

Sermon 24.04.14 *Tikkun Olam*, repair the world

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Luke 24:36-48

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Acts 3:12-19

Peter addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

Context for readings:

Our scripture reading from Luke begins 'When they were talking about this'... here's some context of what's going on: it's Easter evening, a few had seen the empty tomb, and some unnamed disciples met up with Jesus, disguised as a traveler, on the road to Emmaus. Our scripture today starts just as those disciples have breathlessly recounted to the others how Jesus had made himself known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The passage from Acts comes early in that book, where, following Pentecost, the community is growing by leaps and bounds, with sharing of resources, bread, prayers - and where there is much arguing with those outside this new community. The reading today is the end of a story where Peter and John healed a lame man who had asked for alms, and instead, ended up jumping up, praising God.

SERMON:

[SLIDES](#) can be found here, starting at slide 18, follow the text)

I watched a short film this week documenting the annual [potato salad contest](#)¹ between 2 small towns in Poland and the Czech Republic. These towns are within walking distance, yet separated by language, culture and a border. (IMAGE) On one side there's a coal plant that provides work and a livelihood for much of the town. On the other side of the border, a community that says that the coal plant is causing issues with their access to clean water. It's caused a lot of tension and ill-will in this area. While the politicians and scientists are working on solutions, the community, communities, continue a tradition that keeps them coming together. For the last several years, one evening in the fall, they gather in a large hall, where bowls and bowls of potato salad are lined up on long tables, identified only by number (IMAGE). Little stickers are used for voting for the best potato salad. It's a fierce contest, and the room is filled with lots of conversation, the dissing one another's creations, talking up their own. Beer flowing freely. The groups were not necessarily sitting together and chatting. Polish song would break out at one table, followed by a traditional Czech one. (IMAGE) And together they all ate. Tasting, complementing, making fun of each other, choosing their favorite. There seemed to be plenty of coercion as well - one woman making clear to her group what number her salad was. This was serious competition, and yet done in fun. The grand prize: a big bag of potatoes.

At the very end of the film (spoiler alert), the secret of the winner, a Polish woman, (IMAGE) was revealed- she used Czech mustard! Polish style potato salad made with a mustard that was known and familiar to the opponents. Masterful!

This light-hearted film was about repairing the world, or maybe that one community, one potato, one shared meal, at a time.

¹ [Opinion | Everything's Fine, Potatoes in Line - The New York Times](#)

Tikkun Olam: Repairing the world (IMAGE). An ancient Hebraic idea that continues to resonate today. We'll come back to this in a minute.

I recently had a conversation with a friend who is a professor who told me that in one of her classes she has her students sign a contract. A statement of recognition that they will be offended - that that's a part of learning. If they're not willing to be offended, they should drop the class. She feels that one of the highest values of young people today is to not offend another, and so they stay quiet, not engaging fully in debate/conversation. She wants to create a safe environment in her classroom where she push them beyond that niceness, into real engagement.

The Acts passage read earlier doesn't worry about offending.

Peter, John, the others - they have a mission - and are clear about it. They witness to the suffering servant, the one who brings love, who calls us to live lives of love, rooted in Christ.

The clearness of their sense of mission - made me wonder:

Are we at UMC, clear about our mission? Clear about what it means for us, at this time and place, to serve Christ, the Risen One?

New Testament scholar NT Wright teaches that:

Of the first-century believers who accepted Jesus as Messiah, many were convinced that the world would be transformed in their own lifetimes. The kingdom come. This inauguration, however, was far from complete and required the active participation of God's people - it required them stepping up and practicing social justice, nonviolence and forgiveness for the transformation to be fulfilled.

Here we are, still doing the work of building for the kingdom; for the kingdom here and not yet here. Over the centuries, doing this work has come to be known in Judaism as *tikkun olam*, or "repairing the world." Wright suggests this Hebrew phrase is closely aligned to the ancient beliefs embraced by Jesus and his followers.²

Tikkun Olam. Repairing the world.

² [Our idea of heaven wrong, says N. T. Wright | The Christian Century](#)

The Acts passage - as bold as it is, can be problematic today - and is sometimes used as an anti-Semitic text, one of blaming the Jewish leaders for the death of Jesus. That is not what Tikkun Olam is about.

Blaming is not the call of the Risen One. I don't think it was Peter's intention. Peter was a Jew. Peter was inviting them all in - inviting them to change their ways - change the way they lived in the world, that's the meaning of repent - and join them in the work of repairing the world.

The Acts passage is one of restoration. A man who was lame regained his physical freedom - not through some act of magic by Peter and John, but through the love of Christ, made manifest through his followers.

In the passage from Luke, when Jesus appeared to those terrified disciples on Easter evening, reassuring them, opening their minds and their hearts he called them witnesses. They witnessed the fulfillment of thousands of years of prophecy. Jesus tells them: Witness how God's love, woven through the ages, is here, in front of you right now.

And now, go forth as witnesses and share this love.

That's the work of Tikkun Olam.

As Christians, we go forth in the power of the Risen One, continuing the work of repair. We witness to this love through being the hands and feet of Christ.

As NT Wright said - the work to bring the kingdom into our midst was, and still is, far from complete, and so requires the active participation of God's people practicing social justice, nonviolence and forgiveness to become fulfilled.

Does that work involve taking a stand? Does it involve more than activities like planting trees, volunteering locally, opening our building to various groups, caring for one another through visits and offering rides? We are an involved bunch. We care for one another and for our community.

I wonder about taking a stand.

Peter took a stand. Was clear that all were welcomed. He was clear that the healing gifts he had were not his own, but rooted in the Risen Jesus. And, from our standards of right speech, Peter was kind of offensive.

My professor friend believes we don't really learn if we're not willing to be offended, and explore ideas that might offend.

This idea makes me nervous. I have a strong need to be liked. I don't like to offend. I want to create a big tent for everyone to belong.

Creating belonging is central to my understanding of living out the gospel message. I believe that's core to bringing healing to our community. And I hear the words of Black theologian and author James Cone, who wrote that God, indeed, takes a side. The side of the oppressed. That through Jesus, God identifies as the oppressed one. Cone challenges me to stand there too, reminding us that Jesus was in deep solidarity with the disenfranchised and marginalized.³ Can I take a stand while also creating a spaciousness for all to be welcomed? What is the way of Jesus?

Randy Woodley, Cherokee pastor, teacher and activist said: (IMAGE)

"People have fooled themselves into believing they can follow Christ and risk nothing."⁴

What are we called to risk in living into Tikkun Olam?

I bring this question again - one for us to consider together: (IMAGE)

Are we at UMC clear about our mission? Clear about what it means for us, at this time and place, to serve Christ, the Risen One?

May we continue to ask ourselves and each other these questions...

Resources

<https://mwc-cmm.org/en/stories/pacifism-and-nonviolence-should-be-way-life#:~:text=Our%20attitude%20is%3A%20we%20are,world%20of%20peace%20is%20possible.>

³ <https://www.onlineharbor.org/blog/cross-solidarity-with-oppressed>

⁴ <https://chasingjustice.com/i-wanna-be-where-you-are/>