

Sermon Proper 8 Year A
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
June 28, 2020

Genesis 22:1-14 Psalm 13 Romans 6:12-23 Matthew 10:40-42

Yesterday I had the honor and joy of officiating at the wedding of two members of our parish. Logan Todd and Campbell Price vowed before God to honor one another with all that they are and all that they have. You may know Campbell as the granddaughter of Ray Campbell or as the daughter of Debbie Price. Just as the newlyweds were welcomed into one another's families yesterday, please reach out intentionally and welcome them into their faith family at The Church of the Redeemer. Send a card, a note, make a phone call; these are the cups of cold water to our "little ones," not young in age but young in being part of a Christian community. We welcome them in the name of Jesus and in the image of God.

To marry today is a measure of faith, hope and courage. Faith that God will be with them through many tests in life, faith that God indeed will provide, and a deep hope that love still has a place in relationships, in this community, in this nation and in all of God's creation. To join together in Christian hope takes courage.

Fifty six years ago, a landmark civil rights removed many of the country's "Jim Crow" laws, removing impediments for black people – all citizens – in this country to exercise their right to vote. The summer was called "Freedom Summer." As civil rights workers from a group called CORE went to MS to register black citizens to vote, racism and hatred broke free, and three young workers were murdered: Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman. The news of the day included the picture of their burned out car, with the headline: "No signs of violence in disappearance of three civil rights workers."

Fifty-six years later violence is still exploding over racism, skin color, equality under the law, and voting. The Ku Klux Klan, whose members carried out the murders, still exists. Can we resolve anything? We can answer that question with the same amount of as understanding this bible story of Abraham and Isaac. Why on earth would God request the murder of Abraham's beloved son, and why is this frightening story in the bible? From scholars to people in the streets, no one knows for sure.

In Christianity, we mark the parallel of Moses and Isaac to God and Jesus, that God also gave up his only and beloved son to death, only life ruled the day. Life still rules the day, and to me, that is the most compelling explanation of this passage: that God keeps Gods promises and that the story shows us, in the end, that not death but LIFE remains.

We are called in all times and in all places to respect the dignity of every person. Every person, and to welcome all in the name of Christ, offering living water, a cold cup of water to those in infancy in their faith life, the "little ones." If we are living in a world that, fifty-six years later, and 2056 years later is still struggling to honor LIFE, then we, too, are those little ones who need a cup of cold water, a simple, courageous act of giving and receiving living water, Jesus Christ.

Our call is clear: offer a cup of cold water to one who is asking:
How long, how Lord, how long?
God, will you forget me forever?

Who is not asking these questions today? How long will an indiscriminate virus divide and kill us, how long will we fail to recognize that God created everyone in God's image and that we all deserve life? In choosing to honor one another, we honor Jesus that we see in that person and we honor God. People lamenting as the psalmist does are not hard to find: they are quarantined in their homes, they are marching on our streets, they are being murdered everywhere, they are marrying and giving in marriage, they are dying, they are living ... "they" is us.

We are called to welcome everyone, to give a cold cup of water to a people parched for God. "The answer" is as simple and as complicated as that. A seemingly simple act is radical because we are welcoming Jesus in everyone. Imagine if in everything you do today, you envision yourself doing that with and for Jesus. You make coffee for Jesus, read the paper with Jesus, go for a walk with Jesus, swear and murder and hate – not with Jesus!

Transformation is not often, and maybe rarely, big, flashy or complicated. Welcome one another. Welcome "the" other. Welcome a civil rights worker, a protester, any "opposite" of you, of us. Offer the water and in so doing, hear the voice of Moses, of yourself, saying "Here I am, Lord." Show the little ones that love wins. Show the little ones, all of the little ones, that God is faithful, that we are God's beloved little ones, and that a small sip of living water transforms us, and through us, the world.

It took forty years for the murders of Micky Schwerner, James Goodman, and Andrew Chaney to be tried in a court that honored their lives. Three young persons: white, black, Jewish. Thank you, God, for justice. Help us work with you to change the world, not in forty years, but right now. Through our hands, allow us to offer and to receive you, God, in everyone. Convict us, convert us to heal this broken, beloved world.

God, transform this summer into a summer of life, into a summer of true freedom in which freedom means honoring you and not our hatred or indifference. Give us the courage to receive from, and to offer living water to everyone created in your image. Let a drop of cold water refresh our parched souls.

How long, O Lord, how long until we see Jesus in everyone, until we transform your very good creation into a place in which your will is done in heaven and on earth?

How long, O Lord, how long?
But I put my trust in your mercy; my heart is joyful because of your saving help.
Amen.

A greatly abbreviated and incomplete history of the right to vote in the USA:

Amendment 14 to the Constitution gave black people the right of citizenship, theoretically meaning that they could vote; however, regulations and details of voting was left to the states.

Amendment 15 to the Constitution was an attempt to remedy voting discrimination: *The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.*

Then, until the Supreme Court struck it down in 1915, many states used the "grandfather clause " to keep descendants of slaves out of elections. The clause said you could not vote unless your grandfather had voted -- an impossibility for most people whose ancestors were slaves.

Then states used the poll tax as a deterrent to voting: *Begun in the 1890s as a legal way to keep African Americans from voting in southern states, **poll** taxes were essentially a voting fee. Eligible voters were required to pay their **poll tax** before they could cast a ballot.*

(My note: and we haven't even gotten to women ...!)

The 1965 Voting Rights Act created a significant change in the status of African Americans [throughout the South]. The Voting Rights Act prohibited the states from using literacy tests and other methods of excluding African Americans from voting.

The above quotations are from:

<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/elections/voting-rights-african-americans.html>

By the 1960s, other Supreme Court decisions, and the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), invalidated the majority of Jim Crow laws. (<https://u-s-history.com/pages/h1559.html>)

I give special thanks to Steve Webb for correcting my initial words on voting rights, thereby prompting a review of the history of voting rights in the USA.