

Sermon for 19 June 2022 @Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
Second Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day/Juneteenth
Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:1-15a; Psalm 42 (UM777); Galatians 3:23-29; Luke
8:26-39
"Chaos"

Boy howdy!

Suddenly, we're no longer reflecting on life, but living it!

The somber Bible texts of Lent; the flash of Easter; the quiet joy of reflecting on Easter's many meanings during Eastertide; the exhilaration of new understanding @ Pentecost; and the last mystical wisdom of Trinity Sunday ... all these are replaced, today, with as much drama as our own turbulent times.

The towering prophet Elijah is on the run, terrified at Queen Jezebel's promise to catch and kill him by the next Sunday, is as far as his feet can carry him away from her reaches; Psalm 42 gasps in lonely lack of God; Paul's stark lecture to the quarreling Galatian congregation is short and pointed: "So demonstrate equality as Christ shows how! There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus;" and Jesus tackles the grasp of evil in a horribly tormented man by demons and then is run out of town by terrified herdsman who lose their source of livelihood as his remedy drives their herd into the sea.

God help us to see the parallels in the chaos of our own historical moment! Our President plans to visit Saudi Arabia, one of the world's least free and just nations, to talk about world oil reserves; nobody makes any apparent attempts to negotiate with the criminal Putin, as though that is beneath our righteousness; the Supreme Court supposedly will soon undo women's control over their own bodies; and our national worship of guns outruns all reason or mercy week by week.

Very little time left to be reasonably religious ... and don't get me started on the options of the growing ranks of the spiritual but not religious among us ... or on the split in our own United Methodist denomination that complicates everything from pensions to all levels of public service ministry in our communion worldwide.

So now is the time to ... what? Turn to Job and Ecclesiastes and use their harshness about life and God as our daily texts? They certainly "speak to our condition," as Wesley would put it.

Or, as more people do all the time, just stop coming together to worship, or teaching Bible stories to our young, as our ranks thin and those of us remaining get older, and older, and ...?

These look like reasonable responses to the obvious chaos all around us.

But what about that small inner voice that we continue to hear? What about the sense of elation we continue to get from walking with Jesus Talking with God ... working with people of all stripes and nationalities and faith groups who we know are doing good right here and now? What about all the educated guessing our local political leaders ... you know them, you pray for and vote for them election by election and year by year ... people all up and down the ranks of power and poverty who are, we can see, making a difference already now?

Are we supposed to pay less attention to the good news God sends every day into our specific small and crucial place of service, the circles we have been faithful to support, the kindness we know and hear about as often as we hear all the bad news?

You must be kidding! We know that every just act, every kindness, every brave bearing with illness and uncertainty that we watch, and thank God that we have the nerve and hope and wisdom to perform ourselves All this wonder and beauty and solid ground that we experience, win our hearts over and over.

Because we're not in charge. What we call chaos is seedbed ... What we now see was mistaken in the whole Western expansion over the last several centuries ... all what had good as well as evil in it. There is so much promise in what we have left ... what has just turned into opportunity What is crying for support ... what it's more fun all the time to contribute to and run alongside and sometimes to lead ahead ourselves ... all this is the Good News we already know as Jesus Christ ... and you ain't seen nothing yet! What's lost in the trauma of Jesus' healing is always just one side of the story. Church ... Bethesda Church ... is useful and sometimes even smart ... what we have within this ship of mercy ... is of God, and so are we ... so let's go!

Lord, this is just a hint you give us this Sunday. Now that we're turned on, we promise to stay with in your name and spirit. Lead us on. Amen.