

## Hope

A sermon by the Rev. Jane Campbell MacIntyre  
for First Congregational Church UCC, Camden ME  
preached on June 14, 2020

### Proper 6

*Romans 5:1-7; Matthew 9:35-10:8*

It seems to be a normal day in the lives of the disciples. They are following Jesus as he goes from town to town, preaching and healing, day after day.

But this day . . . this day Jesus looked up. I imagine him looking over the crowd and taking a deep breath - and he SEES - he really sees the people before him. They are not just settling in for a good show - They are feeling helpless and harassed.

Now, I suspect you can identify with those feelings. There is so much to deal with in life, both then and now.

I think Jesus, in that moment, suddenly realized that, being human, he could not help all of these people, he could not teach all of these people, all by himself, even though they were obviously waiting to be filled with the Good News. Jesus felt Compassion. He wanted to tend each person.

*“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”*

Now, anyone who has ever been a student knows the next step in this story. Jesus turns to the disciples who have been observing everything and says, “I think you are ready for some hands-on field work. . . *proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*”

This is now our job. You might think you do not have the right qualifications. But look at the motley group around him: PETER - the Rock, the founder and foundation of the church. JUDAS ISCARIOT - the one who betrayed Jesus. MATTHEW the tax collector who worked intimately with the Roman government and SIMON the Canaanite and Zealot who fought against the Roman Empire with all his might. I think we could fit in nicely.

But how are we supposed to go out to these people, when we are being told to stay in?

I don't have a direct answer for that. I do know that the people in this church are very mission oriented and you continue to work for others even now, under these difficult conditions. That is absolutely great. Be proud of yourselves for all you are doing. Be VERY proud.

But there is more to be done. Sometimes compassion requires that you use your voice. Especially today.

Look at the crowds you see on every television and in every newspaper since George Floyd was killed. Talk about a people who are helpless and harassed! This time of sheltering-in-place is the perfect time to find out what would be helpful - and the answer is not by sharing and ‘care-ing’ everything on Facebook.

First, in the bulletin, you will find some Camden Area Conversations you can join - a great venue for discussions. There are also resources listed on the MaineUCC.org web page as well as the Southern New England Conference and national UCC pages also. All will get you thinking in a new way.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Read. One article I read was by Holiday Phillips, a young black woman who describes herself as a “Renegade sociologist — often found playing at the intersection of love + justice”. She gives those of us who are white 4 actions to consider:<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Act with your wallet**

One of the injustices that has survived since the end of slavery is economic - to help break the cycle, support businesses owned by Black people, Indigenous People, and People of Color (BIPOC). Look for them. Research alternatives to the general, faceless markets.

### **2. Call out people for racist language in real time**

It is hard to do face to face - and maybe you are not ready, especially when it's someone at work you see every day or to that relative that spouts off at family dinners. But work on it and one day, you will be able to.

### **3. Inform yourself**

It's others that we blame — the evil ones, the KKK, the neo-Nazis. But those small groups do not hold much power - white people do. Ask all the people of color you can about their experiences - Listen to them and accept their truth, do not debate it.

### **4. Do something that no one will ever know**

Real activism is not always getting out and shouting slogans. Usually it involves the simple daily acts that no one will ever see. Change the things you buy, give your platform to a BIPOC (black, indigenous, person of color), educate yourself on the history of racism without telling everyone about how educated you now are.

The aim of all this? To dismantle the systems that unfairly discriminate and to make real a new point of view.

Steven Charleston, the President & Dean of my seminary, who is a member of the Choctaw Nation says:

“WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS. THAT IS HOW ALMOST EVERY INDIGENOUS NATION IN NORTH AMERICA RESPONDED WHEN FIRST ASKED: WHAT DO YOU CALL YOURSELVES? THE NAME OF MY NATION AND THAT OF SCORES OF OTHER FIRST NATIONS TRANSLATES IN THE SAME WAY. WE SIMPLY CALLED OURSELVES HUMANS. DURING THIS MONTH, WHEN WE HONOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN PRIDE MONTH AND AS WE ENGAGE WITH THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT ALL ACROSS THE WORLD, THAT SINGLE FACT MIGHT BE HELPFUL. IT REMINDS US THAT WHAT WE ARE ALL STRIVING FOR IS THE DAY TO COME WHEN WE WILL NOT HAVE HURTFUL NAMES FOR ONE ANOTHER, BUT WILL

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<sup>1</sup> MaineUCC.org; SNEUCC.org; UCC.org

<sup>2</sup> Holiday Phillips, “Performative Allyship Is Deadly (Here’s What to Do Instead)”, <https://forge.medium.com/performative-allyship-is-deadly-c900645d9f1f>

CALL EACH OTHER BY WHAT WE ARE, NO MATTER WHAT OUR SEXUALITY OR COLOR. LIKE MY ANCESTORS, WE WILL SIMPLY SAY: WE ARE HUMAN.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul writes: *we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. . . because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*, We have that Hope - that we will someday soon live in a Just World. . . . thru the perseverance of Education, the character of Intention, and the hope that comes from Compassion.

May it be so. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Rt. Rev. Dr. Steven Charleston, Retired Episcopal Bishop of Alaska, Facebook, 2020 June 10. One of his spiritual practices is to rise early to pray. From that prayer time he writes a short prayer for all of us that he posts daily on Facebook. You can friend him, he is a Public Figure with thousands of followers.