

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-seventh Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – November 20, 2016
Thanksgiving Sunday
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Philippians 4:4-9

For Reflection

“Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

- Desmond Mpilo Tutu, South African cleric and activist (b. 1931)

Allies

Peter was five when we had the first in a series of conversations known in Black and mixed race families as “the talk.” At a poorly administrated summer camp with a great reputation, Peter had been singled out from several boys who had broken some rules. He was the only one told to not come back for a week – even though it was a blonde kid who instigated the behaviors.

So, that week, on a family camping trip, we sat at a picnic table and explained to Peter that sometimes people judge you more severely because of the color of your skin. Peter burst into tears and said, “Jesus doesn’t love me!” After I shook off my stunned silence, I held him and said, “Why on earth would you say that?” And he responded, “Because Jesus is White!”

That was MY first realization that – although the nursery at church was populated by a dozen children of color – all the books and pictures on the wall showed Jesus as a white man. And that is when we collected enough photos of African and Latino Jesus art to convince Peter that Jesus was actually BROWN – that people depict him in their own color – like Santa – that Jesus loves Peter and all children of every color – very much.

Please turn to someone near you and share a moment when you became aware of your own White privilege – or your own lack of privilege because of your color.

8 [And now], beloved [community], whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these

things. **9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**

- Philippians 4:8-9 adapted

I talked with two optimistic people this week. One was African-American, the other White-South-African, both UCC Clergy. The first said that this is the same America he's always lived in. Now that it is visible to the rest of us – perhaps we can begin to change it. This is a great time for organizing, resistance, pushing back, getting some real changes made. He had visited South Africa during the summer and seen young people demanding free education – or they would shut the government down. It was awesome.

The second man said essentially the same thing – having experienced massive upheaval in his country in his life-time. America didn't change who it was overnight last week. It revealed itself, came out of the shadows. Now we have a chance to demand what is right – or shut the government down.

And both men remarked that this was the time to BE THE CHURCH. And neither of them meant standing around drinking coffee.

Like the Jesus Movement – which arose during dire circumstances (see – this is not the first time) – it is time to find and be ALLIES with those in the firing line of those in power.

Jesus didn't just make donations to those in need, he lived with them, walked with them, advocated on their behalf, got arrested and was executed trying to change the hearts and minds and behavior of religious leaders, governors, the military.

Mt. Hollywood Congregational UCC has a history of doing all of these things – except the part about being executed. We are good at being allies – and we have to get better.

The Islamic Center is a few miles down the road on Vermont. They have resources to help us be better allies. Let's ask them for help. (<http://www.icsconline.org/>)

We have started a relationship with PATH (People Assisting The Homeless) to be of assistance to houseless and struggling individuals. Let's build on that. (<http://www.epath.org/site/main.html>)

This Planet is in dire need of allies and there are some strong ones in this congregation. We've begun to forge a relationship with the Trash Free Earth organization. Let's step up our efforts. (<http://www.trashfreeearth.org/>)

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One way to become better allies is to examine and acknowledge and shed this comfortable White Privilege that many of us enjoy – whether we are conscious of it or not. My optimistic Black clergy friend declared this on Friday. Rev. Traci Blackmon preached this two weeks ago at our Association meeting. People of Color have been telling us this for as long as I can remember – with different words and levels of intensity. Our denomination has actually created a curriculum for this exact purpose – the best parts written by Rev. Blackmon – and I am going to press us to engage with the material, ask the questions it asks of us – and respond accordingly. I believe this can make us better allies. (<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/White-Privilege-Curriculum.pdf>)

As we come out of our shock and stunned conditions that, for me,
have lingered since That Tuesday –
let's remember who we are –
with a new consciousness about what needs to be done –
and renewed gratitude for our own allies –
and a deepened desire to become better allies for others.

I leave you with these “Paradoxical Commandments” – to encourage us as we leave this place of peace and safety – and re-enter the fray:

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.
Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.
Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.
Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.
Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.
Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.
Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.
Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.
Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.
Give the world the best you have anyway.”

— “The Paradoxical Commandments” by Kent M. Keith,
The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council

Scripture Reading for Sunday November 20, 2016 – Pentecost 23 – Year C

Philippians 4:4-9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

