggle, despair, disparity, oppression and injustice we hear about and experience. Too often we can become cynical or feel like we cannot do anything. However caring for others is something, it is love. Love your neighbour. What if Jesus meant that literally. Love the person and people in your neighbourhood. To truly care, to love, can involve risk and vulnerability.

While in Portland we stayed at the farm of Randy & Edith Woodley who care and respect the land as indigenous people. Randy told us when they bought the farm he was very aware that he was purchasing stolen land and went to the local elders of Kalapuyan People in the area and asked them what he could do to honour the land. They told him, huckleberries used to grow all through the valley and they would pick them for food, so plant huckleberries. Which he did - he has a row of huckleberries growing on the land. Randy is also a professor of Indigenous studies and one of the things he told us is that he believes God is vulnerable – authenticity and vulnerability are what love is about and is also what being human, fully human is about. Jesus was vulnerable in his humanity. It reminded me of a comment I made at craft-study group this past year, that to be fully human is to be fully divine. Jesus was divine and fully in touch with God in his humanity. In conversation with Randy before breakfast, apologizing for his radical views, told us that he believes the church will die, because it has not been able to give up its grip on Empire. To work for reconciliation means to challenge the systems and structures that oppress, silence and diminish others. It is a risk and takes vulnerability to do so. To be the word made flesh and dwell in the neighbourhood is to care for others – as we are also called to do.

In the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, now God not only goes where God’s people go, but is who they are. That is, God now dwells with us by taking on our form, our humanity. This “different” dwelling of God is God being where God’s people are, and now who God’s people are. Thursday on National Indigenous People’s day in Victoria park there was a silent protest with members of the Justice for our Stolen Children camp holding pictures of them being dragged off by the police and other experiences of injustice. It was a silent statement that they have not forgotten and that the struggle continues. The [Teepee](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/teepee-saskatchewan-legislature-justice-for-our-stolen-children-1.4717543) went back up on Friday. I was at the Indigenous Christian Fellowship and Circle Project celebrations on Thursday. As I experienced the grand entry and listened to the honour song by the Lone Wolf drummers, Elder Noel Starblanket told us that the song was an honour song to the flag and the queen. I was struck by the power of offering that song, in the midst of the protests going on that day in another part of the city, in the midst of all the injustices that indigenous people have experienced, that they sing an honour song to the flag and queen. It is an example of the power of love and the grace that indigenous people so often offer, that we too often miss in the stereotypes and struggles we hear about. May we have that same grace and love as we continue to offer love, risk embodying the Word of Life, and be vulnerable enough to seek reconciliation.