

Stories from the G20
Rev. Jim Cullen – July 4, 2010

A week has past since the meeting of the G8 in Huntsville and the G20 in Toronto. The news is full of stories about these meetings. At the outset, I think it is fair to say that when people meet face to face, get to know each other as persons, good things can happen. I hope that was the case. There are very few stories about what was accomplished.

On the other hand there are many stories about what happened outside the security zone. We learned about the Black Bloc – individuals who are against everything. They set out to destroy or damage anything that they despise – police cars, banks, even Starbucks. There are stories of how police worked hard to control unruly protesters. There are other stories about how police took their powers too far. In some cases, using powers they really did not have. There are stories about peaceful protestors – raising issues of poverty and homelessness. There are stories about others sitting on the street singing hymns and praying. There are stories about the hundreds who were arrested for cause or for being in the wrong place, at least according to the police. There are many people and many stories. These stories will be shared as the events turn in to history. The value of these stories comes from the lessons learned. Will governments learn that there are better places to hold such an event than inside a major city? Will leaders learn that most of the protestors have a message they need to hear? Will protestors learn that damaging property gains them nothing? Will police learn the difference between violent anarchists and peaceful protestor, even very vocal ones?

The gospel lesson this morning is a very special story. The first people to hear it would be first or second generation Christians who were beginning to reach out to the society around them.

It is the story of Jesus sending out 70 of his followers. He sent them out to the various villages ahead of his own arrival. He told them it would not be easy, *like lambs in the midst of wolves*. He said; *carry no purse, no bag, no sandals*. Travel light. If they welcome you stay and teach and heal. If you are not accepted, move on. Once again we see how one person connects to another – face to face – and connects them to Jesus.

The mission of the 70 went well. Many welcomed them. But certainly many did not. We have no way of knowing how many people were affected by the efforts of the 70. We don't know how many became the nucleus of the early church. They were part of the church before there was a church. The chapter goes on to tell about the 70 returning with either own stories. And that is how it all began.

From then to now we are connected by the generations before us. More than that, there have been specific individuals in each generation who connects us to Jesus' earthly life. While we normally think that it is God's spirit that connects us together, we are bonded together by some very human ties. It comes back to the telling and hearing of faith stories that shape who we are.

These ancient stories are still our stories. In the midst of G8s and G20s and the visit of The Queen we still need to hear the message that Jesus gave to the 70 – the message of love mercy, and justice.

We are caught in the middle of a very real power struggle. There is much about the corporate world that is to be despised – the times when greed and personal gain is all that matters, no matter who get hurt. This is where the Black Bloc has a point. We might even say that to an extent, they do the wrong thing but for a right reason.

There are a few thoughts that are tucked inside this story. Jesus says they will, at times, feel like a lamb among wolves. Have you ever felt like that? There are times when we have strong feelings about something, want to do something and find there is very little support or interest from others. The question becomes, why is there no interest, or ever hostility? Or am I on the wrong track? This dynamic is very prevalent in public meetings. People gather, usually to oppose something new – a development, a building, use of land – you know the kind of meeting. Often there is a lot of noise. Often at the end of it all there is nothing more than a room full of negativity. On a few occasion the challenge is valid and the results are beneficial. There will be times when we are lambs in the midst of wolves.

Another thought from Jesus' advice to the 70 – travel light. This is a short visit – take no purse or bags or sandals. The 70 have a choice – accept the hospitality of those who welcome you and move on when surrounded by those who don't care. Leave behind what gets in the way. If our baggage is holding us back, leave it at home.

The message for us is that the 70 were successful. They knew what they were doing, why they were doing it and they came back to Jesus saying "It went well." They did not let those who would discourage them stop them. They did not let those who were hostile or indifferent deter them.

Twenty centuries later, we have the same responsibility. Our society is somewhere between indifferent and hostile. We still have the mandate to teach and heal. Our teaching evolves from our understanding of how we live in God's world, how we relate to each other, how we make friends out of strangers. We have opportunities to heal, helping to make others and our society whole.

On another occasion Jesus summed this up by saying, *Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*. As a gathering of Christian peoples our strength is greater than the sum of what each of us has to offer. We challenge the powerful, are advocates for the vulnerable, care for creation and celebrate the presence of God in our lives and in our world.