
CMCL -- sermon from August 7, 2022

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Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster

CMCL Sermon: August 7, 2022

Marilou Adams

Genesis 15:1-6

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20

Luke 12:32-40

The lectionary. Know what that is? I didn't until I was in my 40s and working at the Parish Resource Center. I grew up in a non-liturgical (also a phrase I didn't understand—means specific orderliness and ritual—think any high church order of worship) tradition and then became a Mennonite which is also not particularly liturgical. The lectionary is a schedule of scripture readings developed a long time ago (actually the Jews developed this idea—it's that old) to help congregations literally stay on the same page. literally...

And I bring this up because when Marcy and Christy and Susan and I collaborated to plan worship, we looked at the scripture readings suggested by the lectionary (there were 6—and they are suggestions—you're supposed to just pick a few to be used during the service) and the first question was which ones are you gonna use? Needed to print them in the bulletin.

I said, "ohh, let's just use 'em all."

Later my husband, Ron, was gently questioning me about this preaching gig I'd volunteered for. He is a professional preacher, unlike me—I am not pastoral staff here. I am a director and thus not on the regular preaching rotation. And when I reported my response, he said, "hmmm, bold move" which coming from my non-directive husband means "probably not a good idea."

But I'm going with it and I'll tell you why: Now that I know about the lectionary, I love it. I simply love it.

Think about it...all over the world, people who want to follow Jesus are hearing the very same words. Starting Sat night and then throughout Sunday morning, Christians gather and listen to the same words that will be guiding them and niggling in the backs of their hearts all week long. They'll be dwelling on those same words, wrestling, questioning, being comforted by—words being said over and over and over all around the world—Ghana, Addis Ababa, Gujarat state, all of southeast Asia, Nagoya, Quito and Santa Marta and LaEsperanza, Lancaster, Odessa and Damascus—Christians from East to West, brothers and sisters/siblings—all related, hearing the same words. That's what the lectionary does

Makes my skin tingle, it really does. **Genesis 15:1-6**

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.' But the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.' He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

And that's us, you all. That's us. The uncountable stars in the sky. That's us. We are the descendants of Abraham, related throughout the ages to Abraham and Sarah and Naomi and Ruth and Lydia and Timothy and related, too, to those Christians in the places I named before, listening to the very same words we hear. That's us.

But, well..who are we? **Isaiah 1:1, 10-20**

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
Hear the word of the Lord,
you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!
What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams
and the fat of fed beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.

When you come to appear before me,
who asked this from your hand?

Trample my courts no more;
bringing offerings is futile;
incense is an abomination to me.

New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation—

I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity.

Your new moons and your appointed festivals
my soul hates;

they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.

When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,

I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings

from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,

learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

Come now, let us argue it out,
says the Lord:

though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;

though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;

but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Yikes. Hard words. Mean words—fed up, nauseated, useless. Yeah, we need to hear those words, too, because sometimes we are too proud and disobedient and too independent and ignorant. But let's, for now, focus on vs 16-18 (and if you had your Bibles to hand you could indeed focus) because here God outlines for us our work in this world, our work as those descendants related to each other: [Isaiah 1:16-18](#)

- Do good (cease to do evil)
- Search for justice
- Help the oppressed
- Protect the orphans
- Advocate for the widow

Those are pretty specific and pretty big and hard tasks. Each of us individually can not do those alone without our related ones, without The Church.

Here's more: **Luke 12:32-40**

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

'Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

'But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.'

More of our work outlined:

- Give money—be outrageously generous
- Think in the long term—value character and morals rather than physical things
- Prepare for the coming of Jesus

Notice that we are the household staff. Jesus doesn't say that the butler alone is waiting for him. There's an entire staff. This waiting and preparing isn't just left to one servant. All of us are expected to be there. And what are we doing? Hard things, you guys—really, really hard things.

Selling your stuff? Giving away money? Resisting the cultural air that we breathe to say no to violence and over-consumption? We can't do any of this individually. These jobs are too hard. We need the Related Ones, the countless stars in Abraham's sky, the Church, our denomination, this

particular congregation, our small groups/house churches to be able to do this work to which we have been called. These jobs are too big, too hard to do alone.

Just in the way that after having learned about the lectionary I grew to love it, in the same way I value and love Anabaptist theology for its Biblical understanding of community. Ron and I didn't grow up Mennonite. 'Matter of fact—little biographical information—I grew up at 1st Assembly of God right down the road on Columbia Ave—and further fun fact—that congregation started right here in this building, before selling it to a ballet studio and moving to their present location. We became Anabaptists as adults. It was a deliberate and calculated move. And because of all the thinking and praying and soul-searching that went into that shift, we really value the theology which drew us in. We believe that doing our theological work within and with the help of the community is the Biblical model. We resist the individualism of the West where one old white guy tells the rest of us how to interpret the Bible, what to think and how to behave. Anabaptists taught us that. They staked their lives on it—gathered and worshiped and served under threat. They knew that the gathered body was vitally important.

When our family was at East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church, the congregation was the last to sign on to the Council of Churches Community Gatherings program—a hot meal served every week night at some location in Lancaster City. ECS had Monday nights. I was the coordinator for outside participants (here again—ECS had a team of 4 to lead this program which was fulfilled by 6 cooperating congregations who each had teams of 6-20 who actually served food—can't do it alone) which meant Ron and I needed to be at the meetinghouse every Monday night all year round, even—well, especially —holidays. This started when our 2 kids were in elementary school and continued through their McCaskey yrs. It was important to us as a family to eat evening meals together—we didn't want them grabbing a PopTart from the box and eating alone in their rooms— so the kids came to the meals and ate not just with us, but with Ron the art collector and work crew organizer, Shirley and Jigs and Brandon and Big Larry and Ada—AND Tobin and Zack and Dylan and Myrna and Dirk and Emma and George and Dietrich and Eric—families from ECS who not only supported the program but supported our family and this value to eat together. Ron and I didn't get a whole lot of lip from our children being dragged to meals, but it sure was helpful to know those other families were there with kids their ages. And when our children got to HS and had to walk from McCaskey after school to ESC for the meal, they did it (not without complaint, I must say), because of the influence and support of these other families, these other members of our Jesus following community. This work, this being like Jesus, is too hard. We can't do it alone.

This congregation is going through currently. Pastor Susan was approached months ago by an offender who wants to attend services and in other ways

wants to be part of this fellowship. Saying yes to this request is really hard; there is potentially grave and lasting danger by saying yes. What to do? What to say? Pastor Susan immediately talked to Pastor Leslie and other staff and outside Christian consultants and Adam Miller. She convened groups so that we could discern together how to do this work. This is not a job for Pastor Susan alone. This is not a decision one person could possibly make. This is so Anabaptist—working out our theology together. Our early ancestors knew with their very lives how hard it was to resist the State. This is work we do together. We are not influenced solely by US law. We are not swayed by our culture of fear and hate. CMCL is wrestling together with members of our faith family, with the words of God, trying hard to listen together to each other and the voice of God. We don't, we can't do this alone. So we congregate, we come together. We gather, because our corporate life and our individual lives depend on it.

Oh oh—but I do want to point out: both the Genesis passage and the Luke passage start with “Fear not.”

Don't you just love that?

God coming to us time and time again—all through the Bible and the first thing God says in addressing us is, “Fear not.”

Abraham asks God this impossible question—I'm almost dead and have no heir that I'm happy with. And before Abraham even presents the dilemma, God says, “Fear not.”

Jesus is reassuring the disciples. Don't worry about life. God will care for you.

And then he says, “Fear not, Little Ones,” and goes on to tell them of the huge things he expects of them. But first—“Fear not.”

So I want to say those two words, too. “Fear not.”

And I want you to hear them, really hear them. Hold them in your hearts. Because what we as people who want to follow Jesus are expected to do is gonna be hard. We're asked to do things that are considered unimportant or stupid or personally harmful or ignorant or unimaginable. We are going to have to sacrifice. We are going to have to show up, gather together for work and worship, because we can not do this alone. Being part of this Jesus movement is not what I get out of it or how I am nurtured and cared for. It is about following Jesus in this very hard work, but together—gathered as those limitless stars in our ancestor Abram's sky, known and loved by God,

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