

Isaiah writes:

A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I say, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Two weeks ago at my Social Innovation course in Vancouver we played a game called The Lifeboat, which I mentioned last Sunday.

It isn't really a game although it has all the characteristics of one.

We sit around in a circle.

The teacher reads a set of instructions.

4 rocks are placed in the centre of the circle to symbolize a certain action.

In this case picking up a rock means choosing to die.

Each person gets their turn as we go around the circle, until finally, when all the stones are taken up, the game ends.

There aren't any winners or losers though some people think that not choosing death is the same as winning.

In other words they think staying alive means winning.

So why don't we give it a try?

Imagine that we're all in a lifeboat.

Only half of us can live which means half of us must die.

The reasons why don't matter.

All you need to know is that when it comes to your turn you can choose life or death.

It's that simple or that complicated.

Then you have to explain why you've chosen life or death.

The game keeps going until half of the people have chosen death.

Then it ends.

So let's start.

The first person in the circle is you.

It's your turn to either pick up one of the rocks sitting in the middle of the circle and die or not and live.

Which do you choose and why?

Don't think too much about it.

It's one or the other.

Anyone want to share what they chose and why?

Well the first four people in our circle of eight at the Social Innovation course chose life.

Many feel they haven't lived a full life, that there's still more to go.

One woman is pregnant and wants to see her baby come into the world.

It all makes a lot of sense.

That is until we get to person number five.

To everyone's surprise she picks up one of the rocks.

"I've lived a full life," she explains.

"I'm not that old but I've done enough and I'm ready to go. I'm ready to be at peace."

No one says anything.

It goes to the next person.

She also picks up a rock.

"I've always wondered what death is like. I don't want to kill myself or anything but I'm OK with dying," she says cradling the rock in her hand.

The next person chooses life for many of the same reasons that you might have chosen life: family, friends, the pain of letting go, the pain that others will feel, things that still need to be done.

When it comes to me I chose life for some of the reasons above but there's something tugging at me.

Something in me wants to pick up a rock.

I'm surprised.

Why do I want to die?

Round two.

So what do you chose this time?
Do you chose life or death and why?
Anyone?

Well not surprising the first four chose life again.

“I’m just not ready,” we hear over and over again, “There’s more to do.”

Yet there is a real sense of tension in their voices.

Then it comes to the two who choose death last time.

Instead of reflecting on what will be or what they have to do or what they might miss out on they say words like, “I feel a real sense of peace,” and “I feel for the rest of you as you struggle with all the things that are pulling you in different directions.”

Once again the desire to chose the rock washes over me.

I still have the feelings of loss and pain but there’s a deep sense that everything will be OK in the end.

When it comes to my turn I pick up a small brown rock.

Round three.

Where are you at?

Feeling any different about what you’ve chosen?

A change of heart in any way?

A sense of peace or a lot of tension?

Do you chose life or death?

Round four.

Round five.

Round six.

This is where it gets really interesting.

The tension in the lifeboat is thick.

Those of us who have chosen death continue to reflect on our lives but slowly there is a sense that we are being unchained from our past.

Those who are still alive are still struggling deeply with the question.
When it comes to my final turn something amazing happens.
I close my eyes as I explain to the group one more time what is happening
as I think about being dead.
I am above the world and I can see my family who is still alive.
Suddenly time begins to fast forward.
My parents grow older and older and finally are being buried.
Vanessa and my brother also get older along with the kids.
Soon they too are dead.
The earth begins to change in ways that I can't understand and then there
is nothing left for me to recognize, nothing left to hold me in that space.
It's in this moment that the sky opens up to me out into space.
Eternity begins rushing towards me.
I'm free in a way I've never felt before and in that eternity is a wideness
and love I've never known at any other point.

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Amen.