

**In the Name and In the Spirit of Jesus
From the Bible: Mark 1: 16-20**

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In the push and pull of the world as it is, we sometimes forget. So to help us remember, this reminder from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christian community in Galatia. Words and a witness meant also for today.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ.

(Which means you have put on Jesus.)

[Therefore] there is no longer Jew or Greek.

There is no longer slave or free.

There is no longer male or female.

For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And, given the reality of the world in which we live we are called to pull that witness into these times and this moment which means...

There is also no longer Africans or Americans.

There is no longer Houstonians or Haitians.

There is no longer New Yorkers or Salvadorans.

There is no longer gay or straight.

There is no longer red states or blue states.

But, of course there are.

All those divisions.

Sharply separating us from them. You from me. The deserving from the undeserving.

We know it. We feel it. We are told each day it is the way life is. The way the world is.

But, the lines which we are told divide us are no less stark or deep or divisive than theirs were.

So, in the midst of that divisiveness and dismissiveness and hatred the Apostle speaks again and dares to tell us...

Dares to tell you...

As many of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ.

For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Remember your baptism.

So, as we remember who we are and who we are called to be both in our own unique being, but also collectively as God's presence and people and witness in the world as it is, in these two readings listen for God's word that it might be heard in our midst again this day.

First, from the witness of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I was reminded of these words last Sunday morning as Shodie and I, along with her Dad, worshiped at the Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church. Dr. King writes:

This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists.

Our planet teeters on the brink of atomic annihilation; dangerous passions of pride, hatred and selfishness are enthroned in our lives; truth lies prostrate on the rugged hills

*of nameless calvaries; and men [and women] do reverence before false gods of nationalism and materialism. **The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority...** I confess that I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination, to the moral degeneracy of religious bigotry and the corroding effects of narrow sectarianism, to economic conditions that deprive men [and women] of work and food and to the insanities of militarism and the self defeating effects of physical violence. **Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.***

Like I do, do you swallow hard when you hear those words?

I have spent a lifetime learning to fit in and to not make waves and to keep the peace.

But, here I am told what the world needs...

What the Gospel calls us to...

Is to be non-conformist and creatively maladjusted not buying into the notion of *that is just the way it is*, but standing up and stepping towards something more. Something different.

Something closer to what God intends.

And these words from Mark's Gospel.

Continue to listen for God's word that it might be present and heard in our midst again today.

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1: 16-20)

Follow me. Jesus said.

Then he walked out the doors of the synagogue, away from the lake and into the world as it was. And, with all do respect to my more conservative sisters and brothers, the witness of the gospel is not about personal salvation. Not about me and Jesus. Not about avoiding hell and getting into heaven. It is not just nodding our heads in tacit agreement. It is not about feeling good in church. It is about changing the world and transforming people's lives.

After walking out the doors of the synagogue, Jesus touched and healed those broken in body and spirit. He overturned the piety and the tables of the *properly religious* both as he sat and taught and in the courtyard of the Temple. He welcomed into the circle around him women and children, the forgotten and the disenfranchised. He gave food to those who were hungry.

Follow me. He says.

Which means more than just tagging along watching or sitting in church on Sunday.

Instead, it means figuring out how we are to do in our lives what we see Jesus doing in his.

I know politics and policy is messy and complicated just like the world in which we live.

I know the SNAP program is complicated.

What is not complicated is our neighbor and her family who are hungry.

I know health care and the CHIP program are complicated.

What is not complicated is the child who is sick and who needs to see a doctor.

I know race and the impact of changing demographics is complicated.

What is not complicated is the affirmation we are all made in the image of God and bear the imprint of the Holy.

I know immigration policy is complicated.

What is not complicated is the father who was brought to this country 30 years ago when he was 10 and who is now a husband and a father with a full time job and who has paid taxes and been a part of his community whose family was torn apart when he was deported this week. Or the DACA students who also were brought to this country as children and who have worked hard and have achieved academic success and who are now in college pursuing a degree and a career. The pressing question is:

What does *Follow me* mean and look like in those situations and circumstances and hundred more just like them?

Jan Edmiston, one of the Co-Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church wrote this several days ago on her blog.

How do we [as Christians and as the Church] live in a disturbing world?

We start in our own homes and neighborhoods.

We teach our children to respect all people - even those who seem foreign to us in their behavior or their appearance. We speak up when we hear people disrespect other human beings. We make our children proud by defending the weak. And we reward them with praise when they defend the weak. We honor doing the right thing. We learn from people we do not understand. We talk with each other. We are real with each other.

This is who the Church is called to be in these days.

We can no longer be a social club, a service organization, or a sentimental fellowship.

We exist to transform the world for good in the name of Jesus.

We are called to live in the image of Christ - which is no small thing.

It sometimes gets people killed.

On most days the best we can do might be to remember that we and those around us - even the cranky ones - have a value that no one can take away.

Listen for God's word.

The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ.

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