

Sermon for 1 August 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a; Psalm 51:1-12; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

"The whole story"

We are in new territory now.

God's people have a king. He's beautiful, successful, God loves him and so do the people ... and he's totally guilty.

"Thou art the man!" the prophet Nathan tells him.

Psalm 51 speaks for itself ... We call David the Psalmist, even though there's no reason to claim he wrote all the psalms ... and here he describes himself: "Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me."

The very questions we are asking ourselves these days as Americans is spelled out loud and clear: "How did we get this way? How do we handle guilt?"

We were so proud. We were free, after all, and freedom gives the chance for the best to come out. Created in the image of God, we've been right, again and again. We've always won. That proves we were all right, doesn't it?

Now the darkness is killing us. We're divided. We're sick. I just listened to the Congressional hearings from January 6 on U-Tube yesterday, and those officers: One Black, one White, and one Latino emigrant... they were powerful in their sorrow and rage... And the things the invaders yelled at them ... "Trump won." "We were robbed!"

Verily, the human condition is writ large in our day, and our work is not to tame the wilderness outside, as we've always thought, but to work on the inside of being created in God's image.

And John, that fourth and final Gospel, written after the Word had grown and spread and suffered and come alive over and over, to the point of grace where people could proclaim more about human hopefulness than ever before John has Jesus lay it out harshly: "You're following me because you got a free meal!" "You want to make me king!" "You want a sign, and I am the sign!" What King David was able to survive and describe, without rising to divinity but speaking truthfully, Jesus, as John saw in the growth of the church and the fruits of the Holy Spirit it demonstrated year after year in place after place..... Jesus produced. Jesus revealed. Jesus exemplified. "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

This is what we are facing, as a country, as believers, as part of a worldwide redevelopment of character and opportunity. We proclaim, as followers of Christ, the prospects of new life, new

cooperation, new wisdom and grasp of nature and history and science and spirituality,... all those things that are open to our time and the future we may build as never before.

The Holy Spirit is among us. Christ is alive. Over and over I say to people, "I have never known such commitment to good service, or so much love for home and family and even political honor and insight, as I see and sense now ... and I find folks nodding, and giving examples, and contributing to the common good, more than I've ever known, even in the height of wartime or other crises during my long lifetime.

Paul knows his congregation. They are still young in the faith. They are just learning the good news. Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, are testing the water of faith and laying the foundations of belief, so that he can say, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

We are only a small part of the country, we Christians. We know that now, as we face the fallacies of our past, and learn to welcome the opportunities for sharing with other faiths as well as converting many who have yet to feel the need for religion. But my Lord! What an opportunity we have to follow the One who saw and led and taught and stayed true to the trust already built into the people of Israel through the same Spirit that moves us! This is the whole story we are learning to face and rejoice in, as we come through the pandemic and seek out ways to overcome the despair that has been so real among us in these recent months.

Let us dedicate ourselves to live the whole story, fresh and forgiving, inspiring and full of new life, loving as we are learning more fully than ever before about loving ... God's loving us, and our loving God, our neighbor, and ourselves, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.