

Hope: Celebrating the Future in the Present

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Douglas S. Long

Umstead Park UCC

Let us fill the world with singing!! Not fill the world with shouting, not fill it with factions, let us fill the world with singing!

It makes me think of Matthew Fox's book from several decades ago... "Original Blessing." Fox takes the whole premise of the 'fallenness of humanity,' original sin and instead posits that humanity was birthed by a creative Divine force that see's it as, not fallen, but good... that we should imagine instead the Divine from the beginning walking through the creation with 'original sing!' ... singing life into being, birthing the beginning of humanity ...not in sin but in song! We shouldn't be talking about original sin but original blessing! ('Original Blessing' is the title of Fox's seminal work.)

So, Yes!... Let's follow that divine lead. Let's fill the world with singing! What a marvelous vision... thank you, choir, for filling our life together, blessing our lives, with singing.

What a wonderful way to see the world. ...and we *do need* a new way of seeing from time to time... some corrective vision, if you will.

...because, let's be honest, we come some Sundays, many recently, and just wring our hands and shake our heads at the world around us... earthquakes and hurricanes and gun violence, and grown men in positions of great power repeatedly acting more like petulant children on a playground. (I won't name any names, but one does pretty much trump the list.)

Enough about such news... let us fill the world with singing.

Today we will imagine the world as we want it to be, and celebrate signs of that hopeful future we recognize already among us.

"Hope," said Pauli Murray, "is a song in a weary throat."

Pauli Murray was well acquainted with weariness. As an African-American female in the south ... as a lesbian of color who broke down all manner of walls and overcame barrier after barrier on her journey to the Episcopal Priesthood, do you have any doubt that Murray *knew* weariness. -"Hope," said Pauli Murray, "is a song in a weary throat."

Though sometimes it seems hopeless and I do declare... there are signs of hope here and now...

For example... Did you hear this almost unbelievable story from this past week's Durham Herald? It involved the first defaced and then removed statue of Robert E. Lee at Duke Chapel. There has been an empty space there for a few weeks and a "Commission on Memory and History" is to advise the President of the University on how to proceed.

A commission on memory and history... what history do we *want* to remember and celebrate... what history do we value as inspiration?

I have no doubt that on some level, perhaps many, Robert E. Lee was an honorable man of his time and place. Yet I have no doubt that Lee has become a symbol for a confederacy so bent on institutionalizing slavery it was willing to kill that it might oppress. ...and that is what Lee is now known for. He led the troops willing to kill their brothers in the north for the right to enslave their brothers in the south. That is what his present fame rests on.

What history do we want to leave with our children to embolden them into the future...?

I don't know what this commission on memory and history will ultimately recommend... but the name that surfaced in the Durham herald this week was ... Pauli Murray.

Pauli Murray... African American, female, Episcopal priest, boundary breaking, freedom fighting, lesbian lover of all humanity standing beside ... Thomas Jefferson and eight other men.

Pauli Murray where Robert E. Lee at Duke Chapel?!! Can you even imagine that conversation seriously happening a few years ago? ...a few months ago?

Yesterday I attended the Annual Meeting of the Eastern NC Association of the United Church of Christ. For those of you who are not familiar with the intricacies of our denomination... which would be... most of you... the ENCA is the geographic division that we fall into and, on the local level, that we are in covenant with. It was, to summarize in a sentence or so, the body that could not find its way to allow us membership for the first 4 years of our life together. That first ENCA meeting, 17 years ago, the crowd at one point even turned their backs on our choir.

Yesterday I was barely allowed time to speak as well... **BUT**, it was because there were **so many other persons on the already on agenda filling up every nook and cranny with pleas regarding racism and mass incarceration and immigration reform and yes, even a wizened African American minister waxing honestly and eloquently on LGBT inclusion.**

("Everything legal ain't right!" one African-American clergy woman powerfully proclaimed.)

And there was nothing but applause in this rural, African American church in Manson, NC.

A sign of hope? You better believe it! Unbelievably so...

And then there was the still recent news from our sister Congregation in Greensboro... Congregational UCC. A little over 3 months ago Congregational welcomed Minerva Garcia and her children into protective sanctuary. Minerva's community in Winston-Salem had been fighting to save her from deportation for several weeks but with time running out she had to decide whether to leave her children, citizens, in the Sates without her... or take them to a country, a dangerous place, they had never known. Minerva decided to accept the invitation to enter into sanctuary while her lawyers pled her case... and after 3 months... she won. Minerva is free, her family restored, and in at least in one case, justice upheld.

"Look what you did!" The title of Julie People's article excitedly announced to her congregation in their recent newsletter.

Why did the fine folk of Congregational UCC in Greensboro do this?

They were simply living their faith ... They understood their core identity to be rooted in the lasting realm of God and not in the political whims of the day...

Like it or not, there is a division, there is a line between the two. Let's call it a border.

And here we sit today, on that border... between the lasting realm of the Divine whims of the day. Let us fill the world with singing... let us bring the hopeful future, glimpses all around us into the present.

There is all manner of inspiration from deep within our past as well... How does our own "Commission on Memory and History" instruct us? What things, events, person do we call up and place before us.

How 'bout our text for today. From Leviticus, a direct quote:

Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. [Thus, says the Lord.]

That's from the lasting realm of God...

Now, contrast that to another more contemporary direct quote reflecting some political whims of our day:

“I will build a great wall — and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me —... I will build a great, great wall on our southern border ... Mark my words.” (Thus, says the Donald.)

The law of the Lord vs. the law as proposed by the current occupant of the White House. Which is our faith rooted in? Which will we act/or not act/ upon?

True hospitality, deep hospitality, is about treating the foreigner, the stranger, if you will, as kin. Treating the foreigner as a family (in the best sense).

Because... they are! We are ...

All humanity... the family of God.

I am deeply delighted that this week, we have stepped into the lasting realm...

And so in another present sign of the hopeful future we gathered here on Tuesday with others of the wider community to publicly welcome Eliseo and Gabriela into this family to provide for them and their family all the safe refuge we can muster.

I'll be honest with you... we are still figuring out many of the logistics but one of the unexpected tasks is finding enough things for Eliseo to do! Then again, he is figuring that out for us.

I walked in Wednesday and he was cleaning the kitchen ... and when I say cleaning I mean the inner parts of the stove were soaking in the sink. The door to his room was open and I saw parts of the fan we had given him for better air circulation... parts of the fan all over the floor... Well how else are you going to clean something well... you have to take it apart?

Thursday, he was sanding drywall, Friday he was painting the children's closet...

Eliseo... be careful as some of us may be willing to risk transporting you to our homes! (Not advised, by the way, that act is definitely against the law.)

Perhaps you know that we do not do this important work alone. Volunteers have joined us from Community UCC, Pullen Baptist and Western Blvd Presbyterian here in Raleigh, Covenant Christian Disciples and Good Shepherd UCC in Cary, Chapel Hill Mennonites, and the Durham Brethren community as well...

And since 9 others are friends outside the church of one of our members, I should include that church from Sydney! ...the Church of Sarah Sydney.

It's been an amazing outpouring... not quite as amazing as sated by Martha Quillen in the N&O. She reported that we had 3 times as many volunteers as we needed!!

While we are celebrating all the support, but that's not *exactly* true. We still need all of you. The press has been eager to “out tell” and “out report” there competing media sources.

We had representatives of the media from local news stations to Telemundo... (and in fact, Estrella TV is coming this afternoon.)

This is where I want to take just a little time to explain that part of the role of a reporter these days is to generate viewership... which means, for some, to find something controversial... and if there nothing there... to make it sound like there is!

Like the time, for example, Eliseo and Gabriela were going to a baptism (That's news?!) ... and Gabriela lost the keys, temporarily, to their car... and they were about to miss the ceremony... So, they hurriedly jumped into a roommate's car (with no time to inform the roommate) ... sounds like a script for a sitcom... Even better, and more comical when the roommate arrives, cannot find the car, which panics him because it actually belonged his boss, so the sitcom continues and calling the boss in a panic the boss calls the police...

Of course, in the situational comedy script, or even the Shakespearean comedy, Eliseo and Gabriela would arrive back with the children, and there would be GREAT relief for the friend and boss and police and laughing and all would be well that ends well.

But when you are undocumented, even with the friend and boss [pleading your case, pointing out the miscommunication, when you are undocumented you are charged with a stolen vehicle, perhaps breaking and entering to find the keys to drive it, oh and children were with you... contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Yes, the press has dug up some of these charges...and they will talk of felonies... all dismissed eventually, after jail time and detention in this land where some of us are innocent until proven guilty but others are guilty until proven innocent...and the charge, though completely false, always stays on the record.

Folks, if you hear a press report, a media story, and it gives you pause, I have but two words to say... Fox News.

We had a phone call on the church line of someone who heard one of these slightly off-based news reports, took it as completely true, and then, understandable reacted.

"Are you people nuts?" the caller inquired. "Any criminal can crawl to your steps and be given safety from the police?"

I saw the report he was reacting to and I get how someone, already living with a conservative world-view, could misunderstand.

So, I encourage us to be careful that we might hear voices of dissent before we judge too quickly.

We've had supportive calls to the church phone as well... like the one Friday morning from David Price's chief of staff.

We did not contact him... but apparently some of you and many others did.

... And now the Church of Sarah Sydney has David Price's chief of staff's phone number!!

Today we imagine the world as we want it to be, and celebrate signs of that hopeful future we recognize already among us.

Late Friday night Rabbi Lucy Dinner contacted me with the hope that volunteers from Temple Beth Or would soon join in.

There is hope.... Now.
Amen.