

Re-Orienting the Change

Everyday I am surprised by the amount of information that I take in, through so many different mediums. Before noon, I'll have checked Facebook, Instagram, email, at least, and I don't think this is just because I'm young. This is how I get my information about the world. I hear about the most recent political updates, natural disasters, the church announcements, a new YouTube video and the latest eco-friendly products.

We are constantly being bombarded with causes and people that are seeking our attention, some maybe more worthwhile than others. These pieces of information fill up the moments in between. Our schedules are filled and lives are constantly becoming busier and busier, working for what we believe to be the good life. I constantly feel like I go from one activity to the next, promising myself that I'll take some time off once I've done one more thing. Going from school, to work, to lessons, to meetings. Taking care of children, parents, neighbours, friends, and ourselves if we're lucky. On top of the chaos of our everyday life, we hope that we are involved in something greater than ourselves and be active members of society seeking change in the world. By staying up to date with the latest news and disasters, hopefully we can be involved in the struggle to change, as is the theme for this Sunday, if we can find enough time in our busy schedules to change the world.

In light of the context of our world today, the passage in Matthew unsettles me. These three sayings of Jesus provide insight into how we should relate to wealth and possessions. We are instructed to not store up treasures on earth, as these are the things that are destroyed and are vulnerable to the realities of the world. Rather, we are instructed to consider where our hearts lie, as that is what the treasure truly is. Jesus continues to explain how the eye is the lamp of the body, so if it is healthy, the whole body will be filled with light. So in this case, if we look in a healthy direction, we are filled with light and vice versa. Jesus then gives a third wisdom saying that seem to summarize the previous two, that no one can serve both God and money. These passages call into question the priorities of the listeners. The ways of the world, of wealth and status, is not what God desires for God's followers.

These passages don't really give a lot of wiggle room on how we set our priorities. Jesus doesn't say that if our eye becomes unhealthy, we may not see as clearly as otherwise, but it will all be fine. That's not how it goes here. One cannot serve God and money. This implies that we can't divide our time between who it is that we serve, and God can't be limited to our Sunday mornings. But we have been invited to walk in the light, and fix our eyes on God. This is an invitation to live with a different set of priorities than those of the rest of the world. Choosing to live for more than wealth, status and possessions, viewing the world with an attitude of generosity and gratitude.

Though we claim to follow Christ, and strive to live lives governed by Jesus' teachings and example, we are inextricably connected to the world around us. We breathe the air of society, in how we relate to one another, and often, in what takes priority in our life. Though we all seek to live in the fullness of life, this often seems to come by filling our time as much as possible.

Volunteering, playing sports, work, family, friends, self-time, church committees, etc. The way we live is ordered, more than I would like to admit, by the patterns of society.

Our quest to live “the good life,” can too quickly lead us into habits that contribute to environmental degradation. We are pulled into patterns where we look for the quick alternative and the option that fits our time constraints: fast food, a plastic water bottle, dependency on fossil fuels. Though each of these habits stand on their own, they are a part of a way of life that is presented in fancy commercials and flashy advertisements. We are told that the good life comes when you have the newest, and cleanest and are the most accomplished.

In thinking of creation care, the struggle that is needed to change is bigger than caring about creation and acknowledging the reality of climate change. With the current state in the world and rapid changes occurring on the planet, the change that is needed is greater than adding creation care to a list of concerns. Becoming eco-friendly has become the hip thing to do. It is considered fashionable to buy sustainable clothing and go thrift shopping, to buy local foods and commute by bike (at least in some of the circles that I am in). And this is a good thing. These widespread movements and trends are effecting people who may not have thought to care otherwise, but these changes still tend to centre around the same priorities that govern society. These changes can be made to attain status or wealth, so will they last? And are the effects enough for widespread change?

I have begun to ask myself at times how the church has bought into these same habits. Often the Sunday morning church service becomes slotted into the weekly schedule. Your designated morning for God. I don't mean to point fingers or accuse, but acknowledge that it is easy for it all to become a part of the routine, and that worship cannot be scheduled or limited to a time or a place. Rather, the vision of Christ's kingdom must govern our lives.

So the question still remains; how do we shift our priorities?

To me, the passage in proverbs provides words of encouragement as we struggle to change. This passage begins by introducing Wisdom, who is standing at the city gate, making her voice heard. Wisdom has something to say, and does so by acknowledging her proximity to the creator. In the beginning, before the Creator spoke the world into being, Wisdom was there. And as creation grew, Wisdom delighted in all that had been created. Through Wisdom, the mysteries of creation are revealed and we can better understand God's will for the world in creation.

I believe that we must walk with Wisdom in order to struggle for change, and this wisdom invites us to delight in creation. The very act of pausing to take in the beauty of the created world, is a force for change. It is so easy to be caught up in all the struggles and pain of the world, that climate change and energy use becomes one more cause on the ever growing list for social activists. When we stop and take in the beauty of the world, we are actively choosing to seek the wisdom of creation, the wisdom that was there from the beginning. In this act, we fill ourselves with light, as we focus on what God is doing in the world. The struggle for

change is only possible when we can let go of our checklist of things that we need to do for change to happen, and hear the groaning of the earth. But at the same time, listen to the memories that are kept in the land and the generations of birth and death. The wisdom of the earth exceeds our own memory and time span, and reminds us that we are participating in a story that is larger than our own.

We must remain hopeful that God is with us, we must fix our eyes on God so that we will be filled with light, becoming empowered to live a life governed by the wisdom of the earth rather than the priorities of society. The media breeds an attitude of dissatisfaction, where we never have enough, can never do enough and are not enough. By re-orienting how we view our work and role in the process of change, we can begin to break out of this mindset. Mary Jo Leddy suggests that we chose to live with Radical Gratitude. This is the act of seeing that we are enough and choosing to see life as a gift, liberating us from the dissatisfaction on the world. We are reminded that we are joining in with God in the work of redeeming the world.

By changing our approach to change, the struggle changes its shape. Though there is still necessity and urgency involved, the fate of the world does not rest solely on our shoulders. By reorienting our lives towards God, it is through hope and prayer, that change becomes possible rather than an unreachable goal.

This change of posture is also more than just a mental re-ordering and sense of being good enough. This invites us to a place where it is not our possessions and achievements that give us worth. God invites us to a place where we can live simply and let go of the standards of society.

As we take the time to listen to the created world, it becomes an act of resistance, a part of the struggle for change. The earth carries the story of creation, of God inviting the world into being and saying it is good. As we struggle for change, the change must be rooted in a new way of life, that seeks an alternative to the chaos and consumerism of the world. We can seek a new way of living that comes from a commitment to God's kingdom and a deep love for God's creation. The act of riding your bike or eating local is then an action out of faithfulness and gratitude, rather than self-benefit. It is only when we take the time to hear the wisdom of our elders and pray for the wisdom of generations to come do we find ourselves closer to God's hope for the world.

This is the choice to live with resurrection hope, acting with the Spirit that is moving in creation.

I came across the poem *A Vision*, by Wendell Berry, while I was preparing to speak today. I hear these words as speaking to what life can look like when we take the time to embrace the wisdom of creation, to listen to the world, and begin to change the pace at which we live our lives.

To close, I want to invite you to listen to these words and consider this vision, and how we can live into it, as an act of everyday worship and participation in the struggle to change. How do we need to re-consider our priorities to get to this vision?

A Vision: Wendell Berry

If we will have the wisdom to survive
to stand like slow-growing trees on a ruined place,
Renewing it, enriching it,
If we will make our seasons welcome here,
Asking not too much of earth or heaven.

Then a long time after we are dead
the lives our lives prepare will live here,
Their houses strongly placed upon the valley sides,
Fields and gardens rich in the windows.
The river will run clear,
as we will never know it,
And over it, birdsong like a canopy.

On the levels of the hills will be green meadows,
Stock bells in noon shade.
On the steeps where greed and ignorance cut down the old forest,
An old forest will stand,
Its rich leaf-fall drifting on its roots.
The veins of forgotten springs will have opened.

Families will be singing in the fields.
In their voices they will hear a music risen out of the ground.
They will take nothing from the ground they will not return,
whatever the grief at parting.
Memory, native to this valley,
will spread over it like a grove,
and memory will grow into legend,
legend into song, song into sacrament.

The abundance of this place,
the songs of its people and its birds,
will be health and wisdom and indwelling light.
This is no paradise or dream.
Its hardship is its possibility.