

The Beloved Community
Binkley Baptist Church
The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany
Martin Luther King Sunday
January 14, 2018

OT Lesson: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

NT Lesson: I Corinthians 12: 1, 4-11 (12-14, 26-27)

Gospel Lesson: John 2: 13-22

I will be reading the New Testament Lesson immediately followed by the Gospel Lesson.

I confess that these lessons are not the Lectionary readings for this day in the church year, according to the Revised Common Lectionary cycle. Instead, I chose texts that I thought might be helpful, on this Martin Luther King Sunday, in reflecting on what it means to engage in, be a part of, beloved community, beloved koinonia – here at Binkley Baptist Church and as the church and Christians in the world.

The New Testament lesson is one that is dear to my heart. It is the text I used for my first sermon, as I discovered – through my studies and pastoral work while a student at Duke Divinity School – the meaning of koinonia, community, fellowship. While the word koinonia is not in this passage from the 12th chapter of 2nd Corinthians, the wonderful analogy of the body of Christ like unto the physical body – where all parts are vital and dependent upon one another, but not the same – is still for me, almost 40 years after that 1st sermon – an apt description of community:

So hear now the New Testament lesson as it is found in I Corinthians, Chap 12., Vv. 1, 4-14 and 26-27:

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts,^[a] brothers and sisters,^[b] I do not want you to be uninformed.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

[So that] ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

The Gospel Lesson is from the Book of John, the 2nd chapter. Jesus has been to a wedding in Cana, along with his mother, spends time in Capernaum with his family and disciples, then heads to the temple in Jerusalem for Passover. In the temple in Jerusalem, he does *not* find koinonia:

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ **But he was speaking of the temple of his body.** ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”

“This is the Gospel of Christ.”

Thanks be to God.

May we pray together: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight O God, Our Redeemer through Christ.” Amen.

One of the joys in fulfilling an invitation to preach at Binkley is collaborating with our ministry team. In short, they are magnificent. Before a hymn is chosen, before a prayer is written or selected, before the order of the worship service is confirmed, they want to *hear* what the preacher has to say about what is on her heart and in her head for the sermon. And then their wheels begin to turn, their spirits flow, they ask clarifying questions, they excite

and bring joy to the preacher with their deepest desire to glorify God in word, message and music.

Last Tuesday aft., Stephanie, Dale, Daniel and I held a conference call to discuss this morning's service. On Tuesday morning, Dale emailed me to say, *Dear Susan: Thank you for preaching this Sunday as we praise God and remember Dr. King. Remember as you prepare that "you are fearfully and wonderfully made."*

During our phone call, Stephanie – as the lead member of the ministry team for this Sunday - took notes, put together a rough draft of the service and then went on to craft this morning's call to worship. I was asked to find cover art for the bulletin and what quote might bring us to *Becoming Aware of God*, also on the front of the bulletin. And as for Daniel – as we discussed Dr. King's vision of Beloved Community during that conference call, Daniel began to research what were some of Dr. King's favorite hymns, what gave him comfort, solace, inspiration. And so today, as one-I-hope beloved community, we sang, "All Hail the Power of Jesus Name," and "There is a Balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole, there is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul." (You can read more about the music selections for this morning in the Music Notes section of the bulletin.)

Sisters and brothers, my heart was full after that conference call with our ministry team – full of gratitude, full of thanksgiving, full of love. Dale, Stephanie and Daniel bring to us – in service to God and with this Body of Christ - their variety of gifts, but the same Spirit. They perform a variety of services and engage in a variety of activities according to their gifts, but it is the same Lord, the same God who activates all of them in each one of them, along with the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, for koinonia.

In a message from the church's Leadership Team, which can be found in this morning's bulletin, expressions of gratitude are offered to these, our ministers. They are written as part of a welcome to Marcus McFaul, who begins this week his new ministry among us, in his words, "lead Minister at Binkley." We welcome Marcus for who he is and who he can be with us - with a variety of gifts, performing a variety of services, engaging in a variety of activities – NOT to replace another's gifts, another's activities, another's service, but to enter into and with our ministers already here and with this Body – all with the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God!

However, while I believe that the mission of Binkley Baptist Church continues to be, in part, building compassionate and joyful community, I believe that is no longer sufficient. I believe that, for the new age Dr. King describes, and this new day in our church, our mission must be to build **beloved** community, beloved koinonia, which is the foundation for compassion, joy, goodwill, economic and social justice and peace.

As Dr. King reminds us in his writings, sermons and speeches, the beloved community's foundation rests on agape love, the love that is of God and from God, perfect love.

In a sermon entitled Agape Love (1967), Dr. King preached the following:

AGAPE is more than romantic love, it is more than friendship. Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all ... Agape is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return... it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When you rise to love on this level, you love all... not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loves them. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies." And I'm happy that he didn't say, "Like your enemies," because there are some people

that I find it pretty difficult to like. Liking is an affectionate emotion, and I can't like anybody who would bomb my home. I can't like anybody who would exploit me. I can't like anybody who would trample over me with injustices. I can't like them. I can't like anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out. But Jesus reminds us that love is greater than liking. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all....

Dr. King continues: I've seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I've seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens' councilors, and too many Klansmen of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate it too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up before our most bitter opponents and say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. Send your propaganda agents around the country, and make it appear that we are not fit, culturally and otherwise, for integration, and we'll still love you. But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory." Oh My.

Those are the words of agape love – a love so fierce, so deep that it can only originate from the Divine. Those are the words that help to build beloved community.

In the time that is has taken us here at Binkley to reach where we are this week, welcoming a new lead minister, embodied in God's servant Marcus McFaul, sometimes we have not liked each other. When the Sermon Shaping group met last week and discussed today's New Testament lesson from 2nd Corinthians, Jerry VanSant, on behalf of the group, wrote to me the following: "The passage reflects the reality of human life – forces that can bring us together can also pull us apart if we see differences as a threat rather than a potential mosaic."

Yes, sometimes we have not liked one another. Well, I think that's ok, depending on how we answer these questions: Have we **loved** one another? Do we love one another? Will we love one another?

You see, if you love me, you won't say to me, after a time of uncertainty and challenge and differences, "Can't you just move on?" or "Where is your joy?" This is the language groups in the majority say to minority groups – women, people of color, survivors of abuse, survivors of assault, resisters. They are dismissed! And when such dismissal of parts of the body of Christ occurs, then God's house becomes no more than a secular marketplace, where the false gods of hierarchy, power and egotism reign. Koinonia of any kind is nowhere to be found. And Jesus must make a whip of cords.

If you love me, sister, if you love me brother, you don't just listen to me, you **hear** me, you see me, because your agape love is so fierce, so deep, so of God, that it seeks nothing in return. It.Just.Loves. And so I ask again: Have we **loved** one another? Do we love one another? Will we love one another?

With the fiercest love I know how to emanate, I say to you this day that compassionate community is not enough for Binkley and the world in which we live, joyful community is not enough for Binkley and the world in which we live. There will be compassion, there will be joy, there will be justice, there will be goodwill, IF we work to be build and be in **beloved** community, for Binkley and for the world.

I don't know about you, but I need some other members of this body of Christ to join me in loving better, in loving more fiercely, the current President of the United States. I don't like him because of almost everything he says and does, but I have to love him, because God loves him.

I don't know about you, but I need some other members of this body of Christ to join me in loving better, in loving more fiercely, the current Vice President of the United States. He doesn't seem to like to gay people very much. But I have to love him, because God loves him.

I want to wear down! Mr. Donald Trump I want to wear down! Mr. Mike Pence. Do you?

I want to wear down! the forces of xenophobia, of homophobia, of racism, of hate, of fear, of division. Do you?

And I want our beloved Binkley Church to love.one.another, so fiercely, so deeply, that all the world we will see and say, THERE is beloved community, "for there is the love that may be the salvation of our civilization."

Do you?

AMEN

