

“Reaching For What Is Next”

Rev. David Gregory

January 9, 2022

1st Sunday after Epiphany



And a Little Child Shall Lead Them
James L. Johnson

Readings

“When the Song of the Angels is Stilled”

Howard Thurman in *The Mood of Christmas*

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas *begins*:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.

"New Day's Lyric"

Amanda Gorman

May this be the day
We come together.
Mourning, we come to mend,
Withered, we come to weather,
Torn, we come to tend,
Battered, we come to better.
Tethered by this year of yearning,
We are learning
That though we weren't ready for this,
We have been readied by it.
We steadily vow that no matter
How we are weighed down,
We must always pave a way forward.

This hope is our door, our portal.
Even if we never get back to normal,
Someday we can venture beyond it,
To leave the known and take the first steps.
So let us not return to what was normal,
But reach toward what is next.

What was cursed, we will cure.
What was plagued, we will prove pure.
Where we tend to argue, we will try to agree,
Those fortunes we forswore, now the future we foresee,
Where we weren't aware, we're now awake;

Those moments we missed
Are now these moments we make,
The moments we meet,
And our hearts, once all together beaten,
Now all together beat.

Come, look up with kindness yet,
For even solace can be sourced from sorrow.
We remember, not just for the sake of yesterday,
But to take on tomorrow.

We heed this old spirit,
In a new day's lyric,
In our hearts, we hear it:
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
Be bold, sang Time this year,
Be bold, sang Time,
For when you honor yesterday,
Tomorrow ye will find.
Know what we've fought
Need not be forgot nor for none.
It defines us, binds us as one,
Come over, join this day just begun.
For wherever we come together,
We will forever overcome.



For me, January 6th is one of those indelible dates on the calendar. As we acknowledged last Sunday, it marks the Feast of the Epiphany, which along with Easter and Christmas marks one of the oldest celebrations of the Christian church. We might recognize it year by year as the twelfth day of Christmas, a point some sixteen days or so from the Solstice, the beginnings of greater light. It calls our attention to enlightenment, vision, and forward movement in the story of Jesus. It is also full of symbolic meaning around new beginnings for Mother Earth and her inhabitants.

On January 6th, 2008, I preached my first sermon as a newly settled minister in the United Church of Christ—a huge new beginning for me. I was fifty years old, and for a little over a decade I had been prevented from the official practice of my vocation. That January 6th was a major epiphany for me as I stood before a congregation that—just like you—had called me to be their pastor and teacher, and to lead their ministry with the honesty and authenticity of the person I was created to be within full view. It was the first time I had stood before a crowd of people as a minister, as a gay man, and not had that identity be the subject of the conversation (you mean I get to move on and talk about some other things??). After years of talking about one single thing, I suddenly had a million things to talk about. That was my epiphany, and it was life-altering, for sure.

That epiphany, along with many others, is now in the past. On January 6th, 2021, the experience of Epiphany was changed forever. This change was not about politics or political party. It was not about tradition or ideology. It was an assault on the U.S. Capitol, upon the Capitol police, and a threat to our government for sure, but it was also an assault on our senses, an attack upon our sensibilities, a brutal confrontation of truth and lies, a conflict that continues to this very moment as large groups in our population deny that it even happened, despite the fact that we were all eye-witnesses to the day's events.

I was preparing to observe our weekly communion on Zoom that day, when I saw on the TV screen what was happening. For those moments at noon, I turned to those who gathered with me, and shared some somber moments before returning to the spectacle unfolding in front of us. There aren't enough lies in the world to erase what happened, nor is there any way to pave over the pain and loss of the families of police who lost their lives or their health or their vocations because of what happened, nor is there a way to absolve the trauma experienced by members of Congress and the press who were inside that day.

Some are asking us not to trust what we saw with our own eyes, and while we are aghast that this could happen, while we scramble to explain it, to fix it, or to legislate our way out of it, it is not our sages who have the answers we are searching for. The answers lie in the fresh faces of our young people. It is in the power of their music, their poetry, and their willingness to tell the truth in ways that we who are older might find threatening. We shouldn't view it that way at all. Amanda Gorman, in her beautiful rap-like cadences, stood at that same Capitol building just days after the attack and infused us with the energy of an entirely new generation, the

generation that will come behind us and make sense of our senselessness. Their truth-telling reaches for what is next, and this is where I find hope. The prophets of old said it this way, "And a child shall lead them " Let us all reach for what is next. Let us find our healing in all the expressions of new life around us.

The other night I was listening to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin speaking to a gathering on Capitol Hill on how history will judge that day, and she was asked if she held out any hope for the future.

Indeed, she explained, there is plenty of hope for the future, as long as we cling tenaciously to our truth-telling, and tell the truth so many times and so often that it can begin to take hold. There is a faction that thinks that if you tell a lie often enough it will become indistinguishable from the truth. Herein lies the greatest danger in our lifetime. You won't argue people out of their lies. The only thing you can do is tell the truth over and over and over again. We are grateful for the students of Academy DeTurk, and for Scott and Kristine, and for their truth-telling. May it also become our habit.

Benediction:

Make me, O Lord, the instrument of your love,
that I may bring comfort to those who sorrow and
joy to those who are regarded as persons of little account.

In this country of many races,
make me courteous to those who are humble and
understanding to those who are resentful.
Teach me what I should be to the arrogant, the cruel,
for I do not know.

And as for me myself,
make me more joyful than I am,
especially if this is needed for the sake of others.

Let me remember my many experiences
of joy and thankfulness.

And may I this coming day
do some work of peace for thee.
Amen.

~ Alan Paton
author of *Cry the Beloved Country* and an anti-apartheid activist