

Rev. David Owren
Sermon at St Luke's Church, Coeur d'Alene
5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 10, 2022
Amos 7:7-17
Psalm 82
Colossians 1:1-14
Luke 10:25-37

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

People of the Jesus Movement, you are the
people of Light! And the risen Christ calls you to
change your old ways for new ways.

I taught world religions at College of the
Redwoods in Eureka California. A student in my
class shared his life story with me. He was Jewish.
He grew up in San Francisco and went to Hebrew
school. He learned the language, the traditions and
the wisdom of Judaism. He attended Shabbat
services, observed all Jewish holy days and celebrated
his Bar Mitzvah. As he grew older his enthusiasm for

his Jewish heritage began to wane. Finally, he gave it
all up and moved away. He said it got to be too much.

But now he was back in school, in my world
religions class. He said he wanted to know more
about who he was and why he was here. He told me
that his grandmother was buried alive in the
Holocaust and left for dead....and she was pregnant.
But she dug her way out of that grave and gave birth
to a baby boy, who became his father. My student
wanted to know more about the miracle of his father's
birth. He wanted to know why the grave could not
hold his grandmother. He wondered why he was
given the light of life instead of the darkness of death.

In his first address as Presiding Bishop and
Primate of The Episcopal Church, our Presiding
Bishop Michael Curry said, "This is the Jesus
Movement, and we are The Episcopal Church, the
Episcopal branch of Jesus' movement in this world."

On this 5th Sunday after Pentecost, you and I celebrate because Jesus broke out of the darkness of the grave to give us the Spirit of new life. And we wonder too, how and why this happened. What does it mean to be resurrected and Spirit-filled? How then, shall we live?

In the readings today we have some clues.

The prophet Amos warns the people of God not to be sellouts to the status quo, the powers that be. Just because a ruling class is in control doesn't mean they are doing God's will. In fact, those in power are always at risk of doing what they want instead of doing what God wants. Such people deserve the wrath and judgment of God. Always follow the light, follow Jesus.

Our god is a God of love and Justice. The psalmist declares the of the supreme power and authority of God who embraces the weak and the

orphan... the lowly and the destitute...and those in need. This affirmation of God's love and justice anticipates the life and words of Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior, the light--the Incarnation of love and justice. [James Mead, Working Preacher, August 18, 2013.]

The letter to the Colossians is an account of their salvation activity, past, present, and future. In Christ they are no longer imprisoned in darkness. Now we are children of the light, liberated by forgiveness, and living out God's will by bringing the light of Christ to others. Our future is secure, for we have been made holy in God's service. [Richard Carlson, Working Preacher, July 14, 2013.]

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a provocative example of compassion and mercy. Looked down upon by most Jews, the man from Samaria does what others are supposed to do but avoid. Jesus people are known by their labels or titles,

but by their actions. We are called to be “little Christs” as Martin Luther said, little lights that come from the light of Christ.

Do these readings today describe your life? Jesus always calls us to new beginnings. We are to be counter-establishment if the establishment is corrupting God’s will. We are to assert the supreme authority of God in Christ, helping those in need, accepting those who outcast, and loving the unloved. We are to live out our own forgiveness by bringing light of resurrection to those still in darkness. We are to show mercy and compassion grounded in mercy and compassion Christ has shown us.

As our presiding Bishop Michael Curry says, "Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so

doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God’s dream.”ⁱ

Henri Nouwen wrote in his book, In The Name of Jesus, “...it seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.”ⁱⁱ

We live in a world where the darkness of polarization, violence and despair surround us. Often we get used to the shadows of complacency, neglect and status quo. And on a really “bad hair day” we despair and ask the hopeless question, “What can one person do?”

There is a story of a wife who put a little plaque in the kitchen that said "PRAYER CHANGES THINGS." Twenty-four hours later it was gone. She went to her husband and asked, "What is wrong? Don't you like prayer?" to which he replied, "Oh, I like prayer. I don't like change."

Change is tough. It moves us out of our comfort zone. And we don't like it. But Jesus is always calling us out of our comfort zones! What grave do you need to dig out of today? What is keeping you in darkness? What prevents you from seeing light and new life?

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in her book, An Altar in the World: "Every human interaction offers you the chance to make things better or to make things worse."ⁱⁱⁱ

Example...Esther Terrell was the widow of the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. When her husband died she was devastated. She said, "...there were days when I could not get out of bed. I was so down. I didn't know what to do with my life. One day, I got a call from the Red Cross, saying they needed my blood type. Would I come and give blood? Well, I couldn't refuse. I got up and went to the Red Cross.

The person who checked me in was a stranger. But in the process of talking to me, she said, 'You know, you're just the kind of person we need here at the Red Cross. I can see it when you smile. You have a pretty smile, and you know how to greet people. Giving blood is sometimes frightening for people. Would you consider coming and being a volunteer here at the blood center?'"

Esther Terrell volunteered every day at the Red Cross, well into her 90s. She said, "...that stranger changed my life. I think it was a call from God."^{iv}

Esther's life was transformed, and in turn, she transformed so many other lives that her story is still being told today in Tallahassee, Florida.

People of the Jesus movement, we need to listen to the experiences of Amos, the Psalmist, the Colossians, and those who first heard the parable of

Jesus. These people saw the light of God and changed old ways for new ways.

We are baptized people who have died with Christ and now have new life through Christ's resurrected, transforming presence. When you are devastated, when you feel empty, when you have failed, when you think you have nothing to offer anybody...remember the one who has promised never to fail you, but to be always with you.^v He is the one who will give you strength when you are weak, faith when you doubt, hope when you despair, and love when you hate.

In a world that promotes identity instead of integrity and polarization instead of cooperation it is easy to play the blame game. But Jesus, the risen Christ, does not call us to play the blame game. He calls us to follow Him on the ever-new path of love. Giving ourselves to others, serving others, loving

others as Jesus did. Jesus calls us to change our old ways for new ways. As the author Madeleine L'Engle put it: "We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

Come today and be nourished by the holy sacrament named "thanks!"^{vi} Pray each day for our world, our country, our church, our community, our parish, our Rector Fr. David and his family, for the newly baptized today—George Oskar, Bodie Wilton, and Oskar Robert--and for the entire Jesus movement around the world. And always pray those who have no one to pray for them. Love and care for each other. Always welcome the stranger. And be on the alert for new, unexpected ways to be the good news to those who so desperately need some good news. You are

called to get up and go; follow Jesus and be the light that displaces darkness. Remember, the grave could not hold Jesus, who says to you and me today, “I came not to judge you, but to save you. Follow me.”

By the way, that Jewish student in my class...he did find out why He was given the light of life. He discovered his roots and learned that there is meaning in everything, especially suffering. He learned that with God all things are possible, and that, out of apparent death God gives life. From the the darkness of the grave comes new life and new light.

Ernest Hemingway once made a bet that he could write a story in six words. His friend took the bet, because he knew that no one could write a story in six words that would have any emotional impact or importance. Hemingway pulled out a piece of paper

and wrote these six words: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

We are not all Hemingway, but we can tell the greatest story ever told story with just three words: “He is risen!” People of the Jesus Movement, people of Light, we have been raised with Him. “He is risen indeed!” Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Michael Curry, *Crazy Christians: A Call to Follow Jesus*

ⁱⁱ Quoted by Daniel Clendenin, "A Fire of Burning Coals", *Journey With Jesus*[webzine], April 3, 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*

^{iv} James Harnish, "Reflections on the Lectionary," *Christian Century*, April 6, 2010, p. 21.

^v FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS "BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH" Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 32:6-15; John 21:1-19 This sermon was preached by Dr. Joseph S. Harvard III on Sunday, April 10, 2016 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

^{vi} "I have come to think that the moment of giving the bread of Eucharist as gift is the quintessential center of the notion of Sabbath rest in Christian tradition. It is gift! We receive in gratitude. Imagine having a sacrament named "thanks"! We are on the receiving end, without accomplishment, achievement, or qualification. It is a gift, and we are grateful! That moment of gift is a peaceable alternative that many who are "weary and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care" receive gladly. The offer of free gift, faithful to Judaism, might let us learn enough to halt the dramatic anti-neighborliness to which our society is madly and uncritically committed." – **Walter Brueggemann, Sabbath as Resistance**: