**Don’t Worry, Strive for Shalom**

Narrative Lectionary

August 18, 2019

Genesis 1: 1-5 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 6: 30-34

We are not alone, we live in God’s world,

We believe in God

Who has created and is creating

So begins the A New Creed, of The United Church of Canada written in 1968 as the creed for congregations in The United Church. It begins with an affirmation that God created and continues to create. In our scripture reading this morning, the first book of the Bible, Genesis begins with God creating out of a formless void and darkness. God did not dismiss the darkness because God dwells in the darkness as well as the light. It is all good, God declares. Somewhere along the way we have lost a sense of darkness being good as well as the light. What might it mean for us to shift our thinking to embrace the darkness as a good and not a bad thing? There are implications here that go beyond light and dark, but can speak to the issues of our time as we struggle with racism and a culture that is informed by belief system of white supremacy, that white is better than black, light is better than dark. Light and dark, night and day are the same to God and whether in the light or in the dark, God is with us, for God says it is good.

The first words of the chapter read in most translations: “In the beginning…”. However, when looking at the original Hebrew, it may be more accurately translated, ‘when God began to create’. This shifts things to a more dynamic context, and can indicate that creation continues. God cares for all creation, all creatures and elements. The grass is clothed, so will not God clothe us, as we hear in the Matthew reading. Then we are told do not worry. What does it mean not to worry? Is it possible to never worry? Can we actually let it go, stop or avoid it? We are told not to worry about what we will wear, what we will eat, or about what we have or don’t have. Letting go of these concerns, can enable us to focus on what God wants us to focus on – God’s kingdom, righteousness and justice. We are called to work with God to care for creation, and also as co-creators with God.

But letting go of worry and anxiety is easier said than done. We all carry anxiety and find ourselves worrying to some degree or other. Some of us more than others. We hear lately that there is more anxiety in our society these days than in the past. Yesterday I saw two articles that indicate how the level of anxiety has increased during this current U.S. presidency. This week there were news stories about the increased anxiety that students are experiencing as they enter into university, which can lead to drug use and suicide. What kind of things make you anxious or what do you find yourself worrying about? There is much we might be anxious about in our lives, the challenge is how to not let it rule our lives so we can do what we need to. Anxiety and worry is often about the “what-if’s”, dwelling on the bad things that could happen or might happen. This takes us away from the here and now. That is the gift of the birds and animals. They are always in the here and now so don’t worry about whether they will have food or be warm enough. They look after their needs as they come. So what can we do when we find ourselves drawn away from the here and now by worry or anxiety? A few weeks ago, I was talking with someone who was dealing with anxiety and the thoughts and worries they were dealing with. Anxiety and worry brings us into our head, which can take us out of our body and to be here, we need to get into our body. So I told them, when I notice the anxiety, I take a few deep breaths into their belly to bring myself back into the body and I invited them to do the same. I invite us all to take a moment to do this now. Breathe deeply into your belly, a few deep breathes. Feel the support of your feet on the floor, the chair holding your body. See if as you breathe, you can be aware of the aliveness in your body as you quiet your mind and open your heart. You may feel some tingling in your hands or feet. That is your energy, alive in you. I told them to continue the breathing until they feel more grounded and be aware of what they notice in their body. This brings more inner awareness to ourselves and what is going on around us now, so we can be attentive to it. What do you notice in your body as you breathe and come into yourself? Sometimes the anxiety is based on unfounded fears. How often do we check out if our fears are real? If they are real they are not longer a fear, it is something to be dealt with. Sometimes our anxiety it is about things that need to be done. If we can recognize that the fears are unfounded, this can help us to let go of the fear. If it is about things we need to do, we can acknowledge that it is something we need to work on, and make a mental note of a time when we will take time to look after it. In the meantime, worrying about it takes us away from what we need to focus on now.

The next part of the United Church Creed continues with:

Who has come in Jesus,

The word made flesh,

To reconcile and make new.

Matthew’s story of Jesus says: tells us “Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” We are to work for the Kingdom of God, the shalom community of God, and God’s righteousness and all these things will be given to us. This is work of reconciliation and making new that Jesus invites us into. If we can address and let go of our worry, then be present in the moment, we can invite God’s shalom community, the kingdom and righteousness. But what might that look like?

We invite God’s shalom community when we truly listen to one another;

We invite God’s shalom community when we live love with those we engage with;

We invite God’s shalom community when we show compassion to those in need;

We invite God’s shalom community when we see God in Christ in each person we meet and interact with;

We invite God’s shalom community when we support those who are grieving, lonely, or ill;

We invite God’s shalom community when we share our love and faith with others;

We invite God’s shalom community when we appreciate and care for the world around us;

We invite God’s shalom community when we care for the poor, the homeless, the unemployed and underemployed

We invite God’s shalom community when we open our hearts and communities to the refugees and asylum seekers;

We invite God’s shalom community when we seek justice for those who are powerless, abused, or voiceless;

We invite God’s shalom community when we stand up against systemic racism, and acknowledge the prevalence of white supremacy in our lives.

We invite God’s shalom community when we love our neighbour as we love ourselves;

We invite God’s shalom community when we recognize as co-creators, we work to create a just world of peace and reconciliation.

We invite God’s shalom community when we know that we are not alone, we live in God’s world.

May we celebrate God’s creation and God’s action in our lives, knowing it is good. May we learn to acknowledge, address and let go of our worries and anxiety that we can be present to all around us and work for the shalom community of God.

I began with the words of the United Church Creed and in closing invite us to stand or sit as you are able and say together the whole creed.

We are not alone,

we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
    the Word made flesh,
    to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
    by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
    our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.