

Blessing from the Margins

We record our weekly worship on Thursdays.

This means that any news-making stories
that happen from then until Sunday
aren't always addressed in our prayers or the sermon.

And in the same way
when something newsworthy happens on the weekend
before (what used to be) a "normal" Sunday sermon,
my prepared thoughts get tossed out the window.

That's what happened Wednesday evening,
with the news of protesters storming the Capitol building.
I can only speak for myself when I say
I was filled with fear and with sorrow
-when I learned elected leaders and staff had to shelter in place,
hiding under desks.
-when I heard one woman died of gunshot wounds,
and many others were injured.
I've continued to be fearful.
And I've continued to pray.

Because prayer is so grounding for me,
I sent out an invitation to all of you
to join in the prayers that night.
Some saw that invitation as too political...
and I'm sorry it was received in that way.
I saw it as a demonstration of our wider church's immediate
concern for all –
for those who felt the need to act in violence,
for those affected directly by those acts,
and for our all in our nation.

In these days following, I simply invite you to continue to pray.
Trust in the God who was willing to come to earth
and walk beside us to guide the way ahead.
Remember the Jesus who knew it was as important
to love our neighbor as much as God and ourselves.
And that meant getting to know each other.
To listen beyond the angry words we will hear -
To remember anger is often born out of fear
and disillusionment and a sense of being disenfranchised.
To do our best to understand what motivates each of our actions.
To BE a neighbor to one another, even, especially when our
neighbor might want nothing to do with us.

In so being, and doing, we take little steps forward toward healing, and finding common ground upon which to build our future.

On Thursday morning I thought I would also have to toss out the scriptures that were selected for Sunday. How could a story of creation and John the baptizer have anything to say to how a whole nation of people, from all walks of life, are thinking and feeling today? I kept our texts...because I saw their meaning in a new light. And this is what I saw:

When John was calling for repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins, people from all walks of life responded. For some it was an obligation of faith to confess and be washed clean.

I think, others responded to John because they wanted be ready for “the one who will come after...” Still others, even those not of the Jewish faith, went as well, whether out of curiosity or a desire to start fresh. John set the stage for what lay ahead.

What is incredible it that John’s call

got a response from everyone...
the privileged and the not-so privileged.
And all of them left their homes –
some comfortable and safe -
some not so much –
and went out to the edge of the wilderness.
On the margins of Jerusalem,
in the waters of the Jordan,
something new and hopeful began.
They were standing on common ground
and in expectation of the coming of Jesus.

Jesus came then to John and placed himself
on humanity's common ground to be baptized as well.
Jesus cared for us even as the creator cared
when humanity was created in God's image.
Jesus recognized the spark of the Creator who sent him
in the heart of each one of us is.
Which is why he taught that it is as important
to love our neighbor as much as God and ourselves.

Remember all of those different people who went
and received a blessing on the margins?

Picture something similar with all the beautiful diversity of humankind of today.

That movement John began

demonstrated it is possible to do as Jesus does.

He was seeking to break the bonds of prejudice and exclusionism.

He is helping us understand that being a neighbor means to “give everyone a chance to show you who they really are.”

Not just a select few,

not just those who agree with us

not just those who look or think like us,

not just those of our ethnic background or religious belief.

John prepared people for something hopeful that lay ahead.

Jesus took it the rest of the way, all of the way.

Jesus is working now, amid the confusion and chaos and fear, to help us take our first steps into what lies ahead.

May we take a moment today, to remember that we, too, have been baptized into Christ, into his work, his compassion, and into Jesus’ deep reliance on his and our Creator.

We, too, are part of something utterly mysterious –

the deep abiding love of God who holds us close,

and gives each of the tools and the heart for the journey ahead.

Continue to seek out broad analysis and news reports.
There will be much work that lies ahead for all of us.