

John Docherty, November 29, 2015

Freedom Bound : The path of justice

We're now in the first Sunday of Advent.

During this Advent season we'll be using the theme of Freedom to focus our thoughts and structure our worship services. The Leader resources from the Mennonite Church propose five thrusts to the next few Sundays : the overarching theme of "Freedom Bound" – then the specific approaches via

- The path of justice;
- the path of mercy;
- the path of trust;
- the path of love;
- and finally, on the Sunday after Christmas, the path of service.

All paths that will help us get to our destination : Freedom; Freedom in Christ.

The Leader magazine also suggests, and I quote : "... a concise and clearly focused sermon will contribute to the overall effectiveness of worship if it is shorter than usual ..."

How's that for a win/win scenario?

Less work for me, and less tedium for you.

It gets even better.

In the section of the gospel of Luke that precedes the passage we read earlier, Jesus says "... 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. ***So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance***; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict ..."

Yes! So all I'm being asked to do is get up and spout out whatever comes to mind.

And that's good, because the past couple of weeks have been a bit on the heavy side, what with the approaching arrival of Syrian refugees; a trip to Hamilton to participate in an MCEC seminar; travelling to Québec City to do a presentation on

trauma to military personnel who may / or may not be asked to accompany those Syrian refugees who may / or may not be housed at the Valcartier base north of the city.

But ... as I was revelling at the prospect of a light load this morning, I came across a reality check in a commentary on that passage in Luke with regard to the promise that God will “give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict”. The commentator, Leon Morris, has this to say “... This, of course, has nothing to do with sermons and lectures which the Christian must prepare as faithfully as anyone else ...”

I did look for other commentators who might contradict him, but ... no luck.

So ... I'm stuck with trying to bring you something worthwhile; something that fits this theme of being Freedom Bound, and, on this particular Sunday, being Freedom Bound on the path of justice.

As you well know, Christmas is my favourite celebration in the church calendar. It's a time of joy, excitement, anticipation.

It's a time when we allow ourselves to believe that there is, in fact, hope for this world; that anything is possible; and that “peace on earth and goodwill towards all” is not just a warm, fuzzy, seasonal greeting, but a declaration of faith that *this is* what God wants for the world.

But, in some ways, it's sometimes a bit difficult to think of “Justice” during the Christmas season. It's a happy time; a light-hearted time; a time to look forward to being with family and friends.

Who wants the downer of some melancholy scot putting them on a guilt trip about the need to be more just;
about taking on the injustices of the world;
about trying to set right things that we have little personal control over?

Who wants Advent visuals, however beautiful they might be, that include chains – objects that conjure up images of imprisonment, slavery, limitation, exclusion, weight, things that bind us ... ?

It's the *Christmas* season. It's a time of celebration.

Canadian tire has started selling its Christmas trees;
the malls have been playing Christmas music for a couple of weeks now;

Dollarama started selling Christmas decorations on November 1st already; and we'll be having our own Faspa celebration tonight in various homes, culminating in our traditional songfest at Joe and Mary Dean's.

So I'm going to cheat a little bit. I'm not going to speak about justice.

I'm going to speak, rather, about what just is, and I'm going to keep it short, as suggested by the Leader worship resources.

My skin is white. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My gender is male. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My sexual orientation is heterosexual. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My mother tongue is English. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

I'm almost 61 years old, and my hair is white with age. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My family of origin is currently composed of myself, 2 sisters, and an adopted brother. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My family of origin is also somewhat dysfunctional. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My right ear is pretty much dead. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

My left ear is also quite deaf. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

The country I live in is one of the richest countries in the world. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

The space I am occupying at this moment is on Mohawk territory. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

Syria is very far away from here. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

As is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the rest of Africa. It just is. And I am bound by that fact.

I have no control over any of these facts. They just are. And I am bound by them.

Some of them afford me privilege. I'm a white, heterosexual male of a certain age.

Some of them cause me pain. I don't hear well. I have my share of aches and pains. My parents are both gone, and my relationship with my siblings is complicated.

Some of them affect me in ways that make it difficult for me to speak with any integrity about certain subjects, because I am either too far removed physically or emotionally from the issue, or I am somehow complicit in the effects of what just is.

With regard to some of these facts, I am truly bound in the sense that I can do nothing about it. It just is.

My skin is white. My gender is male. My ear is deaf. I am almost 61 years old.

With regard to some of the other facts, I am truly bound, but I have some control over how I allow any of them to play out in my life.

My complicated relationship with my siblings is not woven into my DNA. I can work at my part in the dysfunctionality.

The fact that I live on Mohawk territory means I have some potential opportunity to acknowledge that fact and reach out to those whose roots here are much deeper than mine.

Syria, Congo, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Colombia are very far away, but not impossibly far ... and the travails visited upon the residents of those countries could be mitigated somewhat by the rich country in which I live.

As I said earlier in this meditation : Christmas is a time when we allow ourselves to believe that there is, in fact, hope for this world; that anything is possible; and that "peace on earth and goodwill towards all" is not just a warm, fuzzy, seasonal greeting, but a declaration of faith that *this is* what God wants for the world. It just is. And we are equally bound by *that* fact.