

“Wake Up White Church”

Psalm 14

2 Samuel 11:1-15

Ephesians 3:14-21

John 6:1-21

Jesus takes our fears and replaces them with actions of belief and trust. When we know how to solve something, we're all good. But when we don't, we honestly believe it is better to procrastinate or do nothing than trust God to do what only God can do. God can change our words and corresponding behaviors to be more like Jesus.

When Michigan residents Christine Bouwkamp and Kyle Kramer got married in the spring of 2007, they held a wedding reception that was anything but traditional. Instead of hosting a formal dinner, they held a simple reception at their church where guests were invited to help distribute food to people in need. In the weeks leading up to their wedding, Christine and Kyle had decided they wanted to begin their marriage with an act of service to Christ. With that goal in mind, they figured out how much money they would have spent on a more extravagant reception and instead used that money to purchase five thousand pounds of food for those in need. The week of the wedding, the couple spread the word that a truck with free food would be at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Immediately after they exchanged their vows, Bouwkamp and Kramer put on aprons marked “Bride” and “Groom” and joined their wedding guests in distributing food to 100 neighborhood families. When asked about the charitable act, the happy couple simply said they wanted to “bless God for blessing us with each other.”¹

What we need to be saying and doing at Geneva, we cannot accomplish on our own. Yes, we need one another, God, and a commitment to service. But we also need an infusion of the Holy Spirit into our lives personally and as an institution just like Christine and Kyle.

¹Provided by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky, and Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Anne Cetas, “Serving Together,” Our Daily Bread (June 2008).

We need to be more like Jesus in our words and behaviors. And this is where the Holy Spirit comes in. In this regard, Sandy Willson in Bryan Loritts, editor of *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* writes,

The church, in her imperfection, has always experienced a combination of Spirit-inspired racial inclusion and fleshly motivated racial exclusion. In the early pages of Acts, we read that Philip evangelized the Samaritans and an Ethiopian eunuch, Peter evangelized Roman soldiers and their families, and early evangelists from Cypress and Cyrene preached to Hellenists in Antioch; but it is also true that many of the Christians scattered by Stephen's persecution preached only to Jews, and the early church was plagued with ethnocentric Judaizing in almost every place churches were planted. The church of every age must address decisively the big questions of racial prejudice: "why?" and "what now?".²

We have gospel words to say with corresponding behaviors to do. How do the historically white, suburban churches wake up and start speaking and behaving more like Jesus. Just perhaps, our words and behaviors will move us more and more into living God's dream of being one humanity.

From the Psalter, Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel Readings, we learn that belonging to a diverse community is an essential core value. We need God and one another. And that need is interdependent. Psalm 14:2 reads, "The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God." 2 Samuel 11:2 reads, "It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch... that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful." Ephesians 3:16 reads, "I pray that, according to the riches of his [God's] glory, he may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his spirit, and that Christ may dwell

²Sandy Willson in Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2014), 136.

in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.” And John 6:20 reads, “... It is I; do not be afraid.” Each of these texts challenge us to ensure our words and behaviors match the words and behaviors of Jesus. That match is in question, one way or the other in each of the texts just read. Yet, God is always at work to deal with the lack of congruity.

In John 6:1-21, we notice a feeding of many from a limited number of loaves and fishes and Jesus walking on water. Jesus’ divine authority over creation and his identity as the redeemer of the world are displayed in both stories. As the disciples faced the reality of their limit as humans, they presented the meager number of fish and loaves, in faith and trust, that Jesus would provide. The same theme of God providing in settings like the storm on the lake with Jesus walking on water, is reminiscent of God parting the Red Sea and the people of God demonstrating faith and trust. And the disciples demonstrated faith and trust when Jesus said, “It is I; do not be afraid.” Those words free us to exercise faith and trust.³

The stories in John 6 suggest that the focus of loving and serving others is not what good people decide is reasonable to undertake, but instead, trusting God to multiply resources and calm the storms. What is accomplished, then, is not what’s reasonable, but Spirit led people partnering with God in God’s mission. These stories ask us to look to God and not ourselves to solve the dilemma. Then, and only then, will words and behaviors be congruent with the gospel.

³In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Garrett Calvin, Curtis Farr, Deborah Sokolove, Sammy G. Alfaro, Lucy Lind Hogan, Max J. Lee, and John M. Buchanan in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 179-181, 181-183, 184-186, 187-189, 189-190, 191-193 and 193-195.

In 1946, when Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa) experienced a call to serve those suffering the most, her knowledge of how to fulfill a calling to the serve poorest of the earth was not enough. Yet God's love for the least of these fueled the passion of that call, and with that passion she began the Missionaries of Charity. Love multiplies meager resources and makes a way forward when our limited ability to really know what to do comes to its end. God's one humanity is diverse, ethnically, in sexual orientation and gender identity, politically, economically, and religiously. Love dispels fear and moves us in words and behaviors that demonstrate faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

So, let's wake up White church. The statement by Jesus that he is the way, the truth and the life, the teachings of the Greatest Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 are imperative to be engaged in words and behaviors that are congruent with the gospel. Inclusion, not exclusion is the way of Jesus. Fear excludes. Love includes. Many are gathering to be encountered by Jesus through you to be included in God's family. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 25 July 2021
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