

Sermon for 13 February 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany  
Scriptures: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1(UM738/*Response 1*; 1 Corinthians  
15:12-20; Luke 6:17-26  
***“Right way, wrong way”***

When I went to the preacher to tell him I wanted to study for the ministry, he said he always appreciated my father because he listened so intently to his sermons.

When I told my Dad that, he said it was because he was trying to understand what Brother Barcus was saying!

I remember later standing in the registration line @ seminary --- I enrolled in the middle of the year, in January --- and listening to the students --- all men in those days --- talking about God, and feeling very uneasy about their self-assurance.

That may be what’s always appealed to me about the Quaker faith: They don’t say anything at all in church unless they feel moved to. Sometimes a whole worship hour goes by just sitting silently.

That may be part of why I’m always trying to get you all to say something during service: I just can’t put it into words, and so I try to shift it off onto you!

I’m trying to do that right now ... just walking ‘round and ‘round this tree and not seeing any place to get started. Expressing myself religiously somehow gives me the creeps. I feel insincere, or somehow mistaken ... out of place. The only two things I can say about this are, one, there’s sure a lot of stuff that passes for religion that isn’t: I’m as sure of that in 2022 as I was in 1959; and two, a lot of what I say I come to find out I wasn’t sure about after all.

Yet, I’m sure what you believe matters, more than ever.

I know this sounds political, but it gets down to grass roots with today’s scripture lessons. In my retired clergy book group we’re reading “How Democracies Die,” a study of all the countries that have failed to stay democracies over the past century. It turns out they’ve failed much less often through a revolution or a military coup than through a gradual weakening of working together across divisions.

That’s down to the texts for today, as I see it. “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your presence,” Jesus tells his home synagogue in Nazareth. The Messiah has come. Sitting around and waiting is not the way to live. Truth

is truth. Justice matters. Love is active and real across all sorts of barriers and in all kinds of complicated situations.

Let us pray.

Lord above, within, among, around us, give us energy to act, and wisdom to wait. Hear our cries for help, and teach us how to ask and not try to shape up first. Jesus, friend and brother, work miracles through us.. Jesus, give us eyes to see what you've already accomplished with what little we've dared to try. Celebrate our victories with us. Nothing is small that's right. Nothing is simple that's generous and tender and understanding with others, or with ourselves. We desperately need to accept and forgive ourselves. Everything starts from there. We have been saved. We are on the glory road. O God, we believe in prayer. Help us pray, really pray. With you we say, Amen.