

Shake It Off
Mark 6:1-13
13 June 2021
Sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae

Whenever I hear this gospel story, I am reminded of Malala. Remember her, the human rights activist who, when she was a young girl was shot in the face on her way to school, by the Taliban in Pakistan, simply because she went to school, and spoke out in favour of girls going to school? When I think of “prophets of our time” she always comes to mind. Willing to speak truth to power, to take risks, and willing to be an agent of change in our world. And she paid a price. Not only was she was shot, she also faced threats and continued terror in her hometown in the Swat Valley. Not by everyone of course. Many in Pakistan and throughout the world praised her, supported her and promised to protect her. But the Taliban responded with threats of a second assassination attempt. Malala and her family were forced to leave their home, assume new identities for a time in the UK.

But even after that, her activism continued; the calling on her heart, to speak out for girls about educational rights was so strong, she would not be stopped. Somehow she managed to shake off the

fear and threats and stay focused on her purpose, on her vision of a changed world. And in the face of the familiar, a young teenaged girl, the world saw the extraordinary, the unexpected, the world saw hope. People were encouraged, and change was born.

The people of Nazareth were unable to see the unexpected in the familiar, that day. Like many in our world today, they weren't prepared to see beyond their time and place. They may not have been happy with the ways things were, but at least they felt they understood the way things were. Encountering the divine, in someone as familiar to them as the carpenter's son, was something they were not prepared to do. Their understanding of their community was set, framed in a certain way and they did not want that changed. They became defensive, suspicious and unreceptive to the potential, to the mystery that was unfolding around them.

Like the people of Nazareth, I'm, sure that many of us have been unreceptive to the mystery that is God, unable or unwilling to recognize the divine, the active Spirit of God in our midst; because to do so would unsettle our understanding of things as we know them. We want to believe that God is active, we want to encounter the divine ... just not necessarily in our own backyard. It is one of the

great struggles of our faith life. As Christians we believe that God chose to come to us in Jesus, and we know that God remains with us, the Spirit moving in and through our lives. We profess to expect to experience God in our lives, but so often when we hear the stories of God's activity we feel distant from it, and truth is sometimes we want to be distant from it, because God's activity always stretches us, always challenges us, always changes us.

Always.

God is not a passive God, and so brushing shoulders with God will have an effect. When we encounter God we will never be able to look at the world the same way again. We will never look at those around us in the same way again. We will not be able to stay silent, look away, not care, when we see injustice. Our lives can no longer be just for us, when we encounter God.

And that is a good thing.

The way I see it is, when we can bear it, when we can bear to acknowledge those moments of clarity that bring goosebumps to our skin, those moments when we can release ourselves to the experience, to the love and the divinity around us, we must embrace them. Because in this world that is filled with uncertainty and constant

change, with fear, and hope and cruelty and love, those moments must become touchstones for us, reminders that God is here and active, in the ordinary and in the changing.

God is still here.

And God will work through us and change us and change our world. And that is ok.

Our gospel lesson today points to the good news that God is with us, amongst us, even when we can not see, or choose not to see. And it is a reminder to not give up: when we encounter negativity, when we are filled with fear, overwhelmed by situations in our world right now and when things feel their darkest, do not give up. Even Jesus, when he was rejected, when things seemed tough, did not simply walk away from Nazareth. He did not give up. He laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them, he brought about change even though the locals weren't willing to give him an inch. Even though his own people had rejected him, even though they not only lacked faith, but lacked the vision of how the world could be, the love and movement of God could not be stopped. It was never dependent on them. It is not dependent on the powers that be in our world today, either. God did not need the permission of the people

gathered there that day, and God still doesn't need permission to bring change to our world – to heal, and bring sight, to empower reconciliation and to bring hope.

And the rest of it – all that anger, and name calling, all the derision that so many spewed forth that day? Well, Jesus and the disciples just shook it off, and got back to their calling, knowing, expecting, that God would be in this. The power wasn't in the derision, the power was always in the love of God.

Power is always in the love of God.

In these days, we need to live with anxious expectation of the love of God breaking in. We need to remember that there is more going on than what we see, more than the fear and uncertainty, more than worry we hear on the news or on social media. We need to allow the mystery to become familiar and live into this sense of alertness and readiness that anything is possible. Imagine what would happen within ourselves and our communities if we *expected* to encounter God everyday? When we can do it, when we can come together with a unified vision and faith that we are not alone on this journey, when our communities, congregations live in a climate of expectancy and openness to the movement of the Spirit, when we

are open to the power of love in our world, we open ourselves to the new possibilities and new experience of the divine, of new life, in our world.

It's time to shake it off. Shake off all the stuff that is clouding your heart, your vision, shake of all the derision and the fear of change and fear of the future. It is time to shake it off, all of the injustices and the hate-filled words that are infecting our world.

Shake it off. All the stuff that is distracting us, so that we have the clarity and energy to do what needs to be done, to follow our calling, to bring our world more in line with the kingdom of God, to bring our lives more in line with where God calls us to be. Let's take comfort in the Good News that God's acts of grace and love are not dependent on us, not on our willingness to change or our ability to believe.

God's love and grace just is – it is with us in the everyday whether we are willing or whether we doubt, even when words of hate and acts of injustice seem in control – God's love has the power, and it is here for us.

When you come upon darkness, when you encounter negativity, shake it off. That doesn't mean ignore it or pretend it isn't there, the exact opposite in fact. It means looking it head on, but not

letting it stop you. It means focusing on the love and power of God and committing to following the call to seek justice and resist evil and proclaiming in all of our actions that Jesus, crucified, is Risen.

It means working toward the new life God promises and reflecting the hope Christ.

Shaking it off means not being distracted by darkness, but using our faith to light the path forward.

Shake it off. Focus on the love of God, and the call to reflect it. Because the love of God will change our world. Amen.