

SERMON DELIVERED BY THE REVEREND ALLAN COLE, AT ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN LAKEWOOD, COLORADO AFTER THE EVENTS AT CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

You may notice I am not wearing a green stole today. That would signify Ordinary Time. This is not an ordinary time. Today, I am wearing a violet stole to signify we are in a time of repentance and mercy.

In an address this past week, our presiding bishop quoted from the title of a book by Martin Luther King Jr.: *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* One of his insights was that a moment of crisis is always a moment of decision. In our Psalm today, there is a vision of God we know well. "Oh, how good and pleasant it is when brethren [brothers and sisters] live together in unity!" What the Psalm and our presiding bishop is talking about is the creation of the Beloved Community. That's why we are all here, for the creation of the Beloved Community.

I grew up in a small rural town in the South in the late 60's and early 70's. I was sheltered from most of what was going on in our nation then. I lived in and around discrimination, segregation, blatant racism, and a more quiet form of systemic racism. But I didn't hear about it. Of course, it was going on. Of course, I saw it. Of course, I lived in that realm. Yet I grew up thinking my life was pretty idyllic, and I loved it. Even when I went to seminary, I thought I could give my life on behalf of the Beloved Community. I could reach out to those who do not know they are a part of that community and help bring them to it. Up until then, I'd never really been a religious person, and I went into all this thinking spirituality, prayer and a little repentance would get us through.

There's a quote from former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Mike Tyson: "Everybody has a plan, until they get punched in the mouth." This past week, we were punched in the mouth. And we are shocked, because you and I thought the world we live in was heading toward what we hoped to see, that Beloved Community, only to find out we haven't reached it yet.

There are times in this world when there is no grayness. There are times in this world when we recognize what truth and deceit look like, what hatred looks like. There are times when we know for certain what's right and what's wrong. Supremacy is wrong. White supremacy is wrong. Any of us who do not speak out

against and condemn with our lips and our actions supremacy of any kind, particularly white supremacy — we are wrong. We are not in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have no business in this place, in this church, if we cannot stand up against the things that are tearing apart the hope and the vision of a Beloved Community. We can refuse to see what's going on and we can pretend that in our world, there is equality for all. We can dismiss what's going on by saying, "All lives matter." Or we can say nothing, and be wrong.

John F. Kennedy addressed the nation in 1963 in the wake of racial discrimination. He said, "Those who do nothing are inviting shame, as well as violence." We can't live like that, we can't afford to live in shame by saying nothing. Our hearts cannot afford to do nothing.

You could say that a bunch of white folks on the west side of Denver is removed from all that. But we are not removed from all that. There's a line from a pop song I heard this week. "Remember: white supremacy is not a shark, it is the water." Statistically, less than one person dies by shark bite in this country every year. However, thousands die of drowning. The sea is among us, around us. I grew up in that sea. It's the sea we all grew up in, whether we knew it or not. It's in the air we breathe.

Paul's letter to the Romans this morning continues a theme he's been carrying for three weeks. Paul is standing up for his Jewish brothers and sisters. He's saying to the Gentiles, you think you know something about Jesus but don't get too haughty in your knowledge. The Jews are the bringers of Light and salvation into the world. Let's not forget that. We're all saved by grace and if we're not, grace isn't grace. Then Paul says something pointed at the end of our reading. The call — and I'll say the call to create the Beloved Community amongst all of us — is irrevocable. So if we think we're not a part of it, if we shun our responsibility by silence and inaction, we stand against the very call that brought us here. We can't afford that, either.

In our Gospel this morning, Jesus is talking about the Pharisees and uses a word for blindness. In Greek, the word is *Tōros* and means to be willfully blind. Literally, it means "to be caught up in the smoke of self-deceit," unable to see anything around us. That's when Jesus says the blind leading the blind leads to the pit and talks about what it means to defile. Jesus talks about the heart as the seat of all the things that tear this world apart. One gets the feeling he's calling each of us to

repentance. We'll begin there, with repentance. We'll also do something else. We will learn to speak to our Jewish brothers and sisters. We will learn to speak to our Muslim brothers and sisters. And to our Hispanic and Latino brothers and sisters. We will ask ourselves, what do we say to the native peoples around us? What do we say to our black and African American folks? What do we say to immigrants?

What we say to them is this: "We're scared, too. And we will not let anything happen to you, because you are part of the Beloved Community."

This is not something I say. This is something we say, as a people. We will stand for all those people who are in fear, and rightfully so. If we can't do that, if we can't stand for them, then we can get on our knees again, and we'll start all over, with repentance, until we learn to stand in the strength of the Holy Spirit and in the strength only God can give us. And we will be one people. One people.

I don't mean to be judgmental. If you think I'm being political, okay. If you think I'm picking on our leadership, fine. If you think I believe there are many sides, you're wrong. There's only one side. For us, there's only one side. And that side is the side of love. Anything else is beneath the call of this community and each of us, as a child of God.

And there's that — the children. What do we do with our children? What do we do, knowing they are watching us right now. What do we do, knowing if we do not say or do something to speak out against supremacy, who will they be when they grow up? So they're watching us. And I wonder if we might watch them, too. They don't know hate like we do. They don't despise people like we do. What can we teach them? What can we do for them?

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus ventures into a territory that he earlier condemned. He criticized Tyre and Sidon as places of wealth and self-deceit and inaction because they had all their needs met. He goes against his disciples' behest knowing that's where he's needed most. On the way, a Canaanite woman comes out. You may remember the Canaanites from the Old Testament. God told Joshua to go forth and conquer those people; the Canaanites are thus long-standing enemies of the Israelites. Even so, the Canaanite woman calls out to Jesus, "Lord, save me." From that, we think she wants to be saved, but she does not want to be saved for herself. She is yelling and screaming for healing, salvation, and whatever Jesus can give her on behalf of her child. Jesus responds

with one of the coldest lines in all of the Gospels: “It is not fair to take the children’s (i. e., Israelites’) food and throw it to the dogs,” — ‘dogs’ being a disparaging term for anybody that wasn’t a Jew at the time, particularly the Canaanites. Jesus meant, it’s not fair to take the promise and give it to those who are not promised. The woman, on her knees, says, that may be true “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus says, Woman, your faith has made you well.

I wonder if we have enough faith to be well, to scream out just as the Canaanite woman did for all the people who need healing and wholeness, to scream out for the voices that will never be silenced as long as there’s no justice in this or any other land.

I wish I could say today is business as usual. I wish I could say we can go about our Christian lives and come here to church and get a little bit of what we need, then leave. Come here, bring a little bit of praise, then leave.

I cannot. This is not the same world we were living in ten days ago. This is a different land, and we must be a different people. We must stand against and condemn supremacy, hatred, violence. If we can’t stand against that, then don’t come back next week. If I can’t stand against that, I won’t be here next week.

You can say, Preacher, I don’t know if I can do that. I tell you beyond a shadow of a doubt, if we get on our knees, and pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to be within us, and for God to give us the strength to stand in a world that wants to beat love down — if we can do that, I will see all of you next week. And everybody else you can bring in here!

And we will grow in numbers and stand against those who want to live by hate. We will choose the Beloved Community. We will make it happen. You and me. You and me. Don’t despair. Have hope. Help your brothers and sisters. Don’t turn away. Be. Be the Light we were called to be. Don’t be wrong. For God’s sake, don’t be wrong on this one.