**From Division to Wisdom and Servanthood**

**Narrative Lectionary Yr 2**

**October 27, 2019**

1 Kings 1-17; 25-29 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Mark 10: 42-45

This week we have seen and heard that we have a divided country, following the results of our federal election. We have a minority government that does not have any representation in the three prairie provinces. Some of us watching the live election results witnessed the three main leaders, giving speeches at the same time. Some reported that NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, spoke as if he were still campaigning and went on for far too long. That the Conservative leader Andrew Scheer presented his party as the government in waiting, saying he won the popular vote, when almost 70% of the country did not vote for them. Some thought the Liberal leader, Justin Trudeau who won as a minority government spoke as if he won a majority and a few days later said he is not willing to form a coalition government. Some reported that the leaders speaking all at the same time was unprecedented. Did it show a lack of respect for the other? I wasn’t sure what to think. I wonder how you experienced it all. What did you think about what you saw and heard? It seems it is a nation divided. How can we move forward with hope of them working together?

Israel had become a divided nation, after King Solomon turned away from God and worshiped other Gods. The division got worse when his son, King Rehoboam did not listen to the wisdom of the elders, for fear of seeming weak. Instead, he treated his people more harshly than his father, and created further division with the other King, Jeroboam, building two golden calves for people to worship in order to discourage them from going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. There is often value in the wisdom of elders.

The indigenous community recognizes this and holds their elders in high esteem, looking to them for wisdom, insight, stories that teach traditions and life lessons, and by passing on of traditional teachings. What would our lives and our world be like if we all honoured the wisdom of our elders and sought it out?

One message I have been hearing this week as well is that with regard to climate change, many believe that the indigenous communities are leaders in understanding the issues, the impact, and for caring the earth. I think climate activist Greta Thunberg has learned this also as I have noticed that all her gatherings start with providing opportunity for an indigenous person to speak and welcome us to the territory. While some may not think so, others believe that these young people calling for action around climate change are also sharing wisdom. While some may think it extreme, others see them as truth-tellers, naming the climate crisis as an emergency that needs action much sooner than our government systems are moving. The wisdom of youth can also be of value.

Combining the wisdom of youth and the wisdom of elders, may be even more powerful. There can be wisdom from both, it’s not just elders that have wisdom or just young people. It can be both-and. As Joel says, your sons and daughters shall prophecy and your old men shall dream, dreams and your young men see visions. The working together in listening and discerning can be a powerful tool of reconciliation and unity. If we are able to do so, maybe we could address the concerns of the divisions, as we work toward common solutions to the climate crisis, addressing the economic concerns as we work toward transitioning away from fossil fuels at the same time as providing economic opportunities and retraining for the workers who will be affected by such a transition. When we can gather inter-generationally we can learn much from each other as we share our experience, questions, insights and learnings together.

I have been blessed to have opportunities to work with groups of a variety of ages when planning multi-generational worship or events over the years. It is a rich and insightful experience as well as a profound experience of God working with and through us. We are planning an all ages worship for November 17 and I invite you consider joining a planning team for this service for an opportunity be blessed in the same way.

In the gospel reading, Jesus calls the disciples to account for asking him if they can lead with him on his right and left in glory. He tells them that whoever is to become great, must become like a servant and serve others. This was the wisdom of Solomon’s elders as well – if you serve people, they will serve you. This includes those we disagree with or even who are our enemies. At Craft-Study group this week, we were talking about communion, and receiving and serving with openness and grace. Some reflected on the situation of how they would feel about serving someone they deeply disagree with. Who might that be for you? What would you do? When the question was directed to me, could I serve them? I said, It wouldn’t be easy but that I would, for there is unknown grace in communion that we don’t know the impact or message it can provide both the person receiving and the one serving. God’s grace, God’s unconditional love is so much greater than my judgement.

This week I came across two examples of grace, of serving those who are on the other side in surprising ways. The first is of a mother caught in a protest in Lebanon in her car with her frightened toddler, and the response of the protesters – who started to sing Baby Shark. For those who are not parents or grandparents of young children you need to know that [Baby Shark](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqZsoesa55w) is a very popular song loved by children. The second is what happened when a Muslim woman playing soccer found her hijab falling off as she played and how the members of the opposing team responded, enabling her to fix her hijab. I invite you to watch these two videos. They give me some hope for humanity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C09DSJD8pek>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpKjSQ2StSI>

Serving others is an act of humility. Maybe that is what we need in our leadership and with one another. How do we be more humble in our leadership, in our lives, open to learning from one another? It may mean suspending that we are right and the other side is wrong. Is there a way to listen and be open to some perspective of both/and? Can we hear the fears and concerns that another side might have? What would happen if climate change activists truly heard the concerns of those who work in the oil industry who are probably afraid of losing their jobs? What would happen if oil industry workers could hear the concerns and ideas of what transitioning to alternative energy could look like, including offering retraining and new jobs to those workers. Is it possible? Can we try? We will only know by exploring with humility together the possibilities, with open hearts and minds, to open new doors. Can we encourage and pray that our leaders will be more open to working together, being servant of and working with those they are estranged from? It may be our only way forward toward uniting our divided communities.

As a community of Eastside, we are committed to working with and serving iIdigenous Christian Fellowship, ICF, through our breakfast program and INI Café. One of the blessings of these opportunities is that we work side by side with the members of the ICF community to serve together. As we do so, we build relationship and get to know one another. It is one form of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the work to bridge the divide, the division caused by the residential school program and colonization. Sometimes it is as simple as serving a meal together, or enjoying music together. On one level it is simple. On another level it is challenging as I know I sometimes feel nervous about engaging in conversation, knowing the history, because I think why would they want to talk to me. However, I also know it is because of the history that it is important for me to have those conversations and engagement, which confronts my stereotypes, assumptions, and experience. Through serving, we build community and unity, recognizing we are one, and that God is in each of us and that God is with us.

As we live in these divisive times, may we seek the wisdom that speaks to unity, service, love and compassion. May we be open to serving one another, especially those who are different from us, that love and justice, peace and compassion may prevail, and bring our leaders and us together.