

Worship for January 14, 2024

*Call to Worship Amos 5

We are called to seek good and not evil,
that we may live; and so that the Lord,
the God of hosts, will be with us.

**We are called to hate evil and love good,
and establish justice.**

Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

**We seek to be a people that embodies God's justice.
By the power of God at work within us, may it be so.**

*Hymn 307 God of Grace and God of Glory

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God,

**You sent Jesus to proclaim your kingdom
and to teach with authority.**

**Anoint us with your Spirit,
that we too may bring good news to the poor,
bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive;
forgive us for neglecting the needs of our brothers and sisters
and failing to testify to the good news of your love. Amen.**

*Hymn **Take, O Take Me As I Am**

Old Testament Reading 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading John 1:43-51

The Morning Message

!968. It was both a good and bad year. My sister was born in 1968. We moved into a beautiful new home. The year saw violent demonstrations in many major cities in the US and across the globe. The focus of the US protests was the Vietnam War. It was also the year that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert Kennedy were both assassinated.

That was also the year I started junior high school. I went to Lincoln. Walked to and from every day. It wasn't a problem. It was exciting. For years, I had watched the pretty junior high girls in my neighborhood walk to school in their Bass Weejuns and hose. I had finally arrived, wearing penny loafers and hose.

And when I walked those new shoes through the doors of that school, my worldview would change. I would be in a community that included African American students. I had a lot to learn. The first lesson was about fear. Words of truth and hope, learned in Sunday School, ran through my head and heart. "Perfect love casts out fear." And this...we may not love perfectly, but Jesus does and I could follow his example. So, my experience included both failure and success, but I count it all helpful.

A lot has changed since then, thank goodness, but we have not yet completely healed the divisions caused by racism, or really, any "otherness." This week commemorates both the birthday of Rev. Martin Luther King and Holocaust Remembrance. It lifts up the ministry of MLK and activism of the American Civil Rights Movement and recalls the heinous attempt to annihilate the Jewish citizens, men, women, and children, of Europe. Six million Jews died during this most cruel regime.

And I know we don't like to think or talk about these things, we certainly don't want to identify with them, for to do that is to make ourselves vulnerable to pain. But, I believe what makes us human is our ability to do just that...to have empathy-to feel what others feel.

The 2024 session of the West Virginia Legislature opened this past Wednesday. Like you, I am eager to see what issues they will address in the coming weeks. I hope both chambers will initiate efforts to bring more hope than harm to the people of this state. I hope the two main parties will work together for the public good, especially that portion of the public that lacks the security of healthcare and/or a safe place to lay their head at night. I hope they support the public school system so that all children and youth can succeed in life. I hope they demonstrate their support for all public servants, who work in all kinds of conditions, doing their best to meet people in their needs.

I predict we will be left wanting at the end of the session, being reminded one again that there is virtue in waiting as the "arc of the moral universe is long and it bends toward justice."

When Martin Luther King Jr. preached at the Washington National Cathedral on March 31, 1968, nobody knew it would be the last Sunday sermon he would ever give. The topic was "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." The invitation was extended to him for the purpose of explaining to the "white clergy and the people of Greater Washington" that his planned Poor People's Campaign was intended to be non-violent" and not disruptive of life in Washington.

King, as the “apostle of non-violence,” was invited by the dean of the cathedral to deliver his message. But he knew his white colleagues were uneasy. In fact, one woman wrote to the cathedral warning that the King invitation would “stir up more racial tension and anxiety, which can only lead to disaster.”

That Sunday, the cathedral attracted its largest-ever crowd, with thousands more spilling out the doors to listen on loudspeakers. King knew his audience and he was very direct: “Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God.”

He urged the gathered flock that day to yield the temptation to wait on time, to wait for somebody else to do the work.

He further challenged them with these words: “On some positions cowardice asks the question: Is it expedient? And then expedience comes along and asks the question, Is it politic? Then conscience asks the question: Is it right?

There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right.”

King’s challenge to the faithful gathered that day in 1968 feels intensely relevant today. You know the issues: poverty, violence, addiction and recovery, housing scarcity, food insecurity, inadequate education, racism, anti-semitism, human trafficking, despair.

But how and when do we address these difficult issues? The human instinct is to not offend. Oh, my goodness. I’ve lived in this tension my whole professional life. It’s hard to ask people to notice the needs for social justice, to advocate for it even, and then to back down so that it doesn’t insult or offend.

But, as Christians, we follow a man, Jesus, who never took the easy way out. Jesus did not censor himself for fear of retribution. He challenged the institutional oppression of his day, and calls us to confront the injustice of our time.

Often, it is through the words and actions of our young people that we are inspired to change. I have shared this story every year on this day because I believe it is important and hopefully motivational for you.

A few years ago, standing out in her yellow coat before thousands of people at the inauguration of President Biden, Amanda Gorman reminded me, and maybe some of you, that there is hope and there can be change for this country and maybe the world.

Change had indeed already come to her. She was living, shining proof.

Ms. Gorman is the first Youth Poet Laureate ever in the United States. She was born in Los Angeles and raised by a single mother, a sixth grade teacher. She was academically gifted and won a scholarship to Harvard University. She is both a poet and an activist, as is her twin sister, Gabrielle.

But it wasn't always an easy path for her. Amanda has an auditory processing disorder and is hyper-sensitive to sound. She spent years in speech therapy. She says her disability is also her gift, because being intensely focused on auditory and vocal processes made her really good at reading and writing.

When she stood at the podium on Inauguration Day, we didn't see all the struggles of her young life. But, we witnessed her poise, confidence, intelligence, skill, presence, artistry, and grace. We witnessed a young woman claiming her call. It's a call that is still forming, but, we know she will be equipped to embrace it.

When young Samuel was called by God, he didn't even recognize God's voice. Eli had to steer him in the right direction. We still read Samuel's story and acknowledge the role he played in salvation history.

When Jesus called the fishermen, he was calling them into a life of uncertainty and risk. But, they followed anyway, learning by Jesus' side, and birthing the early church. Their lives still influence us today. Although Presbyterians don't often do this, we see the names of our Christian forebears on churches, schools, and hospitals.

Hear me clearly as I make the next statement. The citizens of our land have been blessed by good leaders and harmed by others. Many people affirm and appreciate the advocacy and spiritual work of Martin Luther King to bring about change for the vulnerable, the poor, the minority citizens of the US. Some saw this not as progress, but as unwelcome revolution. Reasonable minds can disagree.

Some time ago, the Office of the General Assembly published a study guide for "Presbyterians in Times of Disagreement." It recognizes that Presbyterians, and all Christians, are called upon to pay attention to changes in church and culture that tend to divide rather than unite reasonable people of faith. The document offers strategies for moving from impasse and hostility to a rational and mutually acceptable outcome even at times of strident debate and polarization.

As it has been a guide to peace in our church, I have hope that one day, we will have peace in our land..

So, with a new year's hope, from a fresh mind and in a positive spirit, I again offer you the words today of Amanda Gorman for the New Year:

May this be the day
We come together
Mourning , we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better,
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we aren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
We steadily vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.
This hope is our door, our portal,
Even if we never get back to normal.
Some day we can venture beyond it,
To leave the known and take first steps.
So let us not return to normal,
But reach toward what is next.
What was cursed, we will cure,
What was plagued, we will prove pure,
Where we tend to argue, we will try to agree,
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future we forsee.
Where we weren't aware, we're now awake.
Those moments we missed,
Are now these moments we make,
The moments we meet,
And our hearts, all together beaten,
Now altogether beat.
Come look up with kindness yet.
For even solace can be sourced from sorrow.
We remember not just for the sake of yesterday,
But to take on tomorrow.
We heed this old spirit,
In a new days' lyric,
In our hearts we hear it,

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
Be bold, sang Time this year,
Be bold, sang time.
For when you honor yesterday,
Tomorrow ye will find.
Know what we've fought,
Need not be forgot for none.
It defines us, binds us as one,
Come over, join this day just begun,.
For wherever we come together,
We will forever overcome.

May that be our hope and our intention in the year ahead. Amen.

*We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom, Verses 1 and 2

*Affirmation of Faith (from *A Brief Statement of Faith*)

We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

**preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed and blessing children,
healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.**

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,

Jesus was crucified,

suffering the depths of human pain

and giving his life for the sins of the world.

God raised this Jesus from the dead,

vindicating his sinless life,

breaking the power of sin and evil,

delivering us from death to life eternal.

With believers in every time and place,

we rejoice that nothing in life or death

can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia. Amen.

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Holy One, as we have called for your justice to roll down like waters, we are painfully aware that many in our nation and in the wider world have never or rarely known justice and righteousness. As we pause to recognize Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we admit that the issues of racism are far from resolved. Most of us will never know the hurts and offences and even violence our brothers and sisters have suffered their whole lives long. Our experiences have been very different. Save us from contributing to their pain and all the offenses born of discrimination and the de-valuing of others. Help us to walk some miles in their shoes that we might be your faithful children seeking understanding. We pray for that day when we are all truly at peace with the differences in color, race, culture, gender, orientation, and any human attribute that can be used as a weapon against another. Forgive us for our failures and fill us with strength and conviction to live after the manner of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve,

We make our prayer and petitions in Jesus' name, saying, Our Father...Amen.

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

Gracious God, we are so aware of the abundance of gifts you have provided. We know, too, the great joy of sharing those gifts with others. As we offer our tithes and offerings this day, prompt us to commit more than dollars, but also those gifts you have written on our hearts-gifts meant to announce peace and understanding to the world. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus, Amen.

*Hymn 377 We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom, Verses 3 and 4

*Blessing

Go now. Listen for the voice of the Lord and follow wherever it leads.

Do not be dominated by anything.

Allow no room within yourself for deceit,
but offer yourself as a temple for the Holy Spirit.

And may God be with you and speak through you;
may Christ Jesus be one with you and raise you to new life;
and may the Holy Spirit dwell in you richly. Amen.

*Postlude