

Sunday September 26, 2021
Scriptural Lesson: Psalm 124
Sermon Series: Holy Spectrum Part 1
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

- **We are in a new sermon series entitled “Holy Spectrum”**; a series designed to explore the **Rainbow and the social issues, topics, spiritual growth and possibilities contained in it.**
- And just to give some context to those who may be hearing about the work that First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE has been doing for the very first time; First UMC Lincoln has identified ourselves as being a Reconciling Community;
- **We are a community** whose story reflects a statement of diversity and love for all.
- **We are a community** who is invested in being inclusive to all persons; regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation and more.

- **A missional journey** that has started as early as 1985; with the most recent emphasis of redefining our statement of inclusion and what that means becoming more intentional, once you all welcomed your first African American female spiritual leader and her diverse family to become your pastoral representation...I am talking about me, just in case you missed that reference haha...
- **Not suggesting** that I am the first person of color who has ever been the pastor of First UMC Lincoln;
- However, what this persisting pandemic has revealed to us all; through quarantine, isolation, sickness, death and more, is that the world has reached a place in our collective journey; where division on every level has caused this kingdom on Earth that we all inhabit; **to bust at her seams;**
- For the Earth is swelling; He is swelling with so much division on every level; She is swelling with

so much division on every level; **We are swelling with SO MUCH DIVISION on every level....**

- **Some might even suggest that with the** surmounting evidence of dark, tense periods of our history such as the Holocaust, Civil Rights Movement, Woman's Suffrage Movement, Black Lives Matter, UFW (United Farmers Workers) strikes, boycotts and campaigns and more;
- **With the assassination** of Human Rights Activists such as Malcom X Robert F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Medgar Evans; totaling 190 leaders starting from 1837-2019 world wide;
- **With the Assassination of Civil Rights Martyrs** dating back to 1955 including leaders such as Dr. MLK, Emmett Louis Till, Paul Guihard, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley; the four little girls who lost their lives to a bomb that exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963;

- **From the** September 11 attack, insurrection of the Capitol, school shootings that dates all of the way back to the 1700s; where the earliest known United States shooting to happen on school property was the Pontiac's Rebellion school massacre on July 26, 1764, where four Lenape American Indian entered the schoolhouse near present-day Greencastle, Pennsylvania, shot and killed schoolmaster Enoch Brown, and killed nine or ten children (reports vary) with Only two children survived.
- **From the** Spanish Flu, H1N1 Flu, Measles outbreaks, Covid-19 and all of its variants, polio and more;
- Again I say that **some might suggest** that it has been these named events and many more that I have not named; that have finally caused the kingdom to shout out that, **“we have had enough....”**

- The people who have been placed on the margins for far too long **has had enough;**
- **For where our Psalm this morning stems from; was from a lineage of people that began way back in the times of Moses;**
- When one day Moses stumbled upon a burning bush; the story is in Exodus 3;
- And why Moses was attracted to this burning bush which I am inviting us to all hold as a powerful symbol for the work that we are entering into;
- **This burning bush, the text informs us, was on fire; the bush was ablaze;**
- Causing Moses in Exodus 3:2-3 to inspect this bush a little closer, because this bush that Moses thought was on fire Church...**it didn't burn up!**
- You see as I attempt to crystallize the scene for where our psalm this morning foundation stems from;

- Moses is called to this bush, from the voice of God where God called Moses and said, “Moses, Moses!”
- And Moses said, “Here I am.”
- Jumping down to Exodus 3:7; The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.
- And so it would be that the 124th Psalm this morning, reflects an extension of ancestry, that bears a lineage of people, **that is still suffering;**
- But this time, **this generation** in this psalm is determined to speak up and speak out and do something about it....
- **This generation** in our Psalm Church family, is like this burning bush that initially attracted Moses....

- **This generation is literally on fire...they are ablaze....**because they have been experiencing the effects of their ancestor's oppression and marginalization for far too long;
- In my theological eyes...these people **have had enough**; because as I jump into this psalm fully now and invite us to step into their shoes; I am inviting us to step fully into their story;
- **To consider the main point that what is fueling this symbolic burning bush,** is a people who have been the victims of **hostile actions for far too long!**
- To define the word hostile; just to make sure we are all on the same page and under the same understanding; hostile defined means unfriendly, antagonistic;
- So this was their situation....**these people have had hostile actions done towards them** from generation to generation;

- Where they have been enslaved, their babies have been murdered; I would imagine their children and their wives have been sexually assaulted or even raped, beaten, starved, killed, broken into submission and more...
- And in response to all of this and more, **this generation** we are seeing right in our text **has become ignited**....like this burning bush....
- Furthermore the same beauty and awe of this burning bush from the story of Moses, is the same beauty and awe that is happening with these people....
- For yes in both instances, **the bush is fully ablaze**....
- **The bush in both cases** I would submit is not consumed by this blaze;
- On the contrary **it is a controlled burn** we are witnessing;

- **It is a controlled burn**, that understands the core of it's mission;
- **It is a controlled burn** that hopefully is beginning to reveal to us all, why the bush is not completely being consumed by this fire;
- **For the Lord is at the core of this bush;The Lord is controlling the burn of this fire;**
- For God resides at the core of these people, who in this psalm is naming and testifying that without God's help, the hostile actions of other humans would have resulted in their people's demise.
- So what we are witnessing church family, is a people that have made a concerted effort to be lead by the One **who can control the burn;**

- **Connecting the dots to our Holy Spectrum series; we are witnessing the first color of our rainbow that we have invested on our Church lawn that names that “All People are Welcome Here”; we are witnessed the first color of our Spectrum focus bubble up within the scripture right before our very eyes....**
- **We are witnessing a people who are seeing red....**
- **We are witnessing a people who are engulfed in red.....**
- **We are witnessing a people who are fueled by this red...**
- **Where as I begin to break down the symbolism behind the color of red in the rainbow as I see it;**
- **One aspect of red for most of us when I suggest that these people are seeing red and engulfed by red....**
- **Red in my eyes could represent anger...**

- Red for me could represent this hostility that I have named...
- Red could represent rage and disappointment and even provoke a sentiment of rage within us all and I stopped by to suggest that **God affirms our** feelings of anger...
- **God affirms our feelings** of being disappointed, or upset or even our feelings of rage;
- For if you have ever been on the receiving end of someone's hostile actions, it does provoke this sense of anger within most of us on the receiving end if we are honest....
- And I know, I know....some might push back on what I am saying instinctively to suggest that what I am saying contradicts the gospel....
- Not to mention, most of us have come from upbringings that teaches us to be passive;
- Most of us come from upbringings that teaches us to be passive even in the midst of wrong doing....

- And this is because I would suspect that for some who are striving to love like Jesus...
- A scripture that names the type of love of Jesus stems from 1 Corinthians 13; where it says *Love is patient, love is kind.*
- *It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*
- *It does not dishonour others,*
- *it is not self-seeking,*
- ***it is not easily angered,***
- *and it keeps no record of wrongs.*
- However, it is in my life experiences and observations that informs me that a lot of us tends to dismiss the second part of this love chapter that also says that *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*
- *It always protects,*
- *always trusts,*
- *always hopes,*
- *and always perseveres.*

- *Love never fails.*
- So I have two arguments that I would like to lay out for you all to consider from this love chapter for consideration....
- And so my first argument to this is that 1 Corinthians 13 said **that love is not easily angered...but it doesn't mean that love cannot or should not get angry...**
- For in love, **to not become easily angered** which I need to admit I have to work on every day, second, minute and hour;
- But **to not become easily angered** over stuff is like for instance if your kid knocks over your favorite vase and breaks it or if someone were to accidentally step on your toe...
- Now although you and I might be easily justified to be irritated or perturbed in these two instances;
- Love would tell us that we can be upset, but to get over it reasonably quickly;

- In instances such as in these two example I have shared; love would inform us that yes we may not like the action that was done towards us, but these actions although irritating or annoying at best; it would be a gross overreaction for us to contain bitterness or malice in our hearts or to hold grudges and so forth and so forth.
- **However, there are some occasions in life where anger is justified and our anger is warranted.**
- For example as I bring in some of the world/ community affairs that have recently occurred over the past couple of weeks;
- One incident of recent hostile actions in the US is the situation where at least 1 person was dead, 14 others were injured after a shooting in the Memphis-area Kroger grocery store....Church, for me, this is an acceptable time for us to get angry (not suggesting that other emotions would not also

come into play such as empathy, sadness for all affected parties involved); nevertheless anger would be a valid emotion and it would not reflect that we are easily angered in doing so...for to come to a grocery store to do shopping or to be employed by a grocery store; only to be met with the threat of your life or even losing your life is not ok.

- Another incident; We know that major residential segregation is occurring everywhere, but in particular as we speak; I came across an article as I was reading my online news; a well-to-do community of Buckhead which is a majority-White neighborhood in Atlanta who is majority Black; hopes to split away from Atlanta.
- One of the citations from this article stated; "We filed for divorce and our divorce is final," said Bill White, chairman and CEO of the Buckhead City Committee, which is spearheading the efforts for

the formation of the city. "We're forming our own city, we're establishing our own police force and we will eradicate crime."

- So the issue with all of this is that some observers worry that the [cityhood for Buckhead could be devastating](#), removing access to revenue from a critical tax base and even deepening racial tensions.
- So again a lot of emotions can come from this..but I stopped by to state that anger is a valid emotion that is indeed biblical...
- For in this instance I understand the problems that are occurring in Atlanta;
- They are in what people have named to be a "Covid Crime wave," where homicides are up by 63 percent compared to the year before at 43 percent;
- The shooting incidents are up and for many of the residents in Buckhead in particular; they are cited

as saying that "The crime has gotten to a point where it is just unmanageable and it seems like there is no end in sight,"

- But even in that, why I still feel anger is because once again; racial tensions will be named and defined **even more;**
- The Black person's narrative will become vilified **even more;**
- And the long history tension between Whites and Blacks will be pronounced even more;
- Causing me to deduce **that the times of segregation are still alive and forevermore;**
- For although we all may be able to now drink from the same drinking fountain because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- What is still to be determined is can we all find a way to coexist together?
- This I do not have the answer to...all I know is that I feel anger towards all of it.

- **And so I could go on and on about how love can at times and should get angry....**
- For Jesus got angry enough to flip over the table because the merchants and consumers from the temple were turning into “ a den thieves...”
(Matthew 21: 12-13, Mark 11 : 15-18)
- Jesus had righteous anger because what they were doing, contradicted the work of the Church that was supposed to care for the people!
- For the people in the temple of that day was trying to make a quick hustle to make some money....
- For Jesus did not appreciate the people that he cared for being hustled; not to mention the gospel that he was teaching and preaching being trifled with.
- So this is a long way of my naming that **Jesus too got angry** when people were mistreated...
- **Jesus too got angry** when the gospel was compromised...

- So there are times Church we are called to get angry....and this is my second argument I want to re-emphasize in the love scripture of 1 Corinthians 13 that we tend to overlook....
- You see in my eyes, we tend to overlook and not really consider the second piece of this love declaration after it says love is patient and kind and so forth;
- We tend to overlook and not consider the second half where it says again *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*
- *It always protects,*
- *always trusts,*
- *always hopes,*
- *and always perseveres.*
- *Love never fails.*
- And so I stopped by to ask what emotion do we think is behind this declaration of love?

- For there could be a lot of emotions dare I say fueling this...such as empathy, concern for the other, compassion and so forth...
- However, I would be remiss if I did not suggest that anger would also be one of those emotions undergirding this portion of this love chapter.
- And so by now you all may be picking up that I am not talking about the reckless anger that most of us I would suspect are thinking when I am talking about anger.
- Folks, let me be clear...**this is not the anger I am preaching about...**
- The anger that would cause someone to use brutal force towards someone;
- Or the anger that would cause someone to ostracize another person;
- Or the anger that stems from jealousy, hatred, ignorance and more...

- For the anger that I am promoting and that Jesus promotes in his table flipping scene that I named before, is the necessity for Christians to be able to have a sense of righteous anger in their hearts and spiritual focus at all times;
- **For righteous anger** is getting angry at the things that are not of God.
- **Righteous anger** is the anger that is grieved by sin, death, and any form of evil.
- **Righteous anger** is a characteristic of Jesus Christ that we as Christians receive when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior and choose to follow Him.
- **For We are to be angry** at the things that oppose Christ and His image.
- **We are to be angry** when someone is victimized especially our children and babies;

- **We are to be angry** when someone is marginalized and ostracized all because they have been deemed as “the other,”
- **We are to be angry** when someone is forced out of the kingdom of Earth as is in heaven;
- And furthermore when we possess this type of righteous anger...we become like a bush that has been set **ablaze but wait...the bush is not consumed!**
- But instead this bush becomes a symbol of a lineage of people that is reflected in this community right now...
- **A community that** recognizes that had it not been for the Lord on our side;
- **A community that** recognizes that with the mission of Jesus mission of inclusion and love for all being at our core;
- **That the potential of this Red** that represents a lineage of people that have been victimized by

other's hostile actions is innumerable and immeasurable;

- For instead of being consumed by this Red.....we become ignited by this Red...
- Because now having the realization that with God at our core, we will not be consumed by this red;
- We then **begin to recognize the potential that comes from this red;**
- Where now with Christ at our core; **the Red** symbolizes our **energy, action, confidence, courage, and change.**
- **The Red** brings passion and strength to our relationships, our lives and our work.
- **The RED** spiritually informs our stability, security, grounding, courage, action, physical and emotional survival;
- **The Red** becomes a statement of understanding that yes we have been victimized by a myriad of hostile actions towards us;

- However without God’s help, the hostile actions of other humans would have resulted in our people’s demise;
- **But instead today we celebrate this Red;**
- **We are energized by this Red** and all of its potential;
- Allowing us to speak the words of Psalm 124 in a way like we have never done before;

If the Lord had not been on our side—
let Israel say—

2

if the Lord had not been on our side
when people attacked us,

3

they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;

4

the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,

5

the raging waters

would have swept us away.

6

Praise be to the Lord,

who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

7

We have escaped like a bird

from the fowler's snare;

the snare has been broken,

and we have escaped.

8

Our help is in the name of the Lord,

the Maker of heaven and earth.

- Let the people say Hallelujah and Amen!

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so much division on every level; **We are swelling with SO MUCH DIVISION on every level....**

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- The people who have been placed on the margins for far too long **has had enough**;
- For where our Psalm this morning stems from; was from a lineage of people that began way back in the times of Moses;
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- And why Moses was attracted to this burning bush which I am inviting us to all hold as a powerful symbol for the work that we are entering into;
- **This burning bush, the text informs us, was on fire; the bush was ablaze**;
- Causing Moses in Exodus 3:2-3 to inspect this bush a little closer, because this bush that Moses thought was on fire Church...**it didn't burn up!**
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- And Moses said, “Here I am.”
- Jumping down to Exodus 3:7; The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.
- And so it would be that the 124th Psalm this morning, reflects an extension of ancestry, that bears a lineage of people, **that is still suffering;**
- But this time, **this generation** in this psalm is determined to speak up and speak out and do something about it....
- **This generation** in our Psalm Church family, is like this burning bush that initially attracted Moses....

- **This generation is literally on fire...they are ablaze....**because they have been experiencing the effects of their ancestor's oppression and marginalization for far too long;
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- **To consider the main point that what is fueling this symbolic burning bush, is a people who have been the victims of hostile actions for far too long!**
- To define the word hostile just to make sure we are all on the same page and under the same understanding; hostile defined means unfriendly, antagonistic;
- So this was their situation....**these people have had hostile actions done towards them** from generation to generation;

- Where they have been enslaved, their babies have been murdered; I would imagine their children and their wives have been sexually assaulted or even raped, beaten, starved, killed, broken into submission and more...
- And in response to all of this and more, **this generation** we are seeing right in our text **has become ignited**....like this burning bush....
- Furthermore the same beauty and awe of this burning bush from the story of Moses, is the same beauty and awe that is happening with these people....
- For yes in both instances, **the bush is fully ablaze**....
- **The bush in both cases** I would submit is not consumed by this blaze;
- On the contrary **it is a controlled burn** we are witnessing;

- **It is a controlled burn**, that understands the core of it's mission;
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- We are witnessing a people **who are seeing red**....
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and I stopped by to suggest that **God affirms our feelings of anger...**

- **God affirms our feelings** of being disappointed, or upset or even our feelings of rage;
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- And I know, I know....some might push back on what I am saying instinctively to suggest that what I am saying contradicts the gospel....
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- Most of us come from upbringings that teaches us to be passive even in the midst of wrong doing....
- And this is because I would suspect that for some who are striving to love like Jesus...
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- It does not dishonour others,
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- and it keeps no record of wrongs.
- However, it is in my life experiences and observations that a lot of us tends to dismiss the second part of this love chapter that also says that *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*
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- And so I stopped by to ask what emotion do we think is fueling this declaration of love?

- For there could be a lot of emotions dare I say fueling this...such as empathy, concern for the other, compassion and so forth...
- However I would be remiss if I did not suggest that anger would also be one of those emotions undergirding this portion of this love chapter as well.
- And so by now you all may be picking up that I am not talking about the reckless anger that most of us I would suspect are thinking when I am talking about anger.
- Folks, let me be clear...this is not the anger I am preaching about nor endorsing;
- The anger that would cause someone to use brutal force towards someone;
- Or the anger that would cause someone to ostracize another person;
- Or the anger that stems from jealousy, hatred, ignorance and more...

- For the anger that I am promoting and that Jesus promotes in his table flipping scene that I named before, is the necessity for Christians to be able to have a sense of righteous anger in their hearts and spiritual focus at all times;
- **For righteous anger** is getting angry at the things that are not of God.
- **Righteous anger** is the anger that is grieved by sin, death, and any form of evil.
- **Righteous anger** is a characteristic of Jesus Christ that we as Christians receive when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior and choose to follow Him.
- **For We are to be angry** at the things that oppose Christ and His image.
- **We are to be angry** when someone is victimized especially our children and babies;

- **We are to be angry** when someone is marginalized and ostracized all because they have been deemed as “the other,”
- **We are to be angry** when someone is forced out of the kingdom of Earth as is in heaven;
- And furthermore when we possess this type of anger...we become like a bush that has been set ablaze **but wait...the bush is not consumed...**
- But instead this bush becomes a symbol of a lineage of people that is reflected in this community of First UMC Lincoln right now...
- **A community that recognizes** that had it not been for the Lord on our side;
- **A community that recognizes** that with the mission of Jesus mission of inclusion and love for all being at our core;
- That the potential of **this Red** that represents a lineage of people that have been victimized by

other's hostile actions is innumerable and immeasurable;

- Because of having this newfound awareness that now instead of us being consumed by this Red.....we can become ignited by this Red...
- Because now we have the realization that with God at our core, we will not be consumed by this red;
- We then begin to recognize the potential that comes from this red;
- Where now with Christ at our core; **the Red** symbolizes our **energy, action, confidence, courage, and change.**
- **The Red** brings passion and strength to our relationships, our lives and our work.
- **The RED** spiritually informs our stability, security, grounding, courage, action, physical and emotional survival;

- **The Red** becomes a statement of understanding that yes we have been victimized by a myriad of hostile actions towards us;
- Where our gospel briefly ties in; I am drawn to the mention of the stumbling blocks being named in our gospel; for there will be stumbling blocks in this hard reconciling work we are entering into together;
- **However the Red** potential of our rainbow mission as a result of this sermon series and more; the hope is that these learnings will begin to inform us how to overcome these stumbling blocks together;
- Because now with having more tools and careful study of scripture and trainings on community organizing that I plan to dive into within this series and beyond; I believe that we will get that much closer to living out our mission of what it means to be a true Reconciling community.

- But for now, I would like us to begin to see this red in our Rainbow mission as a declaration of who we are and whose we are;
- For we are a collective people who can at least name for now; (just as the Israelites in our psalm) this understanding that without God's help, the hostile actions of other humans would have resulted in our people's demise;
- **But instead today we celebrate this Red;**
- We are energized by this Red and all of its potential;
- Allowing us to speak the words of Psalm 124 in a way like we have never done before;

If the Lord had not been on our side—

let Israel say—

2

if the Lord had not been on our side

when people attacked us,

3

they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;

4

the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,

5

the raging waters
would have swept us away.

6

Praise be to the Lord,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

7

We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.

8

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

- Let the people say Hallelujah and Amen!