

“Embrace The Calling Of Geneva’s New Future”

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5

John 5:1-9

It’s all about Jesus. Whatever forms of despair, discouragement, and doubt you bring to church this day, a new way of living is available to you. On this Sixth Sunday of Easter, the Psalmist declares, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon the earth, your saving power among all nations.”<sup>1</sup>

Conflict is a dominant characteristic of First Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. The 210-year old Dupont Circle congregation had seen nine pastors come and go in forty years. And there was even conflict when in the 1970’s, the President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, taught Sunday school there. The most recent pastor’s parting included a severance payment of \$315,000.00. The pastor was black (African American) and he was leading a white congregation that then began to grow in diversity, both ethnically and economically. It appears that the parting was rooted in conflict around race and power, the latter being a common cause of conflict in many churches. From a quick assessment of what was going on in the congregation at the time of the pastor’s firing was the emergence of a burgeoning church that had a welcoming and inviting vision of being a community that was diverse in several demographics.<sup>2</sup>

No two humans are alike. Therein lies the conflict. Acts 16:9-15 reminds us of this. The book of Acts, which is focused on Paul’s missionary journeys, clearly demonstrates that people from distinctly different backgrounds are to be brought together. People who were once separated by barriers of language, religion and geography are brought together. Acts inspires us to consider mission and outreach within our neighborhoods. As people who know the good news of Jesus, we are to identify the places where people are waiting to hear and see the word of Jesus. Take Lydia, one who was wealthy, a

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<sup>1</sup>Psalm 67:1

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from Hamil R. Harris and Michelle Boorstein’s article, “A Dismal Parting for D.C. Pastor and Church” in *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2013.

merchant and a woman, yet wanting to be a part of the Jesus movement. Who are those different than we who want to be part of our community of faith?

John 14:23-29 depicts a relationship between God and human that is profound. It is a relationship of “complete communion between the human and divine.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus says, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home them.”<sup>4</sup> Note these truths that Jesus gifted humanity: God loves humanity; God will never abandon us; God the Father created us; God the Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross in order to save us from our sins; and God the Holy Spirit lives with us, teaching and reminding us the way of Jesus. Truly the old is gone and the new has come. Jesus is the key transitional figure in this new way of living for humanity. A way to navigate the needed changes in conflict, while moving into unity is mapped.

Revelation 22:1-5 is a vision of the new overtaking the old. In the new Jerusalem, because it is flooded with light, that there is no need for sun, moon or lamps. The gates of Jerusalem are always open. There is no exile or devastation. Permanence pervades life in the new Jerusalem. The book of Revelation “...unfolds as an indictment of the domination and corrupting power of the Babylonian and Roman empires and, by implication, of all empires.”<sup>5</sup>

Psalms 67 reminds us that God has mercy on God’s people. God gives us God’s blessings; presence; and does these things so that others may understand God’s ways and that all nations may know God’s deliverance.

Should Christians embrace the challenges of society and live confidently for the sake of Christ in the midst of conflict? Yes.

What an opportunity we have as followers of Jesus to demonstrate a different way to live in such a time as this. The economic downturn; social isolation; the broadening of the definition of marriage; and

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<sup>3</sup>Peter J. B. Carmen in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 492.

<sup>4</sup>John 14:23

<sup>5</sup>Joyce Hollyday in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*, 489.

immigration continue to be sources of conflict.<sup>6</sup> Let us take courage as we remember how Christians dealt with the pressures of the Roman empire, South Africa's apartheid, and those living under Communism. Negotiating change is a wonderful opportunity. "We are seeking new learnings, not following old rules. Change will produce conflict, which is good and not to be avoided. We need to appreciate experimentation and failure. Leadership is essentially a spiritual issue."<sup>7</sup>

What do we do now that Jesus is risen? We do as Jesus did. We decide to be obedient to the greatest commandment that being to love God and others. We reflect on the results of our doings and decisions. We continue to connect with others in order to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus wants us to remember, tell, and live his way in a world filled with people that are desperately hurt, lost, and conflicted. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 22 May 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh  
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>6</sup>Some ideas adapted from Tara Parker-Pope's article as found in *The Wichita Eagle*, May 3, 2013. Parker-Pope is a writer with the *New York Times*.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation* (The Alban Institute, 1998), 19, 21, 22.