

Church I have to tell you that I come before you today weary. Weary from the uncertainty of the pandemic and now weary and concerned from injustice. Last week I feel I did not have adequate time in my sermon preparation to address the tragic events of last week and how we as Christians were called to respond. For that I apologize. This week I have spent many hours praying during my sermon preparation time to bring you a word of hope today amid chaos in our country and the world.

Today is Trinity Sunday and it also happens to be Peace with Justice Sunday. These two sacred events happen once a year in the Christian year, the Sunday after Pentecost. The season of Pentecost is about being sent out by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God. **So today as we celebrate the Trinity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we remember that we too are called to embody the peace and justice of God.**

This Sunday is very timely in the life of the church. As Christians we have always been called to pursue justice and peace. One pastor put it this way: “The Bible teaches that justice must be in place for real peace to exist.”ⁱ

Biblical justice shows time and time again that God is concerned with the equality of creation (Genesis 2) being reflected in society. All people should be treated with “sacred worth” (UMC Social Principles 2018). When the equality of creation is not reflected in society, the society becomes unjust.

Time and time again in the Old Testament we see that God was concerned for caring for the least of these: the poor, the alien, the one who would die without the help of their neighbor. In Leviticus we see that God instructed the Israelites to take in the poor as their family because as God reminded them, they were once poor and desolate in the desert without anything.

This is our story as Christians. The Israelites were enslaved under the Egyptians, God saved them and led them out of oppression into the Promised Land. We were enslaved to sin, but through our faith in Jesus Christ we are saved and promised resurrection and eternal life, our Promised Land.

So, during this season of Pentecost the Holy Spirit leads us forward to pursue justice and peace. We can first pursue justice when we name that we live in an unjust world.

I confess to you that in the past I have remained silent on many matters, not knowing what to do or how I could help. I did not want to rock the boat or cause polarization that would affect my ministry.

I feel that perhaps many of you may be feeling the same way. You know instinctively through the power of the Holy Spirit what is right and wrong, you can recognize injustice, but you have not known what to do about these thoughts or feelings in ways that are constructive.

Perhaps today we can move forward together committing to be more aware of systemic injustice and committing to do something about it. This was the call put out by our Bishop, Bishop Lewis, this week and we too are called to respond.

Many times, in the gospels, Jesus spoke against injustice. Any time another person was being treated unfairly or as less than, Jesus did something about it.

He stopped and offered healing to lepers who had been ostracized by their community. Jesus said: “Let the little children come to me” in a time where children were better seen and not heard. He saved the life of the woman caught in adultery, he told Peter to “feed my sheep.” Jesus also spoke up against the injustice he saw due to a system of greed.

This is why Jesus flipped the tables in the temple that day. He was outraged that a sacred home for God became the embodiment for a culture of greed (Matthew 21:12-13). And so, we have seen history repeat itself. As the love of money increases injustice increases in our society.

In the Old Testament, Esther knew what it was like to experience racism. The leadership of her time, especially the King’s right hand man, Haman, wanted to annihilate her people, the Jews, but her uncle Mordecai reminded her that “perhaps she had been called for such a time as this.” Perhaps she could use her position of power and privilege to help those who would die without her help.

As the body of Christ, we have been called for such a time as this, to speak out against racism and hatred. We have been called to find our voice and use it to pursue justice and peace.

In our Scripture for today from the book of Acts we see that Peter reclaimed his voice to use it for the glory of God, to use it to bring new life in Christ.

We know Peter had a checkered past. Although he fervently believed in Jesus Christ his fear and impulsivity could get in the way of the things God called him to do. But Jesus saw something in Peter and told him that he was the “rock upon which the church would be built” (Matthew 16:18).

Peter had been given a chance to use his voice to claim Jesus as his Lord and Savior in Jesus’ most desperate time of need. But instead, he denied Christ three times. This time Peter had failed to embody his faith.

This week I thought a lot about that moment for Peter. Surely, he still believed in God and Jesus, but he was scared for his life. It was out of fear that he denied Christ.

So today we confess that we too have been like Peter, unable or unwilling to respond in ways that glorify God. We find these same words in our corporate confession we say before communion. This is the prayer we would have said if we were together today so I will say it now, pray with me:

“Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”ⁱⁱ

Today we confess that we have fallen short, but today we also claim our voices to be used for God’s glory, to bring about justice, peace, and new life.

Last week an African American man named George Floyd lost his life. He was denied the basic human right to breathe and so he experienced a great injustice.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of life poured out by God so that we can all be filled.

As we are sent forward into the Great Commission, God calls us to make it possible so that all may continue to be full of the Spirit and receive the breath of life.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter was filled by the breath of God. He used this second chance to use his voice and life to honor God and he took it.

He preached a powerful sermon and brought over 3,000 people to God. He was now living into the person Christ had called him to be and that day the church was born.

The question before us today is how can we be like Peter? How can we put our past behind us and live into the life that God has set before us?

Today we too are called: to use our voices to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, to preach about God’s justice and peace, to stand beside our neighbors who are being oppressed and to fight for justice and equality, and to name that racism is a sin.

We have been called to use our voice to bring about new life and not death. We have been called to live out the Apostles’ Creed.

We believe in God the Father, Almighty:

We believe that we are created in the image of our Creator God and that we all have sacred worth. We believe that God has tasked us to care for one another as we grow in our love and knowledge of God.

We believe in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord:

We believe that Jesus was the son of God, the one who came to save us from ourselves and our sinful nature. We believe that Christ is our model for servant ministry and that we are called to offer grace and compassion to all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We believe in the Holy Spirit:

We believe that the Holy Spirit further equips us for the ministry ahead. We believe that Holy Spirit gives us courage to “face the future unafraid.”

We believe that the Holy Spirit continues to empower us to bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

We believe that following the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, left for us by Jesus Christ, is the only way that we will find peace.

When we live out the creed through our lives, then we too invite others into the new life that God has set before us through our faith in Jesus Christ.

The good news for our lives today is that we too can be like Peter offering words and actions of life.

May we continue to be bearers of life. Even in all the chaos of the world, may we as the church remain a beacon of hope, an example of God’s love, so that more people may come to believe in Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rev. Martin Adhikary. [https://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/211068/Justice-and-peace-in-Bible/2017-03-10#:~:text=Biblical%20justice%20is%20concerned%20with,for%20real%20peace%20to%20exist.&text=The%20Bible%20says%20that%20there,22%2C%2057%3A21\).](https://www.daily-sun.com/arcprint/details/211068/Justice-and-peace-in-Bible/2017-03-10#:~:text=Biblical%20justice%20is%20concerned%20with,for%20real%20peace%20to%20exist.&text=The%20Bible%20says%20that%20there,22%2C%2057%3A21).)

ⁱⁱ The United Methodist Hymnal. The United Methodist Publishing House. Nashville, TN. 1989. P. 12.

Additional Resource

The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. X. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.