

## **“Shifting Out of Neutral”**

Rev. David Gregory

June 21, 2020

Pentecost 3



*(shouting from the rooftops)*

### **First reading**

*Matthew 10:26-27*

from the *Modern English Version*

Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. And what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

### **Second reading**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

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We think that there are more ways than one to view the life and teachings of Jesus, and the version of Christianity that seems most familiar is not necessarily the most cohesive or coherent one. It's just that for many years it has enjoyed the use of the loudest megaphone.

In the overarching history of the church, religious fundamentalism is a pretty recent phenomenon, so we probably should abandon any arguments as to whose witness is the most faithful or authentic. It's not even a relevant question any more (unless you were present in Galilee and Judea two thousand years ago, in which case we might find out that nobody has really gotten it right).

In times of social unrest and cultural upheaval, we don't have the luxury of theological nitpicking— not when black lives are being targeted by a white-supremacist patriarchy; not when there are children in cages; not when decent health care is out of the reach of huge segments of our population; not when the rights of minorities, of women, of immigrants, or of LGBTQ people are under threat from fearful leaders bent on protecting the old order of things.

What is known as Christianity takes many forms, as does Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. Within every tradition there is an array of thought and practice, and much like what we see in the natural world around us, each expression is an interesting variation on the original theme. Humanity was never a cloth made of a single thread; it has always been a tapestry. And the same goes for religious and spiritual traditions.

If that sounds like a neutral statement, it is not. Religious tolerance and multi-culturalism are not the domain of benign peacemakers. Upholding interfaith, interreligious, and inter-spiritual ideals requires the greatest tenacity and the deepest commitment of all time. And for those of us who think of ourselves as progressive liberal Christians, the times are calling us to articulate our unique message and to do it loudly and clearly and with fervor, using every means and every technology possible.

When Jesus sent his followers into the countryside as “sheep among wolves,” he told them to speak boldly and not to be afraid. The reason they could do so was because “Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” And he said, “What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. And what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.” In other words, “Go get your biggest megaphone and start telling your story to all who will hear it, because the tide is about to shift,” or as Jesus might have said it, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

We dare not underestimate the momentum of our times, and if there were any doubts about that, the heavens themselves are assisting us as we gather today in the energy of the summer solstice and a Ring of Fire solar eclipse that occurred as we slept last night. All of this on a weekend when we note the historic marker of Juneteenth, or the nineteenth of June, the date in 1865 when slaves in Texas finally received the news that they were free. This, as we continue to struggle with a system that targets black lives and fails to live up to the promises of equality and emancipation. At this same time, many parts of the country are celebrating Pride weekend, though in more subdued and virtual ways than usual. And this, at a time when the rights of transgendered persons to receive necessary health care are being challenged. And then, today is Father’s Day, when we pay homage to all that is lovingly paternal in our lives, regardless of where it did or didn’t rest within our own fathers. This, at a time when paternal kindness is eclipsed by fearful patriarchy with its skewed sense of masculinity and power. We are in a weekend of political rallying, of judicial firings, of bombshell books, and continued demonstrations. It’s as if the very cosmos is welling up in a wave toward some massive paradigm shift, one that might bring us into a realm of peace, of kindness, of security, and of love.

For the spiritually sensitive, it would seem we are in the proximity of a vibrational reality to which we are tuning our receivers. There’s nothing fuzzy, nothing garbled here in this place where neutrality no longer exists. The truth is true, and lies are not. There are no alternatives to facts. As Jesus said so pointedly, the time had come for the disciples to “shout from the housetops.” Perhaps that day has arrived for us as well, for us to come out and be counted in the struggle for what is right and loving and true. What if the most radical expression of our values were to come through a megaphone that we call kindness? In a world filled with hate and name-calling, what if the megaphone we take for ourselves is on a completely different plane? What if our “shouting” were to take the form of kindness, loving acts of solidarity and support for those who are the most vulnerable and under the most vicious attack?

One of the most powerful images from the past week was included in a report from CNN about a Black Lives Matter protester in London by the name of Patrick Hutchinson, who came across a white former policeman lying on some stairs in a fetal position being taunted by some other protesters in the crowd. Patrick and his friends surrounded the man on the ground, so that he could pick him up in a fireman’s carry, and walk him safely to the police station. I do not know a lot about the people involved in this story, but I do know the power of the image, which seems to be quite authentic. A

black man protesting police brutality, carrying a white former policeman to safety. To be clear, the protesters had every right and responsibility to protest, and within the exercise of that right, here is one who picked up the megaphone of kindness and showed compassion for his fellow man, even one with whom he might have disagreed. Could this act of kindness not become a model for oppressors everywhere, demonstrating that this is where true power lies, that in lovingkindness there is no need for brutality or brute force, and that to be fully human is to treat others exactly the way we wish to be treated? It's time for us to shift out of neutral and press on the gas pedal ... and radical kindness is the fuel.

