

Vicar's Voice - Pentecost 2016

Being God's children in an inclusive and dynamic world.

Have you ever played the game post office? It's a game where you whisper something into the ear of the person beside you and then that person does the same to the next person. The message is passed all around the room and when it reaches the last person they state, out loud, the message as they heard it and the original person who whispered the message reads the message that was originally sent. At this point you compare the differences in the original and final messages. It's a kids' game and it's always a lot of fun!

We are now in the Pentecost season. It's a time when we talk about the ministry of Jesus and how it applied in the life of the people who followed him and how it applies to us. What do we gain from the ministry of Jesus and helping us understand God's expectation of us as we live our lives in 2016? Sometimes we make the assumption that the New Testament is a cookbook and that everything that we experience in our lives about Jesus was really the way it happened. We then try to literally interpret that and apply it to our own lives. The principles that we receive, we do indeed apply to our own time and place, however, there are things beyond the principles that Jesus taught, such as loving God, loving your neighbor and loving yourself, that we try to apply in our lives and we often use this application as a ruler to judge others. We often are afraid in times of change and then cling to the words of the Bible to protect us from our fear.

In Canada, at this time, we're seeing an application of the commandment to love and to care about our neighbor as the country has opened its door to refugees of diverse faith, opened its mind to the needs of First Nation Peoples around us and opened our sensibilities to the needs of people whose sexual orientation is very different than how we understand ourselves. It is a time of wondering, questioning and pushing our own historically received boundaries and understandings. How can I except change and still be a Christian? Am I being disloyal to my understanding of God that I gained through the New Testament? If I'm open to a pluralistic ever-changing society am I being disloyal to my faith? Some people will hurl at us the charge that we are no longer Christian but have become "secular humanist". Sometimes our friends just don't understand us and our faith expression.

Remember the little game mentioned at the beginning of this article. The New Testament that we have received is much like the game mentioned above. The events that people experienced with Jesus happened around the year 30 A.D. but the first writing down was based in memory after the church had begun its formation in about the year 50 A.D. about 25 years after the

church had formed. The first writings were letters that were received and somehow saved that Paul wrote to the little churches that were beginning to form. The first recounting of the acts of Jesus and Jesus teachings only started about the year 55 AD as the apostles were dying. Some scholars would say as late as 70 A.D. is a more realistic date for the first writing down of a gospel, the gospel of Mark. Therefore there is a 25 to 45 year block of time where what happened in the lives of people that were touched by Jesus was carried forward to a writing down time in a remembered tradition. There has been a lot of work done on memory and it is found that the memory is not always accurate. This is not to say that the events that are recorded did not happen but they probably did not happen in the literal way that they are recorded in the New Testament. There were marvelous, awesome things accomplished by Jesus and lives changed and people gained strength and ability and insight as a result of being touched by Jesus ministry but the events that are recorded are not necessarily literally true. The Spirit of the action was carried by the story, not the literal detail.

Why is this important for us now? It is important for us when we are in discussion with our friends who wonder about us as Anglicans. Why are we being so open to people who may not share our Christian faith, who may have a different understanding of their own identity than we do, or are different in some other way? We are a people of principle, of reason, of historic practice, of a church community experience which includes the Scripture which is a book that comes from the church experience and community. We understand that this spirit and the history that is contained within the mystical stories of Scripture is the essence of Scripture and what is important. The literal detail is not important to us but rather the Spirit which is carried within the scriptural historical record.

It is for this reason that the Anglican Church of Canada is an open community inviting people to come as they are, as we live out the Christian experience in the year 2016 in this season of Pentecost. This summer invite your friends, who are visiting with you, to come with you to church, and to come as they are, knowing that they will be accepted as they are, for we are all the children of God however we understand God our Creator. Happy summer!