

Reuniting
Preached by
Rev. Dr. Linda D. Even
United Church of Fayetteville
Sunday, June 26, 2022

Hebrew Scripture *Psalm 105:1-5*

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.
Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.
Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered.

Epistle Reading *Second Corinthians 5:6-6:2*

I will not be reading the gospel text indicated in our bulletin. I have chosen another reading for our consideration this morning –Second Corinthians 5:6-6:2. Let us listen together.

⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ⁶As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Sermon *Reuniting*

As you may have guessed from the change in our New Testament reading, today’s sermon will not be the one I intended to preach this morning. I threw that one out yesterday morning. This is a sermon unlike any I have ever preached, the reasons for which will become evident. I have twice before tossed a sermon at the relative last minute due to exigent circumstances. I evaluate such occasions cautiously, and when possible, take some time to reflect before addressing them. The exigent circumstances this week are the recently announced Supreme Court decisions—specifically those addressing gun control and *Roe vs. Wade*. While next week, 4th of July weekend, would also have been an appropriate time, this weekend I found I could not reflect on anything else.

Insofar as is possible I will attempt to distinguish personal perspective from professional theological education and experience. As for all of us, those things are often interwoven, so, in advance, I beg your forgiveness for lapses in that effort.

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With regard to gun control, I personally know and respect people who possess guns for sport shooting and hunting, as well as those who are law enforcement officers and members of the military, who use their weapons safely and responsibly and have never used or even been accused of using those weapons for other than for the reasons for which they were issued or purchased.

At the same time, I am horrified by the gun violence in our nation and the epidemic of mass shootings with weapons being used for reasons far from their purpose, appropriate venue and in the hands of folks who, for many reasons, should not have access to weapons. When the mass shooting in Sandy Hook occurred, I called a friend/church member. She hadn't seen the news yet, but I was crying so hard she thought I had lost a loved one in the shooting. I haven't cried that hard since, but I do cry and I do lay awake at night.

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With regard to Roe vs. Wade, I have pastored women *and* couples who made anguished, thoughtful, prayerful decisions not to have an abortion or to have one. Obviously, I can't share all the ramifications, situations, circumstances, gifts and limits impacting those decisions. I can tell you, every one of those people was pro-life.

We may and do both agree and disagree on these issues and all the nuances of personal experience, limitations, opportunities, justice, the meaning and value of life and when it begins, control over one's own body and personal freedom which also results in the capacity to wipe out the lives of dozens of people in minutes.

For both of these issues and many others, any one of us can find a scriptural reference—at least one—that in part, inform our perspectives.

My psychic paralysis, if you will, is a result of my inability to hold those Supreme Court decisions in balance or find some coherence between them in the valuing of life, personal freedom and community welfare. My psychic paralysis is a result of my horror at seeing fellow citizens cheering at the weeping grief of others. My psychic paralysis is a result of my own grief and near despair of a nation whose citizens have formed into camps where, not only don't they have the capacity to speak to one another, they don't even want to. My psychic paralysis is a result of the fact that every discussion now seems to be about winning or losing, rather than listening, finding common ground and building community. I am grieved because those conversations aren't about recognizing that being different isn't about being better, worse, smarter, kinder or more faithful; those conversations aren't about understanding the different nuclear family experience, opportunity, education, and faiths that flesh out the diverse human family God has created. Instead, the purpose of conversation seems to be about drawing lines in the sand, dividing people, not drawing them together, and are about finding justification for separating ourselves from people with whom we disagree. I am not even sure those are conversations. There is no life in that model. Whether among or within nations, cold wars are no less deadly than hot wars—we just die different deaths.

This I don't know: How we allowed ourselves to come to this impasse.

This I do know: We are called to provide for the respect, dignity and safety of all whom God has created.

This I don't know: The specific answers to the divisive issues which drive and keep us apart and disrupt our civic lives and ultimately lead to death.

This I do know: No single person, group or perspective can prevail for the health of all.

This I don't know: The means by which what we need to do will be accomplished.

This I do know: We are called to the upbuilding of the human community. We are not to respond to violence with violence; hatred with hatred; the diminishment of human beings by diminishing others—not even those with whom we disagree.

This I don't know: Who shall take the lead in reuniting us for the benefit of life and health for all.

This I do know: We are called to a ministry of reconciliation among people and with our God. If not us, then who?

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Most holy God:

We are confused. We are angry. We are uncertain. We are grieving.

Our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is in you. We wait in silence. Give us a word, we pray.

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The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day, our daily bread.

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,**

**for thine is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.**