**I am not Ashamed**

**Narrative Lectionary Easter 5**

**May 19, 2019**

Romans 1: 1-17 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Today’s reading is a little different. It is the beginning of Pauls’ letter to the Romans and the first 7 verses is his introduction that is all one sentence! Paul is writing to the church in Rome which he founded, but doesn’t know many of the people, so in that sentence he feels a need to identify himself and explain his credentials as an apostle and servant of Jesus Christ, giving credibility to Jesus by placing him in the line of David, and son of God resurrected by the Holy Spirit. Then he gives thanksgiving for their ministry and faithfulness, and expresses hope that he can visit soon so they can be mutually encouraged by one another’s faith. It isn’t until verses 16 and 17 that we get to the heart of the passage: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ Paul emphasizes the importance and power of the gospel, that he is not ashamed to preach it and that through the gospel, how what he calls righteousness is revealed. What is this righteousness? Is it revealed through us and do we share the gospel as unashamedly as Paul?

This past week, many of you know I was at the Festival of Homiletics, a preaching conference. Five days of sermons, lectures and workshops. Can you imagine?! Actually, there were some amazing preachers, and most of the ones I went to hear were black people, many of whom who had a very dynamic presentation style and energy that often increased in passion and intensity to the end. Jim Forbes, former minister at Riverside Church in New York said the difference between a lecture and a sermon is that a lecture takes longer to get revved up! So I hope you will bear with me, if some their style has rubbed off on me, or if I give some of it a try! One of the lectures I went to was by Traci Blackmon, United Church of Christ Executive Minister for Justice and local ministries. She identified that while the word justice is used throughout the Old Testament, in English translations, it is not found much in the New Testament. However, when you look at the ancient texts, she said, in the original transcripts and translations, the word often translated into righteousness actually is more accurately translated as justice. So when Paul is saying that the power of the gospel reveals righteousness, he is actually referring to justice. The justice of God is revealed through faith. Paul then quotes the prophet Habakkuk that the righteous will live by faith. When you look at the passage in Habakkuk, after this statement, there is a litany of injustices listed that the righteous are taking part in: ‘wealth is treacherous,…alas for you who heap up what is not your own,…you have plundered many nations…alas for you who build a town by bloodshed and found a city on iniquity!...’ the list goes on and on, identifying all the injustice of the community. The message seems to be that those who live by faith, who are righteous, do justice, treat others fairly, and do not exploit others. So Paul’s message could be understood that God’s justice is revealed through our faith, and how we live out our faith.

Traci Blackmon lives in the Ferguson area and was very involved in the community during the protests following the shooting of Michael Brown, a young black man in August 2014. Traci told the story of a woman in the community known as Mama K. She was not one who went to church, but she would come to the gatherings and feed the people. Traci, witnessed her one day pulling up in a pickup truck, setting up some church tables – not knowing where she got those – taking out white tablecloths and laying them out on the table. She then took out some silver chaffing dishes, followed by some big pots of food and put the food into the dishes. She laid out some paper plates and plastic cutlery. Then she got out her bullhorn and announced, to the protesters, the police, the clergy, the community “dinner is served, all are welcome”. Traci commented that she had not experienced a more sacred, holy communion. God’s justice revealed through faith. Sometimes God’s justice is revealed in surprising places and ways.

The theme for the Festival was “Preaching as Moral Imagination”. What comes to mind when you hear that phrase, Moral Imagination? I want to invite you into a 3 minute process that Brian McLaren shared with us. Listen to the instructions before you start. I will invite you to stand as you are able and turn to one or two others to discuss the question, what do you think Moral Imagination is? I will ring the prayer bowl after 3 minutes. When you hear the prayer bowl, the person talking finishes their sentence and then you all sit down. Ready? Let’s begin, What do you think Moral Imagination is?

What words or phrases came up? Some of you may have found that you thought it as negative as morality or moral has been coopted by the religious right. How many thought of the Moral Majority? In essence, having moral imagination is about imagining a world or life where we do what is right, where there is equity and justice. It is about social justice, - love, equity and right relationships. What the new testament including Paul often refers to as righteousness.

Paul was passionate about the gospel, not just because of his experience of Jesus through his conversion experience on the road to Damascus but also because his experiences of being led to include Gentiles into the fold of the Christian Church. He knows God has called him to preach the good news to all, Jews, Gentiles, slaves and free. So he is committed to sharing the good news, the gospel of Christ with all. He is not ashamed of the gospel. How often do you share your faith with others. Are you ashamed of the gospel? I am sure you are not but we all could probably show it a little more! I am not ashamed of the gospel.

I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have seen how it can empower youth to have a voice for justice;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have seen the love and support of God through the church community to those grieving a tragic death;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have witnessed the Christ in this community of Eastside in the support and working together toward creating a sustainable community to live out our mission and ministry;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because my husband and I have been welcomed, loved and accepted with our children in the church;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because I have experienced and witnessed evangelicals who have embraced a more progressive faith and radically inclusive love;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because Jesus values women and their witness;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because Jesus shows love and compassion for the poor, the outcast, the outsider, the immigrants and vulnerable;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because Jesus put nonviolence first, telling his disciples to put away their swords;

I am not ashamed of the gospel because of pastors like Martin Luther King Jr. who was motivated by the gospel to stand against racism, economic injustice and militarism, making a significant difference toward changing an unjust system.

I am not ashamed to share my gospel experiences of love, faith and justice with others. Are you?

May we be inspired and moved to share the gospel as Paul did, and may our faith reveal our commitment to justice and love. Amen.