

Sermon for 23 May 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Pentecost Sunday

Scriptures: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

“ Together”

I begin personally: Our oldest son is here, visiting his mother and me for several days from his home in California.

Then I shift to the global good news: A cease-fire has been achieved between Israel and Palestine.

In both cases, I say, “Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!”

These two events make the point, the fact, the story we announce with our worship today.

We are together. What we are meant to do and to be, to experience and to demonstrate, is real, en masse. Group-wise, corporately..

A thousand tugs in the opposite direction don't overcome this fact.

In the image of God, we stand together.

Not just physically, but mentally, and yes spiritually, we breathe together; we are together.

Biblical texts from both Old (Jewish) and New (Christian) Testaments make this message more ways.

The sum of Easter, the conclusion of the Jesus story, the aim of the Creation, demonstrates we humans are capable of long-distance connecting as well as incredible intimacy..

Along the way, we have gotten off track. We have turned away from the path running through everything. We have conned ourselves into selfishness, and fought each other as well as Nature, and it's a mess.

But we can still talk to each other. The Spirit in charge of everything, pulls at us, dusts us off, and guides us back on the real way.

I woke up the other morning convinced life was just beginning --- that all that time wasted, all those tries and failures, all that sadness and disappointment I tend to focus on, are nothing but preparation for the present moment.

The one thing that cannot be taken away from me is my own attitude.,

That means this is a long-range show we're all involved in, and we're in it together. As a book on the Wesleyan movement's emphasis on small groups is entitled, "God Does Not Foreclose." Soon or late, the whole show will be hopeful, with no details forgotten.

Now, we live in an age when some of the brightest and most thoughtful among us resist this idea. Ta-Nehisi Coates, a black intellectual who for our time speaks with something like the influence Frederick Douglas did for another age, insists that the universe is basically chaos, and the only positive achievements come not from nature, but from character.

We understand his honesty, and make common cause with all who work towards justice and charity. We use the strength and fellowship of Christ towards many of the same ends. We also recognize the heritage and piety of many faiths, to move in the same direction. To teach, on Pentecost, the common understanding humankind is capable of, is a vital tradition. We see it every day in our politics: the great need for civility and cooperation at every hour of every day. We KNOW how to talk across borders and get good work accomplished. It comes to me often, in fact, how many techniques of modern psychiatry and medicine make the same good sense as our practice of prayer and meditation, worship together, service and outreach. Much of humanity aims towards health and good care of self and others.

May God demonstrate in each of us how Christlike it is to practice togetherness, making our differences useful and peaceful.

Amen.