

“From Death to Life”

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27, Mark 5:21-34

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Christian faith is summarized with three simple things: 1. Jesus is our risen Christ who overcame the power of death and brought us new life 2. God never works alone but calls us as God’s co-creators. 3. We are all called to proclaim hope spreading God’s love to our community and the world. Jesus named this God’s Kingdom. Faith helps us begin this journey. Love is our path and direction to run our race, and finally hope is our fuel and energy to keep us moving in this direction. The church community is called for this mission in solidarity and we, the church of God are called for this sacred purpose, of bringing light into every corner of darkness possible.

This morning, I am going to respond to two special occasions that we all experienced in the last two weeks and share my message with you: One is June 17’s deadly shooting tragedy in Charleston, South Carolina and the other is the United States Supreme Court’s decision in favor of marriage equality for all people.

Let us begin with the tragedy in Charleston, South Carolina. We heard this horrific news that a young gunman opened fire at Emmanuel African Methodist Church during Wednesday night prayer and Bible study. According to the news report, he killed nine innocent church people simply because he hated African Americans. I am not sure whether this guy was mentally ill or not. We can hardly imagine how the victims’ families would feel. We are all grieving over the innocent loss of lives. Today’s Old Testament story is David’s lamentation over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Saul was the King of Israel and Jonathan was his son. We know that Jonathan was David’s best friend. At Ziklag, a messenger came to David to report the defeat of Israel’s army and the deaths of the king, Saul and his son Jonathan on Mount Gilboa. David lost two important people in his life. This Scripture reading shows us that even in the midst of grief, hope inspired David to write a poignant song of lament and praise for his beloved friends. The hope keeps David moving on. What hope can we find in the tragedy of Emmanuel Methodist Church in Charleston?

I believe evil is real and works powerfully in our world. The evil may not take any physical shape, but it spreads into people’s minds creating prejudice, stereotype, hatred, and eventually causes war and kills innocent people. When evil is active, there is a bad spirit of disrespect, discrimination for others, and

acts of oppression for the weak, the poor and the marginalized. The devil teaches people to learn these negative attitudes and loves to see us hating one another. This is totally opposite to Jesus' teachings. Jesus' entire ministry on earth and his calling for his ministry was just one: Love. Jesus teaches us, "Love your God and love your neighbors as yourself." The spirit of love regards me and others with the same respect, compassion and dignity. This love also produces the spirit of peace and justice. Peace is an agreement that we acknowledge our differences and accept others as they are. Justice comes out of compassion for the weak, and for the care of those who have been treated as marginalized.

Paradoxically, the evil act of killing nine innocent lives reminds us of our sacred call to bring new life from death. Death may not merely be physical, but death may also be the state of lifeless, hopeless circumstances. God calls us to work together as co-creators of joy, compassion, peace and love in our lives and in our world.

Let us move to the marriage equality issue. On Friday, June 26th, the news told us that the Supreme Court ruled by a 5-to-4 vote that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. Also last Friday, our Bishop Warner Jr. Brown sent a letter to all pastors in our conference regarding the Supreme Court's decision. In his letter, he says, "The law does not require anyone to violate their conscience of what God has called them to do, or their theological understanding. But, if we seek to be an inclusive church that serves all of our parishioners, and all of our neighbors, we will have to consider how we treat all people equally. The heart of our call to ministry is to be pastor to the people of the congregation, and the community we serve. May we continue to be a people of prayer, and hope, as we work towards a day of equality and inclusion for all people created in the image of God." He also says a quote of Alice Stokes Paul, women's rights activist and leader in getting women the right to vote, "I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

Our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church and our Cal-Nevada Annual conference have consistently stood for full inclusion and equal rights for all people in our denomination. Unfortunately, for decades, our denomination has been debating and wrestling with this same-sex marriage issue. Next year when General Conference gathers in Portland, Oregon, our United Methodist Church will make a decision again whether we will accept this reality or not.

If Jesus were to be at General Conference as a voting member, I imagine

what he would tell us about this reality. I believe that he would again say, “Love God and love your neighbors as yourself!” Love all...AND all means all! Conference delegates believe Jesus would have said that “all” means love is meant for all. Love for all meant Jesus was regarded as a dangerous man to Jewish religious leaders because of his radical love. It is not easy to continue this risk taking mission, but Jesus didn’t give up on this love. He calls us to be his disciples for the transformation of the world.

Our New Testament reading is a story about a miraculous healing touch restoring a dead girl back to life; and a woman who gained new life through a touch to Jesus’ clothes. Specifically, I want you to look at a story of a woman who had trouble with the flow of blood for twelve years. This woman sought to touch Jesus’ own body or at least the garment to cover it, because she believed that ‘being in touch with’ Jesus would bring her hope and life. This woman has been in ill for twelve years with chronic bleeding. In Jewish culture, this woman was labeled as unclean, sinful and marginalized from her community. Simply speaking, she was nothing, she was invisible and she was treated as a lifeless one. She had no hope and no life. But she didn’t give up and she made one last effort to live. That was when she desperately reached out to the power of life, Jesus. She pushed out from the margins to move toward the power of life in hope. She was brave to come to Jesus. When Jesus looked all around to see who had done it, he said to the woman, “Your faith made you well.” What does Jesus mean to say to us? When culture, religion and even the disciples denied her and treated her like second class, Jesus lifted her up and embraced her in love. Love lifted her up! I imagine that Jesus would have said this, “You deserve to be a child of God. Your hope and effort pleased God and love made you well. Go in peace.” Can Jesus’ response to this woman be our attitude to the same sex marriage debate in our denomination? Can this compassionate act be an example for our love of the weak, the victims, the unjust, the poor and the marginalized in our world?

Wherever acts of violence, discrimination and oppression are happening, we as Christians are called to work to end that violence seeking peace with justice. We do this because Jesus taught us to do so. In the midst of grieving over the loss of nine innocent lives and the Supreme Court’s courageous decision, we are reminded of our sacred Christian calling. Truly, we are called to walk humbly with God seeking peace with justice, loving kindness toward our neighbors and by doing compassionate acts for the Kingdom of God. Amen.