Sermon – **Holy Frustration: More-with-Less**

26 February 2017, 11:00am worship, 9:45 Sunday School

Nutana Park Mennonite Church

Contact: Susanne Guenther Loewen

Theme: green discipleship

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

Resources: Doris Janzen Longacre’s work

Malinda Berry on DJL

MCC scripture card – Mtt 22

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Good morning! I’m glad to be with you this morning and grateful to join your conversation on green discipleship. And I join you this morning also representing Mennonite Central Committee. You are dear friends and supporters of MCC’s work around the world, and we are most grateful for your gifts of time, and material resources and money. You are such strong participants in the planning and the experiencing of our annual Relief Sale and quilt auction; you donate to, volunteer at, and purchase items from, our thrift shops (which last year in SK provided 1 million dollars for MCC program around the world). Some of you make kits and blankets which when shared are very tangible reminders that people in very difficult circumstances are not forgotten, not entirely alone. Your commitment to refugee sponsorship is legendary. Truly. And your financial gifts are generous and oh so necessary as we are present in 54 countries alongside 528 church and community organizations, supporting activities that provide emergency assistance, reduce poverty and promote healthy communities, sustainable living and alternatives to violence.

I am humbled every day by this organic thing that is MCC, by the hundreds and thousands of souls that make it breathe with each gift, each action, each relationship, both here in Saskatchewan and then again in South Sudan and Rwanda, in Honduras and Guatemala, in Nepal and Cambodia, in Iraq and Syria, in so many beautiful and broken places on this earth.

Your focus on green discipleship is very important to MCC. For many years already, as folks in North America and elsewhere have been debating when and how climate change would impact us, the very poorest and vulnerable people in our world have been living with the effects of the already changing climate. Our programs in Africa and Asia don’t talk so much about prevention as they do about mitigation, about adapting activities and skills to mitigate the changes that are happening – where rainfall patterns are disappearing, seas are rising, floods are more devastating. The most vulnerable of the earth’s people, with the fewest resources, are bearing the weight of a changing climate.

So then, why did Eileen choose a scripture passage that doesn’t even have a river or a field in it? Love the Lord, love your neighbour. I invite you to stick with me, stay with me for a bit. In these last weeks you have heard four beautiful sermons about holy ground, the tree of life, covenants, and the teachings of the created world. You’ve covered the bible from Genesis to Revelation. So many rich and meaningful images. This morning, I invite us to read Matthew’s words in chapter 22 through these last four sermons. Let’s add the lens of a created, covenanted, alive world to our reading.

The Pharisees are trying to set Jesus up, trying to catch him. The Sadducees had attempted this just earlier with a question about the resurrection of the dead. So now the Pharisees have lined up their spokesperson, a lawyer – “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” And Jesus responds with the liturgy. Deuteronomy 6. Every Jewish person knows it. The Shema. “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength.” But Jesus doesn’t stop there … he adds another, from Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself, I am the Lord.” And, Jesus says this commandment is just like the other one, “Love the Lord your God.”

Jesus is riffing on the scripture. He’s identified the theme, the pattern, and then he brings in a variation that highlights, that enriches the theme. And this second one, which is the same as the first, “Love your neighbour,” shows up again and again – in Romans, Galations, First Corinthians, James. Love your neighbour, love God. Love God, love your neighbour. The two teachings inform each other. To love and be loved by God informs our loving in the neighbourhood. Our neighbours teach us about God.

After these last four weeks of sermons, we maybe want to add a bit more melody to the riff.

You shall love the Lord your God, Creator of Heaven and Earth and everything that moves upon the earth.

You shall love the Lord your God, the great Covenanter who invites careful tending of the land and compassion toward its people.

You shall love the Lord your God, who offers teachings through deeply rooted trees and flowing rivers.

You shall love the Lord your God, whose presence lives and breathes in creation.

You, creature of the earth, you shall love your creaturely neighbour as your creaturely self. You, creature of the earth, you are not separate from nature, not separate from creation, but are most incredibly and integrally part of creation. And you shall love your neighbour as your created self.

As Susanne said a month ago, “You shall live as if the earth matters and as if our bodies matter to God.”

As Patrick offered two weeks ago, “You shall extend respect, compassion and mindfulness towards the earth and its creatures.”

The way we live our creaturely lives on this created earth will speak with the greatest clarity about our love for God and for neighbour. And this is the Holy Frustration. We want to be good. We want to love God. We want to love our neighbour, here and afar. We want to be mindful of the limits of the earth’s resources. And we find ourselves, by birth or journey, in a wealthy society living beyond the earth’s capacity to replenish itself, contributing to the increased vulnerability of poor neighbours on lands far away from us. Holy Frustration.

If Mennonites had saints, I would be nominating … wait, do you nominate saints? … well, Mennonites would. I would be nominating Doris Janzen Longacre. I have long identified myself as a Doris Janzen Longacre Mennonite. I came of age as the More-with-Less cookbook, which Doris authored, was proliferating in Mennonite communities and beyond. When I was a student at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, I learned to cook and eat on an almost nonexistent budget thanks to Doris and the existence of lentils.

But let me back up just a bit. In the early 1970s a global food crisis erupted, threatening 500 million people with starvation. The annual meeting of MCC in 1974 (43 years ago) was held in the small town of Hillsboro, Kansas. Out of that meeting came the Resolution on World Food Crisis, a document which has become lore in MCC history and is now known as the Hillsboro Resolution. The Resolution outlined the global food context and then priorized 8 bold actions Here are 3 of them.

1. Call for much greater financial and material resources for development during the next ten years.
2. Attempt to constructively influence the public policy of the United States and Canada in regard to the use of Canadian and U.S. food supplies so that the poorer nations will share in whatever food resources are available.
3. (And in my mind, the boldest) In cooperation with constituent groups encourage each Mennonite and Brethren in Christ household to examine its lifestyle, particularly expenditure for food. A goal should be established to reduce consumption and expenditures by 10 percent and contribute this to meet food needs of others.(!!)

It was the Hillsboro Resolution that gave rise to the MCC Food Bank which later expanded to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and to the More-with-Less Cookbook, both of which have had tremendous effects far beyond the imaginations of their creators.

Doris Janzen Longacre and her husband Paul had worked with MCC in Vietnam and Indonesia and at a personal level were slightly horrified by the affluence and consumerism they experienced upon returning to the U.S. in the early 1970s. Doris had studied Home Economics at Goshen College and Theology at Goshen Biblical Seminary. She wanted to respond to the Holy Frustration that she identified among MCC constituents. The Holy Frustration of wanting to respond to hungry people and the groanings of the earth, and of feeling caught in cycles of consumption. And so, Doris Janzen Longacre started with what she knew – home economics, feeding families, running households, and she blended that with a prophetic witness and pastoral concern for her neighbours around the world. And the More-with-Less Cookbook was born. Doris focused her readers’ attention on the entire globe as a reminder that God does not live only in North America, that affluence is not a form of intelligence or spiritual wisdom. Doris wrote that “the best reason for listening to and learning from the poor is that this is one way God is revealed to us.”

Doris encouraged cooks to be theologians and ethicists. She gave us the tools to bring our global worldview into our daily living and eating. As she said, “We are looking for ways to live more simply and joyfully, ways that grow out of our tradition but take their shape from living faith and the demands of our hungry world.” While Doris might have induced guilt in some, she certainly attempted to put her emphasis on compassionate action, on joyful living. She died far too young, at age 39, while finishing the manuscript for Living more with Less, her sequel to the cookbook. More than 1 million copies of the More-with-Less Cookbook have been sold in these last 4 decades, gently reminding so many that our daily choices are, in ways seen and unseen, tied to the lives and lands of others, sometimes on the other side of the world.

I carry these three teachings from the life of Doris Janzen Longacre, and I think they are valuable for us decades later as we respond to our own Holy Frustration in the face of climate change and the groanings of creation.

First, we always need prophets. We don’t like them, but we always need them to push us out of our comfortable patterns and to question our well-worn justifications. We must be willing to look at ourselves and humbly understand our foolishness.

Second, let’s keep our focus on what we love – our God, our neighbour, our earth. Sometimes we become a bit shrill with each other in our zeal to act, and we start to sound like what we are attempting to resist. Doris reminded us to act out of joy and love.

And third, we need to make changes together. We need each other for courage and for accountability. We need covenanting communities to stick with the difficult work of questioning the powerful influences of consumerism and exploitation at work in us and around us. We need to worship together. We need the liturgy to remember that everything comes from God’s provision, that abundance is for sharing, that our value is defined not in production or consumption, but rather in our relationship with our Creator God and our creaturely neighbours.

Friends, courage and wisdom and oh so much love be with you. Amen.