



First Lesson: Acts 2:1-21

Gospel Lesson: John 7: 37-39

Sermon Series: Where is the Good News?: Finding the Good News in less than ideal circumstances

Sermon Title: “Where is the Good News?: Pentecost!”

Sunday May 31, 2020

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We are concluding our “Where is the Good News? Series; Finding the Good News in less than ideal circumstances and this week our word of focus is Pentecost.

And I need to be honest and say that this week, in light of all that is occurring in the world, it is getting very difficult to find the good news; at least for me; as I would suspect many of you if you have been tuned into the affairs of the world.

Mainly because of the two new trending racial incidents that are trending both on social media and the news; and one local issue of racism right here in Lincoln NE.

The first incident; the gut wrenching death of George Floyd in which I first got wind of on social media before the video was able to be edited down for news purposes....

And I tell you the frustration and anger coming from the Minnesota community, as they helplessly witnessed the police man bear ;what looked to be most of if not all of his weight on that man’s neck;

while the victim cried out; “I can’t breathe; along with crying out for his mama seconds later I believe twice; before his body eventually stopped fighting—it was unbearable to watch; not to mention we learn that it was not just one cop pinning him down at the neck but a total of three policemen pinning him down, where the first video’s angle did not reveal; Another video with a different angle came out revealing this. All of this even though he was already handcuffed.... also I saw all videos now and it is apparent that George Floyd did not resist arrest; psychologist viewing the tape even said that George Floyd called the police men sir at the beginning of the resist; one of the onlookers on the street who couldn’t see that he was pinned down initially encouraged Mr. Floyd to stand up. Mr. Floyd’s response on the tape was “ I am trying, but they won’t let me up!”and I wonder why they didn’t just put George Floyd in the police car?

I also wonder how can black mommas and dads teach their black children in the event of being stopped by the police to not resist the police and they will be ok; when this is not even true now?

How do we keep our black children safe now?

The true revelation regarding George Floyd’s mom that I just learned is that she passed away roughly 2 years ago. I wonder could she have been there in spirit to aid her son as he was transitioning on?

And did I mention that he was already handcuffed?

Did I mention that it seemed to me as if every time a citizen begged for the police to stop, it seemed as if more pressure was applied to his neck? Did I also mention that for me, that this was the most gut wrenching, agonizing 10 minutes or so video that I ever witnessed in my life?

If one could believe it, there was something in my

opinion even more agonizing and even more disturbing with this video than the Ahmaud Arbery video; where he was gunned down like an animal....and both were extremely difficult to watch! The second incident was of a woman by the name of Amy Cooper and her dog in Central Park who was off leash.

An avid bird watcher by the name of Christian Cooper came across the woman and her dog and Christian Cooper asked the woman to put her dog on a leash as it was the park law.

Matters escalated quickly and because of incidents like Ahmaud Arbery, Christian Cooper who is African American, knew the value of recording the interaction which happened to prove to be a life-giving measure and a smart measure for him to take;

Because suddenly Amy Cooper threatens to call the police and say that an "African-American man is threatening my life" before dialing 911 to deliver on her promise; all which was clearly false per the video.

Ironically, the only real threat that came to the dog was the owner's unwillingness to place the dog on a proper leash along with the owner literally strangling the dog in the midst of her fury.

And so the racial tension builds on this case for a number of reasons;

Number one, this woman who I am convinced knew the system well; knew that by stating the man's race would get immediate results;

People of color in addition to others who are racially aware in particular, realized that this woman's actions could have ended catastrophically for Christian Cooper;

Some would even suggest that such a call could

have ended in a George Floyd outcome for Christian Cooper;

However in light of all of this, there is still a portion of the society who seemed to have expressed more concern and outrage over the dog being strangled than the man himself.

For some, when it was even explained why what Amy Cooper did was so harmful to the African American man; the response from some was , “He was fine...”

Christian Cooper was fine!

The third racial incident Locally; graffiti has been painted on trees near the northern edge of Wilderness Park... some with swastikas painted on; the most recent swastika was painted in one of Lincoln's bike paths.

And so church this and more is what leads me to say the following as your spiritual leader....I am tired....no scratch that; I am sick and tired...I am angry.... I am perplexed...I am heartbroken that this type of racial profiling, hatred and senseless discrimination and execution of people based off of their race keeps happening.

And yes the cops in the Minnesota situation has been terminated and so far one out of four of them are charged;

And yes Amy Cooper has been terminated from her job and turned in her dog to the shelter in which she adopted it from;

And yes I have heard the theory that Amy Cooper was justifiably afraid because when Christian Cooper reached into his bag to offer the dog a snack, it could have been a weapon from her perspective...

And yes I suppose that Christian Cooper is physically fine; but emotionally and mentally I would

beg to differ and say that **he is not fine...**

And yes there are riots occurring in Minnesota as we speak; riots that have burned up businesses and police stations and more; not just in Minnesota but throughout the US; riots even breaking out in Lincoln where Metro PCS and EZ go gas station were impacted at around 27th and O.

And so no I am definitely not condoning riots; I am saddened that business owners are negatively impacted; although I do wholeheartedly support peaceful protests;

But I will say even in all of the theories and pushback and what ifs and other contortions that could be made to over explain the intentions behind the actions of these individuals, that in my book there is no explanation for the level of harm that was caused...

It was wrong;

And a man unnecessarily lost his life as a result;

And another man may never view his hobby of birdwatching the same again;

Not to mention the other long list of victims of black and brown; women and men who list their lives senselessly just devastates next to no end:

So I understand the outrage;

And I stand with all of those who expresses the sentiment that all of this; all of it needs to stop.....

this systemic racism needs to STOP!

In fact as I segue us into our first lesson and gospel this morning; I believe that as we look closer at Pentecost and its significance; I believe that there is an embedded word that will echo all that I have shared and more;

For as I place these scriptural texts in the world today; church family I believe there is an implied call to action for cases that not just focuses on racial

crime and hatred, but it also addresses everything that our reconciling statement that we support says and more!

And to refresh our memories concerning the statement of belief as a church; our mission is to be a reconciling church that seeks to be inclusive to all persons regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation.

In other words as we adopt John Wesley; our founder's ethos to do no harm, do good and stay in love with God; we are saying that whomever is being done harm to; our missional purpose and charge is to denounce those incidents where harm is being done and affirm those who have been harmed as being just as vital and just as valued in not just the eyes of God, but in our own hearts;

For like the Ubuntu philosophy I have shared in the past; the term essentially means "humanity." It is often translated as "I am because we are," or "humanity towards others,"

And so with this philosophy, if one part of our community hurts, we all hurt.

So for those who may not always understand all of the nuances of some of these cases I have raised and more and the hurt that some of these communities may be experiencing; my suggestion is to **just air on the side** of love and you and I can do wrong.

Just air on the side of compassion; and the response of God will follow;

Just air on the side of empathy and think what it would be like if it were your son or your husband or your uncle or your grandpa and then perhaps the story that might seem so indifferent and insignificant to some of us; might start to matter a little more;

And our gospel invites us all to **just air on the side** of the Holy Spirit who will teach us how to respond to others out of love and mutual respect for one another.

And what will happen when we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us is like John 7: 38 reveals; *Rivers of Living water will flow from within all of us*; because we are all striving to be anchored in the One who provides that living water...Jesus!

You see what is happening in today's time in all of its divisiveness that is not just contained in matters of race; but matters of government and politics, economy, religion and pretty much humanity as a whole; I am convinced does not have to be this way.

Looking at our First Lesson that describes what many of us call the Upper Room proves this.

Because in our First Lesson, there is an embedded statement being made I believe by God;

That not only can people from different backgrounds, beliefs and racial ethnicities be in one room, but they can be in harmony too.

For in that room the Word says that they are all together in one place;

And as I place this story in my own biblical imagination and words; the Word tells us that there were pious Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem.

And what was going on in that room drew them all our to hear...

Because all of a sudden the disciples began to speak Fifteen different nations.

And this church consisted of Gentile proselytes to the Jewish faith, *God-fearers* (Gentiles who worshipped the God of the Jews but who did not subscribe to the Jewish ceremonials),

It consisted of Jews of the *Diaspora*, and the Judaeans.

It consisted of 127 provinces in the Persian Empire, ranging from India to Ethiopia,

And the word said that the apostles were able to capture every voice and every language;

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs...

And the remarkable thing in this is not just that these apostles were speaking in all of these languages although that was impressive in itself but it was what they were saying that makes this story come alive for us today....

Because church what they were saying in all of these languages was one message

And that message as I put it into my own words but can be found in Acts 2 : 17-21; was essentially this: **we are one.**

Church essentially what happened in that room through the apostles was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that connected all of us together as one; Even though we speak different languages, **we are one;**

Even if our race and ethnicity is different, **we are one;**

Regardless of our background...**we are one**

Regardless of our political affiliation...**we are one....**

You and I may see our differences as walls that divide us, but God..... I stopped by to suggest sees us as one and is encouraging us all to start embracing this concept.

Furthermore the good news of the Pentecost

(which is essentially defined as the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus); is that God gives us the opportunity to unify ourselves by God's Spirit to be that One. God in the Word tells us that *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,*

*and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.*

So what this means for all who are wondering what we can do in the midst of all of the division that is occurring in the world is **we must begin to align ourselves with God's Spirit.**

We must begin to align ourselves as one body;
We must begin to see one another with that Ubuntu philosophy that tells us that that if one part of our community is not fine we are not fine.

This week the issue happens to be race relations... next week it may be something else...

However the way I see it, **you and I always need the Pentecost to unify us;**

You and I always need the Pentecost to remind us;

You and I always need the Pentecost to help us to see that we are the solution and the only way we can combat this problem of racial hatred and division and all problems of social division is to invite the Holy Spirit among us to walk with us and teach us how to walk in our sisters and brothers shoes....

And what this looks like as it pertains to George Floyd and Christian Cooper and so many other victims of racial discrimination and execution as a result; is taking the first step for those of us who may not identify with these instances and experiences, to acknowledge that there was something that was catastrophic that happened.

It will take us all coming together in one spirit to acknowledge that these types of incidents and more contradicts what it means to love God and love our neighbor.

And where I see hope as it pertains to race relations as an example to this, is those across the world beginning to acknowledge their own fragility.

In this instance an acknowledgement of not only some of our fragility but our privilege would be a great first step in helping to ratify some of these heinous acts of racism and marginalization.

I was moved to see black, brown and white people coming together to silently protest along side Capital parkway.

My husband and I honked our horns as we drove by. One white woman held out a sign that said “white silence is violence.” I broke out in unexpected tears because I was relieved to particularly see some of my fellow Anglo community acknowledge the pain of people of color. This is a great first step church.

I was moved to see pictures of the Amish community holding up signs of protest against racism and oppression.

I was especially moved by one of the social media post that is floating around that I believe is a good example of how we all might begin to explore how we can portray empathy in situations that we may not necessarily identify with, but still invest in being apart of, because it simply harms our sisters and brothers not to be concerned with;

And the post says I have privilege as a white person because I can do all of these things without thinking twice:

I can go birding (#ChristianCooper)

I can go jogging (#AhmaudArbery)

I can relax in the comfort of my own home

(#BothamJean and #AtatianaJefferson)
I can ask for help after being in a car crash
(#JonathanFerrell and #RenishaMcBride)
I can have a cellphone (#StephonClark)
I can leave a party to get to safety
(#JordanEdwards)
I can play loud music (#JordanDavis)
I can sell CDs (#AltonSterling)
I can sleep (#AiyanaJones)
I can walk from the corner store (#MikeBrown)
I can play cops and robbers (#TamirRice)
I can go to church (#Charleston9)
I can walk home with Skittles (#TrayvonMartin)
I can hold a hair brush while leaving my own
bachelor party (#SeanBell)
I can party on New Years (#OscarGrant)
I can get a normal traffic ticket (#SandraBland)
I can lawfully carry a weapon (#PhilandoCastile)
I can break down on a public road with car problems
(#CoreyJones)
I can shop at Walmart (#JohnCrawford)
I can have a disabled vehicle (#TerrenceCrutcher)
I can read a book in my own car (#KeithScott)
I can be a 10yr old walking with my grandfather
(#CliffordGlover)
I can decorate for a party (#ClaudeReese)
I can ask a cop a question (#RandyEvans)
I can cash a check in peace (#YvonneSmallwood)
I can take out my wallet (#AmadouDiallo)
I can run (#WalterScott)
I can breathe (#EricGarner)
I can live (#FreddieGrey)
I CAN BE ARRESTED WITHOUT THE FEAR OF
BEING MURDERED (#GeorgeFloyd)
White privilege is real. Take a minute to consider a
Black person's experience today.

If we all could just take a minute to consider not just a Black person's experience but another person's experience in general; this is what keeps us in that great Pentecost moment;

Where we all can be together in the same place; one body, one spirit...

Where suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind will fill us up and space that surrounds us;

And all of a sudden we can see one another like God sees us;

And all of the differences that we initially saw as being inferior or even terrifying for some of us; Suddenly feels like everything you and I have been innately seeking and waiting for.....

Where all who are thirsty for justice and peace will be able to drink...

Where everyone regardless of their physiological makeup can drink!

Let the People of God say Amen!

Sincerely,

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