

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles

Easter Sunday – April 16, 2017

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

John 20:1-18

For Reflection

“The good news of suffering is that it brings us to the end of ourselves – a purpose it has certainly served in my life. It brings us to the place of honesty, which is the place of desperation, which is the place of faith, which is the place of freedom.”

- Tullian Tchividjian, American Clergyman (b.1972)

The Good News: Free, Fake, Fierce...

The word “Gospel” comes from Old English: *god* (good) + *spel* (news, a story). Simply put (in the words of our *Wikipedia* oracle):

In Christianity, the Gospel...or the Good News, is the news of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), and of Jesus's death on the cross and resurrection to restore people's relationship with God.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_gospel

And it is truly a good story – a GREAT story of redemption – that has had traction worldwide for millennia. It is a story that has inspired millions of other stories about people who champion the poor and put their bodies on the line for justice and fight hard against the oppressive, often violent powers of a ruling class. It is a storyline that predates Jesus – myths and hero stories – some based on real, live people – that served to give hope to those who suffered – AND hope to those who caused that suffering and, in regret, found forgiveness. Each of these stories arose in a particular time and culture – inspiring the next generation to have some integrity, defend the defenseless, repair the brokenness of the world.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), in his 1923 dramatic work: Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and An Epilogue, asked a question that will be pondered as long as the human race exists:

Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?

https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Bernard_Shaw

Telling the story of Jesus – what he did – how he died – how new life came in the aftermath – telling the good story isn't enough. Apparently, we have to relive it – have it reenacted in our faces – in our own time – for us to get the point and begin to help G-d redeem humankind all over again. Just as teenagers refuse to learn from the mistakes of their parents, we have to make those mistakes ourselves to get it.

In our lifetime alone – how many martyrs for justice have we witnessed? Name the ones we can – knowing there are countless others:

- **Labor Movement... Farmworkers' movement** (Teamster violence)
- **LGBTQ Rights Movement...** Stonewall martyrs... people dying to this day
- **Civil Rights Movement...** https://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/civil-rights-memorial/civil-rights-martyrs?gclid=Cj0KEQjwicfHBRCh6KaMp4-asKgBEiQA8GH2x6-_UEQ1QdXR7Vr08cVzO_9EeCCRI2jRyIVJbVsVagaAgAP8P8HAQ
- **Medgar Evers (1963)**
- **James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Henry Schwerner** (young civil rights workers, were arrested by a deputy sheriff and then released into the hands of Klansmen who had plotted their murders. They were shot, and their bodies were buried in an earthen dam. **1964** · Philadelphia, Mississippi)
- **Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968)**
- **Robert F. Kennedy (1968)**
- **Archbishop Oscar Romero** (killed while celebrating Mass in San Salvador in March **1980**.)
- **Activists against Apartheid in South Africa**
- **Annalena Tonelli** (Italian Lawyer. At 25 years old, she moved to Africa to work with the Committee Against World Hunger, an organization she helped found. Later in her life she moved to Borama, where she founded a tuberculosis hospital where she brought HIV/AIDS patients because she believed they deserved to be treated like human beings and children of God...November 2002, protesters threw stones into the windows of the hospital and chanted "Death to Annalena." On October 5, 2003, Annalena was shot in the head and killed while working in the hospital she founded.) <http://epicpew.com/6-modern-day-martyrs-need-know/>
- **Clement Shahbaz Bhatti** (shot in **2011** for lobbying against Pakistan's harsh blasphemy law, promoting interfaith cooperation and advocating for minorities of all faiths.)
- **Malala Yousafzai** (aboard a bus in **2012**, campaigning for education of girls in Pakistan, when the Taliban hijacked the bus and singled her out, shooting her in the head and the neck. Age 15)

There is always resistance to the loss of power – often a volatile reaction to the empowerment of those who get up in the face of the powerful. The threat of the loss of privilege – in spite of the promise of fairness and equity – is still a threat. Cuban landowners and business owners fled to Miami after 1959 rather than face the socialism that the revolution brought. Jim Crow Laws were the response of the white landowners to the end of black slavery in this country – creating a state of terrorism in the South from which millions fled.

The Trump candidacy and presidency are a reaction to the progressive policies of Obama's 8-year presidency – and to the mere possibility of a female president. This

administration and congress – and now a majority of Supreme Court justices – are a mockery of a balance of powers. This regime is creating martyrs of the sick and poor, veterans and women, people of color, LGBTQ folk and foreigners. It is a reaction to the empowerment of all of these groups – which threatens the power of the minority of white/rich/American/males – our own version of a Roman Empire in its death throes.

One of their greatest weapons is storytelling. And their story, first and foremost, creates doubt about what is true, what is real. The Story of Empire does its best to discredit every other story that is not theirs. The Easter Jesus story from the very beginning was deemed a hoax by those in power – perpetrated by the disciples (women first) – an unbelievable tale of empty tomb and resurrection and hope for the riff-raff of the world. Impossible. But whether or not the actual physical resurrection happened, the message of Jesus' life did live on, embodied and practiced in communities that spread around the world. The story had to be coopted by the empire for the empire to survive.

Anti-semites have called the WWII Holocaust a hoax.

Gun rights activists have called the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting a hoax – perpetrated by supporters of gun control.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandy_Hook_Elementary_School_shooting_conspiracy_theories

Lies have been told about political candidates in order to destabilize and destroy their campaigns.

And now we have an actual name for it: fake news.

Fake news is a type of hoax or deliberate spread of misinformation (false information), be it via the traditional print or broadcasting news media or via Internet-based social media. To qualify as fake news, a story has to be written and published **with the intent to mislead in order to gain financially or politically.**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news

Disagreement with a story does not automatically make it fake news. It has to do with INTENT and GAIN. And it comes to us full-force in the midst of what author Ralph Keyes has called our Post-Truth Era:

In the post-truth era, borders blur between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction. Deceiving others becomes a challenge, a game, and ultimately a habit. Research suggests that the average American tells lies on a daily basis.

...Trends ranging from the postmodern disdain for “truth” to therapeutic non-judgment – encourage deception. There is much incentive and little penalty for improving the “narrative” of one’s life. The increasing influence of therapists, entertainers, politicians, academics, and lawyers, with their flexible code of ethics, contribute to the post-truth era. So do ethical relativism, Boomer narcissism, the decline of community, and rise of the Internet.

Post-truthfulness builds a fragile social edifice based on wariness. It erodes the foundation of trust that underlies any healthy civilization. When enough of us peddle fantasy as fact, society loses its grounding in reality. Society would crumble altogether if we assumed others were as likely to dissemble as tell the truth. We are perilously close to that point.

<http://www.ralphkeyes.com/the-post-truth-era/>

And:

In 2016, "post-truth" was chosen as the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year, due to its prevalence in the context of that year's Brexit referendum and U.S. presidential election.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-truth_politics

So, in this "post-truth" era – an era in which millions of reasonable people steer clear of the Christian church – leaving the institution in the hands of millions of unreasonable people who confuse literalism, conservatism, republicanism, Christianity, and their need to be right ... In this "post-truth" era – as self-titled "progressive" members of the Jesus Movement – as tellers of what we believe to be the greatest story ever told that is NOT fake news – how do we proceed?

Well, let's take a hint from George Bernard Shaw. In light of the apparent need to reenact the crucifixion in every age for those with no imagination – there is a need to reenact the Beloved Community of Christ in every age for those with no imagination – and for those with plenty!

Telling the story only takes us so far – especially when a culture of literalism continues to destroy the actual meaning of it. We must keep telling and reinterpreting the story. But more so, we have to LIVE it, practice resurrection, bring in that Kingdom/Kin-dom of G-d that Jesus went on and on about – a place where no one is rejected, the refugee and foreigner are welcomed and given a home, people share rather than hoard, each person is loved as they are.

Jesus was fierce in the way that he lived out his value system. Yes, he told stories – but he LIVED his love of humanity. He instilled hope, he healed and fed and included and chastised and challenged and stood up to and died trying to change the world. He valued people over property, included women equally with men in the movement, and faced down the Roman Empire – in the same way we need to be facing down those who dropped the Mother Of All Bombs on a foreign nation on Maundy Thursday. As we continue to practice, to relive and reenact the story – along the upward spiral of time's trajectory – we do find ourselves closer and closer to the Beloved Community – the Kingdom of G-d – that Jesus proclaimed.

*Take note that the State of California has declared itself a Sanctuary State, protecting immigrants from ICE and asking local police to refuse cooperation with federal immigration agents. Our state has also begun work on legislation for a single payer health care system so that we won't be undone by any repeal of the federal Affordable

Healthcare Law. California is practicing resurrection – becoming a statewide Beloved Community.

*Take note that the breakdown of denominationalism is bringing all kinds of DIFFERENT worshipping communities into partnership – working together on social issues. And people of all religions have come together to defend our Muslim sisters and brothers against hateful speech and legislative bans.

*In spite of Brexit (a reaction brought on by fake news), the breaking down of borders in Europe has been an amazing experiment in human beings getting along – sharing power and culture – and, until recently, taking in enormous numbers of refugees from oppressive regimes and civil wars.

*In spite of Trump’s “America First” proclamation, there is a Global Community that has been made possible by technology, trade and travel that cannot be erased – and continues to grow in strength and wisdom. That is why the people in power are running scared. The empowerment of previously disempowered people is rampant.

***And get this.**

The Trump administration is reviewing design bids for its proposed wall along the US-Mexico border. But not all plans are interpreting the word "wall" literally.

A group of Mexican and American engineers and urban planners called MADE Collective want to build a **\$1 trillion hyperloop transportation network** instead. The plan would turn the border into a shared nation, called **Otra Nation**, with an independent local government and nonvoting representatives in the US and Mexican legislatures.

The group submitted its design to the US Customs and Border Protection's official call for proposals in March. It also launched a petition to replace the current border fencing with its hyperloop design.

- The Otra Nation's hyperloop network would stretch about 1,250 miles, turning the US-Mexico border into an unincorporated territory.
- There would be stations along the hyperloop for people from any country to board.
- "The existence of the border wall has become more a signifier of status than a barrier that each population sustains in its own form of isolation towards the opposite side," the designers wrote in their proposal.
- The network would also feature several solar farms, which would power the hyperloop. The designers say an equal number of Americans and Mexicans would build the system.
- **The plan would cost approximately \$15 billion — less than the \$21 billion that the Department of Homeland Security estimated a border wall would cost. The designers also predict that their system would create \$1 trillion in trade.**

- **"The 19th century brought us boundaries, the 20th century we built walls, the next will bridge nations by creating communities based on shared principles of economic resiliency, energy independence, and a trust-based society," the designers wrote.**

Take a look at it. There is a link here:

<http://www.businessinsider.com/design-trumps-border-wall-hyperloop-2017-4/#the-otra-nations-hyperloop-network-would-stretch-about-1250-miles-turning-the-us-mexico-border-into-an-unincorporated-territory-1>

and on my Facebook page.

It is awesome – a creative, out-of-the-box, beloved community kind of response to the repressive proposals of empire.

Resurrection is hard work. But that's what we're here for. Bringing in the Kin-dom of G-d is a whole lot more than telling a great story and getting people to believe it. It's not just an individualized program for personal salvation – although that can come with the practice of building healthy relationships with each other and our Maker. It's about bringing down multiple empires so that the global village can thrive. It's about protecting and resurrecting the planet we all depend on so that LIFE itself will go on.

There will be more martyrs. There will be more fake news and take overs. There will be more kicking and screaming by those who lose privilege – including us.

**But The Good News – The Good Story – is working.
Christ is Alive – here and now – and can be seen in every moment –
mending this wounded world –
by those who have enough imagination.**

John 20:1-18

1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2 So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3 Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7 and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9 for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10 Then the disciples returned to their homes.

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; 12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. 13 They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.