

VOICES from
CHARLOTTESVILLE

September 2017



CHICAGO
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INTRODUCTION

September 2017

As activists and preachers, as chaplains and educators, we are called to not stand idle in the midst of injustice. However, responding to the on-going atrocities of racism, anti-Semitism, and white supremacy are ever-exhausting. And while it is hard to find appropriate words during these times, we know many of the CTS community write, preach, and pray as public leaders. The contents of this document contain messages of hope and resistance in the days and weeks following the events of Charlottesville. May we find hope and inspiration in the words of each other, reminding us that we do not work for justice alone.

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BONNIE T. AMESQUITA
DEKALB, IL

"I Dreamed a Snake" describes a nightmare I had after watching the news. It's meant to describe the pain of gun violence, racial violence, and the threat of an oligarchic government.

I Dreamed a Snake

today a small child
afraid to go outside
sat watching cartoons
when a bullet shattered window glass
and found him

tonight people prayed
lit candles
carried cardboard signs of protest
their tears melted into rain
while crosses burned

tonight I dreamed a snake
caged in gold
was loosed upon the world
its jaws
unhinged

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PASTOR JASON W. COULTER '08 CHICAGO, IL

Walk Across the Waters, O Christ...

One: God of Grace, God of Glory, Jesus, Prince of Peace, we call upon you, to come to us in our moment of fear and trembling. We ask that you take us by the hand and lead us to safety;

Many: Walk across the waters, O Christ, and touch us with your peace.

One: Our world is broken, the earth cracked and shattered, and destruction lay all around. Our humanity is ruptured and relationships are torn asunder. We fail to recognize the face of our sister and brother and turn a blind eye to their suffering.

Many: Walk across the waters, O Christ, and reveal your kindness and mercy.

One: We live in a world where the color of skin or circumstances of birth can decide life or death. Where systems of injustice are built into our society and the scourge of racism rears its ugly head. Where ancient prejudices surface and hatred flows anew.

Many: Walk across the waters, O Christ, and demonstrate your vision of the Kingdom.

One: In our world, the greedy and entitled use their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of others, corruption runs rampant, and power is employed by the wealthy to exploit and oppress.

Many: Walk across the waters, O Christ, and impart your justice.

One: Across the nations, violence is too often the means by which problems are addressed. Fist, gun and bomb are the tools of the trades that traffic in death and destruction.

Many: Walk across the waters, O Christ, and share your peace.

One: Walk across the waters, O Christ. Touch us with your compassion and teach us with your truth.

Many: Hear our prayer, O God, for we know with you all things can be made new.

One: What is broken can be repaired, what is ruptured can be reconciled.

All: Inspire us to be your agents of change, working for justice and mercy and bringing healing to a world that needs it. Amen.

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REV. NATHAN DANNISON '09
KALAMAZOO, MI

Audio of Rev. Dannison's sermon, ***How to Get out of a Boat*** can be found online at:

<http://firstcongregationalkzoo.org/how-to-get-out-of-a-boat/>

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REV. EILEEN GEBBIE '12

AMES, IA

God is Other

MONSTERS

Our scripture is full of fantastic beasts, cataclysmic events, and magical/miraculous imagery: A talking snake in Genesis' Eden. A talking donkey in the book of Numbers. A whale that can swallow Jonah whole and then still spit him out. A flood that destroys the world. Ten plagues that free the slaves. An angel that balances Jesus atop the temple. Water becoming wine.

But the beasts and cataclysms and magic and miracles of the book of Revelation are so concentrated, they can sound so extreme, that today I'm mixing up the order of worship a bit by integrating Dan's reading of the scripture with my teaching/preaching on it. And thank you to Ben and Barbara for the sung preview.

But before we get to Revelation, let's get to its author: John of Patmos.

JOHN OF PATMOS

John of Patmos was a Jewish man from Jerusalem who at the time of his vision-writing, about 90 CE, was living on an island—Patmos—off the coasts of Turkey and Greece. As a Jew from Jerusalem writing in the year 90, this John may well have witnessed the final destruction of the Jewish temple in the year 70.

Remember that, for Jewish people during the temple period, the temple was the home of God on Earth, the nexus between this world and another. It was literally and materially an intersection between the sacred and the profane. And the Romans crushed it. The Romans closed the door.

In doing so, the Romans didn't just insult the Jewish people, they attacked God. Their destruction of the temple was not only aggressive warfare, but the height of sacrilege and blasphemy, too.

Imagine how we would feel if a foreign nation burned this house of God to the ground. Though we understand God to be everywhere, we still come to a particular place to practice that relationship. How bitter, how angry, how venomous might we feel toward those who took it from us?

John of Patmos leaves Jerusalem, possibly in exile, possibly as a refugee. But he cannot escape the violence of Rome. When John is on the mainland of Turkey, he is constantly confronted by celebrations of Rome's violence. He even has to look at a statue of the man who took the temple down.

Kind of like how Black and Native Americans have to look at statues of genocidal generals and



Presidents throughout the US.

John also has to contend with a culture that has come to revere the Roman emperors as divinities. Wasn't it enough for God to be taken away, now they have to put themselves in God's place? John is surrounded by insults to God and the hubris of rulers. He is a body under threat, a soul under attack.

And then he has a revelation.

REVELATION

John of Patmos is not unique in that sense. His revelation is much like those of Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel and dozens of others that did not make it into any "final" version of the Bible. Revelation, also known as apocalypse, was a style of prophecy and writing meant to make sense of history and give voice to what God might yet do. It has a lot of fire and makes use of Jewish numerology. Today you'll hear the number seven a lot: That is the number of perfection. And it involves being in an altered state.

SON OF MAN

At the beginning, John describes being "in the spirit" when he hears a trumpeting voice giving him instructions. On looking for the source of the voice, he sees the "Son of Man," a human-like being in radiant white with fiery eyes, surrounded by lampstands as in the now-demolished temple in Jerusalem.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.(Revelation 1.17–20)

So John of Patmos transcribes letters to seven churches on the mainland that are being led astray by false prophets and others who would have them assimilate and cooperate with the enemy empire. And then, as we heard Ben and Barb sing,

GOD

...I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! And the one seated there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around

the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. (4.1–7)

No one can see God and live. That's why Moses talks to a bush and Jacob wrestles with an angel. Likewise, John of Patmos can only describe the divine realm in analogy. He did not physically go to God, but spiritually. And when in that state, he experiences something like jewels, like crystal, creatures like a lion, ox, and eagle. Our minds and our language are only human, so John of Patmos relies on the creatures and beauties of his world to try to convey the varieties and beauties of divine presence.

The revelation continues:

SCROLLS

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." (5.1–8)

The contents of this scroll are so dangerous that none, not even the elders of God, will even try to break its perfect seal. But John of Patmos holds such hope for that scroll. He is desperate to know its news and so is left aggrieved, sobbing. A celestial elder reassures him. The elder reassures John of Patmos that there is still a messiah, an anointed one of a destroyed temple, a defeated nation, a withered line that will release the scroll's truth.

The intersection between God and humanity may have been ruined by Rome, but God will still find a way to redeem God's people.

LAMB

Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Here it is, here is the hope. And it is a deranged sheep. It is a grotesquerie of the imagination. A slaughtered lamb with seven eyes and seven horns standing up is a horror. Not Jesus the healer and teacher. Not the radiant son of Man who opened the gate at the beginning of the vision. But this thing, this hobbled, contrary to the natural order, abnormality itself.



I get that we can't really see God. I get that John of Patmos' inner eye had only the language of his life to work with. But I do not want to see this. I don't imagine any of you do, either. So why look any longer?

THE QUESTIONS

John of Patmos is terrified that the world, not just his world, but the whole world is coming to its true end at the hands of the power-mad, self-aggrandizing and self-deifying leaders of the Roman empire and the people who presume they are superior for having been born of that nation. Feel free to read as much as you like about our current situation into that. I'm not over-interpreting—it's all right there.

Like Job, like the author of Lamentations, like the authors of the Psalms, John is questioning why and where God is in the midst. We are asking the same questions today. Because the world has not, in John of Patmos' time or in our own, worked particularly well. Things get so bad on Earth, so familiarly, and tediously, and lethally bad because of humans and how we like to wield power.

GOD'S POWER

Thankfully, God's power is not like ours.

It does not accrue for the sake of the few. It is not oppressive. The Psalmist writes that God hates the lover of violence (Psalm 11.5). But sometimes the extremes of human power command so much of our attention that we need an equally extreme image to redirect our vision to God's truth.

Even though we may prefer to spend our time with buddy Jesus, radiant Jesus, even the crucified Jesus, the hope those Jesuses represent is easily diluted by familiarity and human power. The only reason the cross is our symbol rather than the butterfly and the bread is precisely because Jesus' execution was co-opted by the Roman empire.

This distorted lamb, on the other hand, is a graphic reminder of God's Otherness and just how different all of God's ways are from our own.

The answer John of Patmos receives to his whys of pain and wheres of God's power is an extension of the one Jesus gave before Rome crushed him: Among the weak there is strength. Among the humble, might.

John of Patmos' hope for salvation from a violent and abominable empire and every human being complicit with it is that divine paradox, the paradox of the divine. So is ours.

It doesn't always have to use John's language of monsters and mayhem—evil has those pretty well used up.



But as we look for hope, as we look for faithful corrections to unholy assertions of human power, take refuge not in denial, nor in self-righteousness, nor in defensiveness. Those are the shelters of empire and the foot soldiers of that empire.

Take refuge in the power that even in its weakest state is stronger than any state. Take refuge in a power as subversive as a butterfly and universally filling as bread. Take refuge in the God that is just beyond our vision, waiting for us to be angry enough, desperate enough, ready enough to act on that scroll of liberation.

AMEN

***Note from Rev. Gebbie:** I am indebted to Elaine Pagels' *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* as well as Amy-Jill Levine's *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* for this sermon.*

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REV. DR. ANA GOBLEDALE INDIANAPOLIS, IN

This prayer for Charlottesville arose from words shared in a reflection sent out to all Disciples from Terri Hord Owens, the newly elected (July 2017) General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) USA.

A prayer for Charlottesville, 1 John 4:20

God of Love,
our hearts break at the recent violence in Charlottesville
the loss of life,
the dishonoring of children of God,
the vile insults hurled
and the wounds of history reopened.
We pray for the family of Heather Heyer who died
and all the wounded.
We pray in praise of the peaceful demonstrators.
Guide our feet and minds that we do not take backward steps fueled by hatred.
Guide our mouths and hearts that we do not remain silent when the humanity of black persons is being
assaulted and terrorized.
Convict us anew to follow Christ's commandment.
Hold us to account.
"Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars;
for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen,
cannot love God whom they have not seen.
The commandment we have from him is this:
those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."*
Strengthen us to love one another as we love you.
With such love, we are compelled to stand for justice, and walk in peace.

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REV. BRUCE KITTLE '98

IOWA CITY, IA

Out from the Shadows

I seem to live, as most people I believe, caught up in a dynamic tension between the events going on in my own life verses the realities and events of the rest of the world. Its like one eye on what is happening in my own life and another on the rest of the world, starting with my community and including my state, nation, and then the world.

As one who believes in the importance of self-examination and awareness, I spend a fair amount of time looking inward, trying to understand myself and what is going within. Where am I now at this point in my life? What goals do I have? How will I move forward and work toward those goals? What lessons has the universe presented to me of late and am I getting the message? Where do I need to grow and how can I do that. Lots of questions with some responses and very few concrete answers.

When I look beyond myself to the rest of the world, and particularly to the events in the United States, I at times simply sit back and stare in disbelief. In some ways the progress and developments that have made just in my lifetime are amazing. This is especially true as it relates to technology, communications, science, and the like. Things seem to advance and change so fast it is a full time job just to keep up with it all.

But in other ways it seems as a culture and a country we are stuck or have even lost ground. I think back to my first jobs out of college and all of them had very good health insurance plans that were reasonably priced for us to add the family plan and decent co-pays and all of that. Looking back on all of that 30 years ago, I had in my head then that over time health insurance would just get better and better and easier to obtain and more affordable. But that is not what happened.

Over time it seems things got harder, less available, and more expensive. I am no social engineer or health care expert. I just know that the last time I transitioned between jobs I was faced with purchasing insurance from a private entity, not related to any employer, and it was difficult, expensive and not a great experience. In my work I meet clients regularly who have no access to health care beyond the state provided policy (and are grateful for that) and I see all of the difficulties they have without access to preventive and regular health care. I just thought over these many years things would have gotten better, not worse. But here we are.

Then there is all of the turmoil and angst over the events in Charlottesville and honestly I see the images and read and listen to all that went on and is going on and I am stunned. Not that in my heart of hearts I can't believe it is happening, because I can believe it. Over all my years I have consistently and



regularly been exposed to and rubbed up against racism and hatred and discrimination. It has been a steady and persistent presence in my life no matter where I have gone and no matter what I have

done. Not so much at me personally, but part of the air I breath, the water I swim in, the reality I exist in. I have seen it expressed and effectuated in so many ways over all these years. So I know it has not gone away or been eradicated, but rather, it simply had crawled into a deeper pit, gone underground, or stayed hidden. But I knew and have known that it is alive and well in our society.

But now that too seems to have changed. Now it is not so subtle. Now it is not hidden. Now it is not layered behind closed doors within a civil society and only expressed in ways that hide or mask what is truly going on and how people actually feel and believe about others. No, the hatred and discrimination and racism has found its voice and has been emboldened to speak and act out on all of their hatred and lies. The fire has been stoked and permission granted to step forward, to go public, and be proud.

On the one hand I am stunned at that as I look back on all that has happened in the world since the 60's and 70's to now. Like health insurance I thought it would get better, that it would improve, that we would be past all of that. I thought in my lifetime that people would learn to appreciate difference and diversity and that we would find ways to accept others and live together in peace. I thought and believed that we could find a way to respect all people no matter what the color of their skin, their religious beliefs, their sexual preferences. While some of that has gotten better in some ways, in so many ways it has not and the lies and hatred from years gone by have been taught to new generations and they are now more empowered and more bold about expressing that hatred then ever before.

While this is awful and wrong and unacceptable, I am also grateful that to the extent it exists it is being brought out of the shadows and into the light. Because it is very difficult to address what is hidden. But once out into the light and the masks are taken off and people say what they really mean and do so in public view, then we are able to confront it, to talk about it, to respond to it, and hopefully find ways to end it and begin to heal from it. But at this point we have such a long way to go.

So while I am not sure how we got to the point where those who believe in this kind of hatred and racism feel so free to publicly express it, I am actually relieved that they do. It forces a response and a discussion about the issues and gives me hope that this then is the beginning of the end for all of that. That this is the beginning of not only a healing, but an end to this kind of thought. No doubt we have lots of work to do and this will take much time and energy. But it feels like finally their boldness has now drawn into the conversation a much broader audience. It feels like the power and the voices of those who believe in diversity, in respect, in unity, and in acceptance have been awakened so that once united together, we can begin to move our country beyond this level of hate and discrimination.

I have no quick answers or solutions. Just like the health care issues our country faces the solutions to these issues are also complicated and entangled. But that does not give us reason to not act or to not speak out. As each person finds their voice and accepts responsibility for their own lives and actions,



we can move forward together. It just takes all of us to stand together, to speak together, and with love to say NO. To make clear that this is not OK and that we will not stand by and let this kind of evil and hatred dictate our future.

So much of our history, while it has racism and discrimination throughout all of it, also contains the lives and voices and stories of so many of our greatest leaders who gave their lives, talents and energies to overcome all of this and it is, I believe, upon each of us to carry that message forward and stand together against this attack. So that maybe in 30 more years our kids and their kids are not facing the same issues that not so long ago we felt were being addressed and taken care of. There is much to do but I believe that it is still within our grasp.

So I encourage you to join me, to take the journey within to see where your heart and consciousness lie on these issues and then go forward boldly. Speak from your heart. Live out these values in ways that others can see and model themselves after. And whatever you do please understand that silence is not ok in the face of the evil that currently walks amongst us. It has come out from the shadows and we must face it head on.

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REV. DR. KENT A. MEYER '82
LE SUEUR, MN

I was on a continuing education week last Sunday. I felt I needed to say something as senior pastor about Charlottesville and racism as sin. I sent the note copied below to our visitation pastor to be read to the congregation on Aug. 20th.

I want to say this as clearly as possible: racism is sin. I condemn the wanton display of racism in Charlottesville and the violence that followed.

Racism is idolatry -- it is the worship of skin color or racial heritage as a false god which demands the sacrifice of other races. The current practice of pandering to racist attitudes in order to gain political support is in itself sin. Such idolatry is incompatible with, in fact contradictory to, Christian faith.

As Christians, we must clearly reject racism and racist attitudes. They are the worship of a blood-thirsty false god! All people of all races are equally made in the image of God . . . period.

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REV. DR. F. RUSSELL MITMAN, JR. '95
COLLEGEVILLE, PA

Oral Ethics

“Jesus called the crowd together and said, ‘Pay attention and try to understand what I mean. The food that you put into your mouth doesn’t make you unclean and unfit to worship God. The bad words that come out of your mouth are what make you unclean. . . . Don’t you know that the food you put into your mouth goes into your stomach and then out of your body? But the words that come out of your mouth come from your heart. Out of your heart come evil thoughts, murder, unfaithfulness in marriage, vulgar deeds, stealing, telling lies, and insulting others. These are what make you unclean. Eating without washing your hands will not make you unfit to worship God.’” –Matthew 15:10-11, 17-20, Common English Bible

The lawyers issued a formal complaint against Jesus’ disciples: failure to wash hands before they ate. This had nothing to do with the kind of hand-washing of which mothers insist on with their kids--for washing away germs. Washing hands before eating was, and still is, a ritual requirement of the law. It is called in Hebrew, *netilat yadayim*, and the consequences of not doing so in the ancient Talmud were dire. At least an amount of water equal to the volume of one and a half large eggs is required to be poured over the hands before eating. Restaurants in Israel today have basins and running-faucet water for ritual hand-washing so that in eating the diner will not defile himself. The lawyers complained that Jesus’ disciples were defiling themselves by not washing their hands before eating.

Which prompted what Matthew recorded in the Gospel appointed for us today on the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: “ [Jesus] called the crowd to him and said to them, ‘Listen and understand: it is not what goes *into the mouth* that defiles a person, but it is what comes *out of the mouth* that defiles.” Jesus’ one-sentence description of what happens between what goes in one end of the alimentary canal and goes out the other end is quite graphic. And then he goes on, spelling out in detail: “But what comes *out of the mouth* proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, unfaithfulness in marriage, vulgar deeds, stealing, telling lies, and insulting others. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

“What goes out of the mouth comes from the heart,” Jesus says, and “heart” to all with ears to hear meant far more than a mechanical pump in the chest. “Heart” to Jesus and his hearers, is the seat of emotions, The heart is the place for sympathy, generosity, compassion, love and affection. the place for sympathy, generosity, compassion, love and affection. “Heart” also, as Jesus says, can be a place where evil resides: “evil thoughts, murder, unfaithfulness in marriage, vulgar deeds, stealing, telling lies,



and insulting others.” The “heart” is capable of both good and evil, love and hate, giving and taking, life and death.

What *is in* the heart only God knows. What *proceeds from* the heart and comes out of the mouth are words. What was in the heart of the Nazis and white nationalists as they paraded in Charlottesville last Saturday we can only speculate and only God can judge. What *came out* in words and actions were words and actions of hatred, bigotry, nationalism, and racism, the likes of which flash back to Adolph Hitler and his torch-lit rallies with crowds shouting and saluting, “Heil, Hitler!”, denunciations of the “*Lügenpresse*” (the “lying press,” or in the White House’s jargon, “fake news,” chants of “*Blut und Boden*,” or, in the English of those white supremacists in Charlottesville, “blood and soil,” swastikas that justified the annihilation of 6 million Jews and other “undesireables” and were emblazoned on the shields of those who had come to Charlottesville in combat gear to wage war. The only response must be condemnation by every elected official throughout the land, containment by any lawful means, and education, not denials, about the horrors of the Nazi genocide, so that not one more impressionable young man is drawn into the tentacles of hate. Silence is not acceptable. The Gospel will not be silenced. Otherwise, the church will be complicit in the forces of evil as it was when the German Protestant Church adopted the “Führer Principle” which was a claim that Hitler was “lord” over the German church and that its Christ and Christianity were uniquely Aryan. The opposition German Confessing Church went underground during the Hitlerian takeover. At the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau, three barracks out of thirty were used to hold clergy from 1938 to 1945. More than a third of the 2,720 pastors and priests imprisoned in these barracks in Dachau died there.

I have spent more than half a century of my life studying German language, history, and culture, and when I saw the footage of the torch-lit parade in Charlottesville, and heard what came out of the mouths of the paraders, chills went up and down my spine.

What is in the heart of our President and other officials only God can judge. What has come out of some of their mouths unfortunately reveals an unhealthy alliance with white nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the racism of the neo Nazis, the KKK, and other “alt-right” groups. A refusal to name what happened in Charlottesville as domestic terrorism and to denounce those who will continue to plan, organize, and lead such events amounts to a moral deficit in leadership. What has come from the mouth and the tweets of the President has begun to raise deep concern among a wide spectrum of leaders regardless of their political, social, professional, and religious affiliations—deep questions about what constitutes emotional stability and fitness for the highest office in the land. On Friday, the pastor of a New York City megachurch stepped down from President Trump’s evangelical advisory board. Pastor A. R. Bernard announced

on Friday that “it became obvious that there was a deepening conflict in values between myself and the administration.” Bernard said he “does not expect much from the President, but calls on his fellow religious leaders to speak out.” And, all across the religious spectrum religious leaders have been



speaking out, including leaders in the United Church of Christ and our own Conference Minister and President Bill Worley. That is a demonstration of what I am calling “oral ethics.” I wrote an email to Bill thanking him for words that give me courage to preach this sermon.

On the other side, a steely silence in public of those mouths that whisper in privacy is a recusal from the leadership ethics demanded in and by a democratic society. Words—or even the absence of words—matter. What is at stake is an erosion of the moral standards of a civil society in a world that is watching every mouth-ing and twittering of words. Words matter. The world is waiting anxiously for more signs of oral ethics—words that come from rules of behavior based on principles about what is *morally good and bad* and not from what is politically expedient and appeals to “the base.”

Listen again for the Word of God in Matthew’s gospel of Jesus’ words about: “what goes out of the mouth and comes from the heart . . . that defile a person: evil thoughts, murder, unfaithfulness in marriage, vulgar deeds, stealing, telling lies, and insulting others.” Folks, I didn’t choose those words of the Gospel reading for today. Those same words of Jesus are being read in churches across the ecumenical spectrum throughout the English-speaking world today. And, with those words Jesus is making his weekly walk knocking on doors, to use the imagery of Dietrich Bonhoeffer we encountered last week—with those words Jesus is making his weekly walk through this congregation and every assembly as the bible is opened and our words of worship are spoken and sung. Jesus is making his weekly walk among us and knocking on the doors of each one of us in both pew and pulpit and asking us: “What’s in *your* heart? And, what will proceed from *your* heart out of *your* mouth?” “Once to every man and nation,” James Russell Lowell wrote in his hymn—“Once to every human being and nation comes the moment to decide in the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side.

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REV. LINDA NOONAN '83
PHILADELPHIA, PA

Philly is Charlottesville: Unmasking White Supremacy in Philadelphia

One of the rallying cries of the white supremacists in Charlottesville was “You will not replace us.”

First of all, many of you and people like you with experience in public action have created much more savvy, witty, and rhythmically-compelling demonstration chants and songs. Poets, these guys are not.

More importantly, of course, is the intention behind this. White supremacists, not only in Charlottesville, but around the country in all its nooks and crannies, believe they are being sidelined and left behind. They believe that no matter what is happening in our economy or in the world, their skin color alone should protect them and insure that they always get the biggest slice of the pie.

This country was founded on the genocide of one people and the enslavement of another. Race was actually created as a way to divide and separate poor whites and immigrants from slaves and former slaves. Were they to band together in common cause, the wealthy elites would not have stood a chance.

Divide and conquer is the age-old strategy to insure that wealth and power remain concentrated in the hands of a few.

“You will not replace us,” they hollered at people of color, Muslims, LGBTQIA queer folk, and Jews.

I am here as a white, temporarily able-bodied (somewhat – my very new hip and I are still getting acquainted), bisexual cisgender woman, and Christian pastor. And I know this - each of us – every one of us in this room and in this country – is irreplaceable. All our religious traditions affirm that human beings are sacred, created in the image of the Holy. Each of us – no matter who we are – carries within us a divine spark. We are, all of us, irreplaceable.

In one of the most stunning stories in the Christian bible, Jesus shuts down an angry and vindictive group of people ready to stone to death someone in their community who has been deemed dispensable, replaceable, impure, someone who does not belong. He shuts it down.

When the President of the United States deems all Muslims a threat by preventing their entry into this country, *he throws another stone.*



When he does not express outrage at the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and holy ground, *he throws another stone.*

When he supports the takeover of sacred indigenous lands for corporate gain, *he throws another stone.*

When he cripples our nation's ability to protect our air and water and allows polluters to profit off the lives of those most vulnerable – people of color, the elderly, and the poor, *he throws another stone.*

When he renders trans people prepared to fight and die for the country they love a disruption and a burden, *he throws another stone.*

When he creates and allows policies and laws to be put in place that strip people of their rights, agency over their own bodies, and access to the things that help us all thrive, *he throws another stone.*

These stones have been thrown by the most powerful person on the planet, giving permission for all the little, angry guys to start throwing them as well. And people are dying.

Even if we ourselves are not in the line of fire because of the color of our skin, our gender identity, or our zip code, and we are caring, concerned bystanders – if we are not being hit by the stones thrown at others, we are not standing close enough to the ones at risk. If we're not being hit by the stones thrown at others We're not standing close enough.

If we're not being hit by the stones thrown at others, We're not standing close enough.

We are here tonight to stand close, to put our bodies in the way of the stones, to shield one another. To shield those at risk. To work for changes in policies and practices in our city and state that will protect all of us and bring us to a day when stones will be used for building up, not beating down.

The only way we can do that is to not allow ourselves to be divided. The biggest fake news story since the Europeans landed on the shores of this land is that some of us belong and some of us don't.

Every time those who seek to divide us are successful in convincing us that we belong and others don't, they win. *We won't let them win.* We won't be divided.

Tonight, we affirm together that we are one and that our differences only enhance the beauty of beloved community. *We won't let them win.* We won't be divided.

We commit ourselves to fighting for good education for all our kids, regardless of their zip code. *We won't let them win.* We won't be divided.



We will work to make living wages the norm for all, not the exception for a few. *We won't let them win.*
We won't be divided.

We will lean in on the criminal justice system in our city so that all will live free. *We won't let them win.*
We won't be divided.

And here and now, we celebrate that all of us – saints, sinners and suckers – are sacred and irreplaceable. *We won't let them win.* We won't be divided.

Amen.

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REV. CEDRIC EUGENE PEARSON '73
PERRYSBURG, OH



Until Trump resigns or is removed from office, the black streamers will fly with the Stars and Stripes to express the shame Trump brings to this country.

[\[BACK TO TOC\]](#)



REV. KWAME PITTS

CHICAGO, IL

Jesus Got Us Y'all:

A Sermon about Jesus standing with the Oppressed and Charlottesville

*Grace and peace,
To you,
My sisters and brothers
And siblings
In Christ
Regardless of the storms in our lives,
The Creator God has promised us,
We will never be alone,
And
Nothing can truly destroy us,
Because,
It is the Creator who gives us life,
And only the Creator
Who calls us,
Ultimately
To Life
Everlasting.
Amen
(pause)
I am so thankful,
To be among you,
My sisters and brothers in Christ
Today.
Especially in these times,
When the struggle to be authentic
In the wider expression of American Christianity,
As People of Color,
Has become more front
And Center
Than ever
Especially when we as Pastoral and faith
leaders
Are still fighting*

For our voices
To be HEARD
And still carrying the PTSD
Inherited from our Ancestors
Carried as a heavy burden
Morphing into this reality before us
Of fear.
(pause)
A couple of days ago,
My husband lamented his fears,
About the talk of global war.
I told him,
That I am more fearful,
Of the aspect of war unfolding
Right here,
Simply because our sacred bodies
Apparently are nothing more than eyesores
To those who are bowing and prostrating at the
altar
Of Racism.
I am more afraid,
Of someone attacking my family,
Simply because
We have gained rights
To breathe,
To exist,
To be.
Our rights
As a People
Are under threat
Of being stripped
By this Administration
who refuses to live out the public call,



to serve
protect
to make sure through the laws,
that we can live out life,
Liberation
And
Happiness
This Administration refuses
To be for the people,
regardless of who they are,
whom they love
or
how they celebrate
and worship the Creator
God
-who is the only one,
who has the power to blow sacred breath into
our being..
and only has that power to call us back to the
Light.
(pause)
We are struggling for survival,
And daresay,
We are fearful
Of our life
And the quality of life.
If we are honest,
We have spent nights weeping
Praying
Asking
God,
Where are you?
(pause)
I don't know about you,
But watching the events over the past 48 hours,
Have left me numb,
And fearful.
Now my prayer is,
Why God Why?
Why US?

God,
You tell us to follow you,
We attempt to root ourselves in faith
In the midst of over 500 years
Of exile
Of Abandonment
And then,
This old, old story
That we are unfortunately familiar
Unfolds before us
Facing down these legions of hate,
Is sadly
Nothing new.
(pause)
I don't know about you,
But experiencing the tragedies
Of Michael
Eric
Tamir
Travyon
The Charleston Nine
And Sandra;
Witnessing the horror
Of Ferguson
And now of Charlottesville
Knowing that our Elders
Are reliving
Emmitt Till,
Jim Crow
Economic boycotts
Voter suppression
Fire hoses,
Bricks
Bats
And dogs
Wells up fear.
Finds us,
Standing outside of that boat,
Calling to Jesus
Crying out of fear.

Even,
Questioning whether
If faith is enough.
*The institution of Christianity as we know it
Has become warped,
Disfigured
Soiled
So much so,
Why are we surprised
When people tell us,
They have lost their faith,
In Jesus
Why are we surprised,
When Christianity refuses to speak against
Racism
Oppression
Hatred
Bigotry
Brutality,
And people,
Just give up?
(pause)
When have you,
Lost your faith?
I'm being SERIOUS HERE,
When have we
Lost our faith?
(pause)
Or can we be completely honest,
In this open, sacred space
And declare that when LIFE has FAILED US
And we don't see evidence,
That God is indeed standing with the
oppressed,
We can't help it!
We flounder,
Like Peter in those rocky seas
(pause)
And can we admit to one another,
As sisters and brothers and siblings*

In Christ
That at one point,
Or even now,
We have lost our way
Without the condemnation
That easily flows from our lips?
Please do me a favor,
When your fellow sibling in Christ and in Faith,
Is fearful,
When they are scared
When life literally lands them at rock bottom
Don't respond,
"O you of little faith"
Because that is empty.
We really believe Jesus was condemning Peter,
But that's NOT what Jesus was doing,
Jesus does not condemn Peter,
Or us beloved.
I think Jesus was trying to get us focused,
On HIM!
(tell the story about the canoe tip test here)
(pause)
We have to remember
We cannot bury ourselves in fear.
We were given voices..
...to protest
to express our righteous anger
to share the Good News of Jesus Christ
That God indeed,
Stands with the oppressed
to speak life,
and justice
for
ALL.
That it is because we are marked,
With the sign of the CROSS
That can NEVER BE REMOVED
From us
That we are washed in waters of Baptism
That will never run dry

We were given a purpose,
 To be an example
 To continue the work that the Risen Christ
 Has given to us
 (pause)
 When we are afraid,
 Of going that first step,
 Or across a new path,
 That even though Jesus Christ,
 Is not physically here,
 He is here,
 In each one of us.
 Therefore we need to be vocal,
 and demand
 and publicly lodge our refusal
 for the annihilation of People,
 simply because they are held hostage
 by a cult and dictatorship
 in North Korea
 for the destruction of a People,
 Simply because they are tired of being tired,
 And demand their rights
 As Peoples of African Descent
 Of Latinx
 Of Native
 Of Asian
 Of Indigenous
 Of Aboriginal
 simply because the dominant culture here,
*is no longer "on top" of the socio-economic
 food chain*
 And for me,
 the Creator has promised
 that we will never be annihilated.
 (pause)
 But its hard,
 Just as Peter experienced
 In our Gospel this morning,
 That it is hard to keep focused
 On Jesus Christ,

And easier to cry out in fear,
 When you are staring down weapons
 While singing "Oh Freedom"
 When you are walking,
 Through streets which threaten us with death,
 While singing
 "I know one thing we did right,
 Was the day we started to fight,"
 While those who worship
 At the altars of supremacy
 Launch bottles filled with concrete
 At us, beloved
 When we strain our voices
 To scream out
 "No justice! No peace!"
 As a man in a car decides,
 Simply because our skin color
 Is wrong,
 Simply because we lock arms together,
 Is wrong
 Simply because we won't behave
 And assimilate,
 Is wrong
 Simply because
 WE LIVE AS GOD ORDAINED US,
 Is wrong
 Because of LOVE
 Because of our common humanity
 Mows us down,
 (pause)
 And even when our fears overtake us,
 And we are blinded
 And we give up
 And we doubt,
 JESUS
 STILL
 STANDS
 IN
 THE
 MIDST

AND
DECLARES
“IT IS !!!
DO NOT BE AFRAID!”
THAT,
Beloved
Is Good News!
And Jesus did not condemn Peter!
Jesus says
“HEY!
I AM RIGHT HERE
I GOT YOU!
CHILL!”
(pause)
We do horrible, violent things to one another,
and the Creator does weep,
But this place,
this Earth
is the Creator’s
Somehow,
the Creator will shut and lock those doors
leading to our destruction,

while we,
as People
as Humanity
still must learn
that we must STOP
Killing
Hurting
Abusing
one another.
I refuse to live in fear.
We,
refuse to live in fear
We will live out,
what the Creator has called us into.
Peace.
Mercy
and
Grace.

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REV. DR. SHARI PRESTEMON '93
MINNEAPOLIS, MN

*Pastoral Letter from the Conference Minister
The Work We're Called To*

My partners in faith:

In the wake of events in Bloomington, Minnesota and Charlottesville, Virginia, we in the Minnesota Conference must have moral and theological clarity. When we see a homemade bomb thrown through the window of an Islamic Center, when we watch a white supremacist, torch-wielding mob pummel others with clubs and shout “Jews will not replace us”, we are seeing evil personified. It is morally wrong. It is theologically offensive. We must resist this evil with everything in us.

These actions have been promulgated by those whose hatred against Muslims, Jews, immigrants, African Americans and all persons of color drives everything else in their lives. Their actions are rooted in their insistence on their own superiority as persons with white skin. They claim God is on their side, that somehow God’s love and blessings are shared with them alone.

That is theologically repugnant.

We know from the long narrative of holy scripture that the call of God in Jesus Christ is a call for justice, a call to expansive love, a call to honor the image of God in each beautifully diverse one we encounter, a call to humble service and abiding grace. God sets before us a vision of peace and justice and wholeness and fullness of life that we are called to embody fully, “on earth as it is in heaven”.

So we have work to do...

- ***The work of confession.*** Those of us who are white must confess our own complicity in our white privilege and the structures of racism that maintain it. We must acknowledge that our experience in the world is nothing like the experience of persons of color, and that the disparity between these experiences is sinful. We must confess that these latest events are merely the latest in a long history of racist violence and oppression in our nation, the effects of which are felt daily by persons of color.
- ***The work of theological discernment.*** Too often our discussion in these days becomes a purely political one, but our task as Church is to consider how our faith and what we know of God from our scriptures informs this moment and should shape our response. How can we prevent the message and purpose of God from being distorted and used as a weapon of those who hate?
- ***The work of witness and sanctuary.*** I borrow this from Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, the Dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary in New York. She wrote: “To be a sanctuary means that wherever we are present no one should feel diminished or unsafe because of who they are or are not.....Proactive witness means, in the least, calling out racism,



xenophobia and any other ism or bigotry for what it is...We must refuse to be silent until these systems and structures are dismantled.” (<https://btpbase.org/charlottesville-truth-america/>)

I am heartened by and sincerely grateful for all the ways so many of our churches, clergy, and lay leaders are already doing this work with creativity, commitment, and authentic faithfulness. I urge all of us, in every church and community, to engage this work fully and for the long, determined haul.

Preach. Protest. Pray with your words and your feet. Talk with your elected officials. Build relationships with persons of color in your neighborhood. Reach out to someone of another faith. Have authentic conversation about the difficult subjects. Advocate for policy change. Resist and persist. And examine scripture for wisdom in all of it. This is the discipleship our God of justice and peace calls us to every day. So let's get to it.

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REV. DR. CRAIG RENNEBOHM '70

NORDLAND, WA

The piece speaks both to the larger question of the American narrative, and to the issue of memorials. It is important to remember that many of the statues celebrating the confederacy came long after the Civil War, erected in the last century in times when the Klan, lynching, segregation and white supremacy was surging.

Contrast the “culture” of these confederacy memorials with the memorial policy of Germany around Nazism and the holocaust. No glorification of the Nazi leaders or even use of National Socialist symbols is permitted. Concentration camps stand as stark reminders to the horrors visited upon persons identified as Jews or Gypsies, developmentally disabled, mentally ill, homosexual or in any way considered to be inferior to the master race. The naked evil of white supremacy and slavery should be addressed in this country with the same clear-eyed resolve to insure that racism will no longer and never again be tolerated here.

Robert E Lee and I share 19 January as a birthday and a slaveholding family ancestry. Any of us who have benefited from the sinfulness of servitude, all of us who carry in our personal economic, social, cultural and political history the DNA of white supremacy and privilege have obligation, duty, responsibility, prompting and calling to repent of the traditional American narrative and live a new revolutionary story – that this was a land stolen from its inhabitants, commercially colonized, built with the forced and exploited labor of slaves, indentured servants, migrants and workers kept in the lowest and meanest of conditions, a land still very much learning what it means for all to be equal and all to be free.

Me and Robert E. Lee

statues to generals
help us not to remember
peoples cattled and sklavened
causes of war
the virulent creed

statues to generals
help us forget
the suffering of soldiers
the trauma come after
a sword in the lead.

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REV. JENNIFER SANDERS '16 BIRMINGHAM, AL

A Time for Troubling: A Sermon for Charlottesville

The great priest and peace activist Daniel Berrigan writes that 1 Kings (among other books in the Hebrew Bible) offers us “a diagnosis of the pathology of power. ”What then is the role of the prophet mired in the pathology of power, residing in a bloody land that worships idols?

Berrigan lifts up the idea that “Prophecy [is] speaking loud and clear, interpreting, warning and blessing, praising goodness and denouncing evil in high places and low.” The prophetic role is rare in the conflict-laden, harsh world of the books of Kings, this theological review of empire and its mistakes, written much later to explain the rise and the fall and the rise and the free-fall of Israelite faith and culture. In the passage we read to day, we walk straight into the work of the prophet Elijah. He has condemned the idol worship of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel and those who follow them – and now they are coming after him.

It is no easy task to go against the grain of the culture. Prophets are summoned to speak into the hard spaces. Ahab calls Elijah “the troubler of Israel.” Elijah is indeed that, for the Israel of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel needed to be troubled. They broke the covenant established with God and served other gods and their own indulgences. The Israel of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel needed to be troubled and Elijah was quite effective at the task.

America needs to be troubled. In 1967, one our of modern Elijahs, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr described the problem of the United States as 3-fold – racism, militarism, and capitalism. To look at the events of this week is to see that this is still the case.

We glorify in our national swagger, substituting rash rhetoric for the hard and patient work of diplomacy and coexistence on the global stage. We adopt toxic masculinity as a foreign policy strategy. We revel in American exceptionalism, as if our lives matter more than the lives of others around the globe.

We’ve been doing it for centuries – this is not about any one leader or any one era of government – but we see it with harsh, stark clarity right now.

Some people act like nuclear war and intervention in other countries is a game we’re entitled to play. We dedicate our spending and our brightest minds to developing the technologies of war rather than the methodologies of peace.

As for capitalism, well, we live in a system dedicated to adding to the wealth of the 1% by exploiting the earth to sell the lure of happiness to the rest of us.



I can tell you this for sure. When more than a 100 people – family and neighbors and friends – gathered from all over New York and all over the country this week to celebrate the life of my mother-in-law, they didn't come because of how much cool stuff this 97-year-old, working class, immigrant Jewish woman had.

And that's a good thing because most of the items in her apartment had been around for decades, simple, durable everyday items.

No, people came and told stories and shared plates of food and countless hugs because of who she was and what she meant to them. They came because of her enduring kindness, her commitment to showing up, her humor, and her practical wisdom. They came because of her hospitality and her generosity of spirit. They came because she loved them and she showed it. They didn't come because of her stuff.

We all need adequate shelter and nourishing food and decent medical care and enriching education and meaningful work and opportunities to grow and learn. We need healthy, sustaining relationships born of spiritual and emotional maturity – and we need to continually work on ourselves to reach that place of spiritual and emotional equilibrium. We wear our scars and hopefully learn from the things that put them there.

We don't need to strip the heart of public service and public lands in the name of privatization and private enrichment. We don't need every electronic gizmo, every trinket, every latest thing, every seductive experience of consumption.

But capitalism will tell you that you do. It will tell you that you need to worship the so-called free market; that unscrupulous economic power brokers are the heroes of our society; that the earth is ours to consume; that greed is good; and that the poor are poor because there's something wrong with them – not because we have a system that is built at its very core on violently maintaining inequality among human beings and on the rape of the earth. It cares nothing for your well-being – and it teaches you that the well-being of others comes at your expense. It lies about our fundamental interdependence as human beings and as a planet.

We worship the wrong gods. As Dr. King observes, modern society kneels at the altar of militarism and material accumulation and racism.

Let's talk about the racism part for a moment –

The horrifying, revolting displays of white supremacy in Charlottesville Friday night and Saturday were certainly dramatic in their boldness.



Yet at heart they are nothing new. White supremacy and both systemic and individual racism are the founding cornerstones of this country. Let us not forget that it is a historical phenomenon, rooted from the earliest years of conquest and nation-building on the bloodied backs of native and African peoples and sustained through the centuries by dehumanization codified in law, policy, and culture.

But it is not only a historical relic. It is the reality of here and now. White supremacy comes not only with tiki torches and nazi salutes and ridiculous false claims about the persecution of whiteness.

White supremacy is enshrined every day in our systems of mass incarceration, voter suppression, environmental degradation, political gerrymandering, tax codes that overwhelmingly work to the advantage of the affluent, inadequate education, militarized policing, and stereotyped media images. I could keep going. Anyone want to add anything?

White supremacy is a sin against God, the God who made us all in God's own image. Dehumanization, whether located in systems or in individual hearts, is sacrilege. It is wickedness. It is in direct contradiction to the teachings of Jesus, that we are to see the face of Jesus in the marginalized.

Because we are daily soaked in our culture's white supremacy, we white folks must daily do the work of confronting it in ourselves and in those around us. We must continually extract reinforced racism from our own souls and our own minds as well as in speaking back to it among our circles of family, friends, and acquaintances.

Does that sound like a lot of work? Well, people of color have to do the work of dealing with the brutal violence and the spirit corrosion of white supremacy ALL THE TIME. They don't get to walk away from it – so, if we genuinely believe in the teachings of the Gospel and we genuinely care for our neighbor, we don't get to walk away from it either.

That brings us back around to our passage from 1 Kings. Elijah's trying to walk away from the work that God has called him to do. With echoes back to Moses and ahead to Jesus, he's been wandering in the wilderness for 40 days and nights and now he's taken refuge in a cave at Mount Horeb. He's trying to hide out from his calling, but God finds him there.

Can you imagine Elijah standing there at the base of the mountain, standing through a wind so strong it split rocks and an earthquake and a fire? And then silence?

And Elijah hears God in the silence – and there is no mistaking that Elijah must do what he is called to do. There may be rest for the prophet. There may be wandering in the wilderness for the prophet. But when the time comes, if you are listening, you have to show up. You have to confront the forces of idolatry, the forces of exploitation and dehumanization, those that worship power and privilege and money at the expense of the image of God we see in all who live and breathe and all that forms the earth.



We have work to do – and the call on us in this time is to set ourselves to dismantling all forms of oppression across difference, for these dishonor the image of God found in the face of our neighbor.

How do you do that work in your own life? How do you live in such a way that people will remember you for something besides cool toys? How do you show up for people who need you? How do you build community rather than undermine it? How do you hold your own self accountable and keep your focus on the work that needs to be done? How do you keep learning and growing?

I began with some words by Father Daniel Berrigan and I'll end with more – “Let a prayer arise out of the void opening by these pages: Grant us knowledge of our crimes. Help us take our true bearings in the world, to confess how rarely, in public life and private, in religion and statecraft, in temple and marketplace and home – how rarely authority is joined with virtue. Grant us knowledge of our plight, that we may cry out for relief, and be drawn forth.”

Amen.

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REV. JASON CARSON WILSON '16 WASHINGTON, DC

This sermon was preached on Aug. 20, 2017 at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, Washington, D.C. in response to rising tide of racial unrest. This message sprung out of my reading of Psalm 133.

Jagged Journey to Unity

Living together with our kindred in unity wouldn't be good and pleasant--it would be heavenly. Living together with our kindred in unity, taking a page from my Catholic siblings, is right and just. Equality and true acceptance are essential ingredients for unity. Unity cannot come with conditions. But, in this nation, which has benefitted from White supremacy from Day One, unity does come with caveats. One definition of unity is widely accepted. The absence of diversity; unvaried or uniform character. This definition rivals the meaning of cult. Dismissing diversity makes discounting the trials and tribulation of underrepresented people easier. Let's keep it real, it makes it easier to dismiss and ignore the oppressed. Oppression and racism was no secret before Charlottesville. Well, it wasn't a secret to us. But, plenty of fellow Americans put it out of sight and out of mind. Our reminders were/are often met with calls to "get over it." Interestingly, people, who haven't gotten over losing the Civil War, often shout that the loudest. The balm of Gilead may soothe sin-sick souls. Confederate statues both soothe certain Southerners still seething from succumbing to northern aggression. Propaganda has furthered the false notion that acknowledging oppression and racism is divisive. Um, no. Pointing out that we're all God's children and should treat each other as such isn't actually divisive. It's only divisive to those who can't handle the truth.

The aforementioned strain of unity sounds great on paper. But, it forces some people to become like Peter. Some of us must deny ourselves, in order to unify. In denying ourselves, we sin against God. Why? How? So, speaking out against oppression is a spiritual practice. I've no doubt that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King believed that during his prophetic journey. He took that journey, enriched, energized and refreshed by seven of spiritual practices, according to patheos.com. They include:

Meditate daily on the life and teachings of Jesus

Many people like to think meditating on Jesus' life and teachings is solely meant to channel our meek and mild side. It's meant to perpetuate the myth about Jesus' passive personality, who let himself be crucified. Um, no, he was proactive character, who knew his assignment: Challenge the Empire. King did the same thing. Let's be clear. I'm clear King isn't Jesus. But, the Montgomery Bus System was a symbol of the Empire. King's repudiation of the Vietnam War--as well as materialism, militarism and



racism--challenged more than one Empire. His daily meditations allowed King to put Jesus' life experience and life lessons into practice. His commitment to nonviolence arose from guidance from gay civil rights icon and angelic troublemaker Bayard Rustin. Of course, those lessons didn't exclusively center around agitation. They also focused on healing, peace and love. King certainly strived to live in the manner of love.

Live in the manner of love

King described how lived in the manner of love during a Nov. 17, 1957 sermon titled, "Loving Your Enemies," which he preached at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Incidentally, he preached a similar message at the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University just a week earlier.

"The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil. . . . and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love."

If we read this quote carefully, it seems having power doesn't necessarily mean you have strength. The man currently occupying the White House has power. However, he doesn't have the ability or inclination to cut off the chain, chain, chains of hate and evil. According to King, that's a sign of weakness. I would agree. Spreading love throughout the universe is equally challenging, since he doles out love and respect dictated by his "personal" legislation that mirrors criminal justice and immigration policy stances. Well, wasn't that sentence diplomatic. What I meant to say was, "He's racist."

Pray daily to be used by God

While God uses Trump's evil ways for his glory--inspiring actual unity--King prayed daily for God to use him. God did, indeed, use him. Of course, God used him in more effectively than man ever used him. God didn't use the media to water down his "I Have A Dream" speech, in order to perpetuate White supremacy. God didn't create a faux "good cop/bad cop" dynamic between King and Malcolm X, encouraging the Black community to be good little Black boys and girls. Thankfully, how God used King overshadows how men used have used him.

Sacrifice personal wishes

Ministry is a fulfilling and inspiring calling. But, it not easy. One of my personal wishes is that my abilities wouldn't be questioned and devalued. But, Critique and scrutiny are occupational hazards for ministers. Wait! They're occupational hazards for journalists too. I should've gotten used to them during my 20-year career. With that said, straight White male ministers face less of those occupational hazards than women, LGBTQIA and same-gender loving clergy. We sacrifice our personal wishes to be affirmed and supported, in many spaces, to answer God's call. Because Jesus came to the Earth in human flesh, there were times when he wanted affirmation and support. Queer theologian Jason Carson Wilson describes Jesus as a transdivinitive figure. So, how is he transdivinitive? And, what's transdivinity? Transdivinity is the process during which Jesus transitioned from divinity to humanity through birth. To be clear, I'm using "transiti on&rdquo ; how it's generally used within the context of the Black church. In



other words, Jesus transitioned to Earth upon birth and transition to Heaven (divinity) upon ascension. So, technically, Jesus was trans and an outcast. But, he was also a Black man killed by the Roman authorities. So, he sacrificed his personal wish--in a moment of human-like fear--to avoid dying on the cross. King knowingly risked and--ultimately sacrificed--his personal wish to see whether his children grow up to enjoy a post-racial America. Oops, that's not his wish...that's my dream. Working to realize his dream was King's regular service to others. Working to realize my dream--creating a world of love and equality--is my regular service to others.

Perform regular service for others

What can do I do? You ask. You don't need to be Jesus, King or me to perform meaningful service to others. In this America of unhooded Klan members, loud and proud homophobes and violent isolationists, channeling an Open & Affirming spirit and sharing it with everyone is the best regular service you can do for others. The Beatles could sing all we need is love, because they enjoy White privilege. So, people of color, LGBTQ people and same-gender loving people need more than love. We need just policies and advocates to fight for them. We need community and allies to support us. Love is what we need. But, it's not the only thing we need. Love wins is a great slogan. But, the reality is that love without works does not win. Love without works manifests itself as lip service to the notion of peace and unity. In other words, love without works is superficial. Jesus is love. Jesus is love--with works. Meditating on that idea and other concepts is one way to remain in good spiritual health. Exercising is another way to by cherish God's creation. Holding on to animosity, though easy to do, does a number on your health. So, one should pray for the oppressor, while you pray for peace and strength.

Pray for the oppressor

Pray for the oppressor?! Whatchu talkin' bout, Willis....I mean Rev. Wilson? Listening to 45 inspires my use of particularly expressive language. So, praying for that oppressor--or any oppressor--is difficult. But, we must have faith that God will open their ears to hear and their eyes to see. Difficulty seeing plagues our nation. Well, actually, it has nothing to do with difficulty seeing. It has everything to do with refusing to see. Refusing to see the oppressor's handiwork is at the root of the demonization of the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright.

"The United States of America government, when it came to treating her citizens of Indian descent fairly, she failed. She put them on reservations. When it came to treating her citizens of Japanese decent fairly, she failed. She put them in internment prison camps. When it came to treating her citizens of African descent fairly, America failed. The government put them in chains. She put them on slave quarters, put them on auction blocks, put them in cotton fields, put them in inferior schools, put them in sub-standard housing, put them in scientific experiments, put them in the lowest paying jobs, put them outside the equal protection of the law, kept them out of their racist bastions of higher education, and locked them into positions of hopelessness and helplessness. The government gives them the drugs,



builds bigger prisons, passes a three strike law, and then wants us to sing God Bless America...no, no, no.”

The government has also failed our undocumented siblings. Interesting how the original “illegal immigrants” are all about legal immigration. This allegedly Christian nation’s government has also failed LGBTQ and same-gender loving people, because the Bible says...um, the Bible says nothing specific. God and Jesus said plenty and were quite specific about many things...just not about who you should love. The words put in their mouth have been the foundation of homophobia used to create a political capital to sustains a heteronormative White supremacist paradigm. Let’s not forget, twisting the story of Ham facilitated the justification of slavery. So, God damn America for misusing the Word of God. It has caused death, destruction and division. We must reject these machinations, if we want to discover “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” Amen.

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Audio of Rev. Winters' sermon, ***Scrolls, Seals, and the Lamb***, can be found online at:

<http://www.loveandjustice.org/?sermons=scrolls-seals-and-the-lamb&fref=gc>

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