



John 8:51ff  
Romans 4:16-25  
August 13, 2017

I had a sermon ready for this morning. It was pretty good. It had a couple decent jokes and I think it made a sound theological argument. But every now and again you wake up on a Saturday morning with a sermon baked and ready to go, only to discover that something in your world has shifted dramatically, and suddenly that sermon that just needed to be decorated and put on a serving platter sounds sad, flimsy, and inauthentic. So...this is not the sermon that I had prepared for this morning. Perhaps I'll give that sermon another time if the moment presents itself...but this...This is a different sermon. It's not as polished, it's not as funny, but this is a sermon

that I know I need to hear and my prayer is that it is a sermon that speaks to you as well. I say in advance that many facts about the situation are still being uncovered. And so I say now...that I if I say something you disagree with, or cite information that later proves to be false, or if you feel that I have somehow overstepped my bounds...I Say now, please share your concerns with me. Because as you will see...this sermon is not meant to divide us, but to draw us together in Christ. So please know that my door is open.

Yesterday morning I woke up to discover that White Supremacists, including the Ku Klux Klan, had held a rally in Charlottesville Virginia, marching, burning torches, shouting hateful chants, and sending a shockwave through our entire nation. Then through out the day I watched as tensions grew and rallies continued until a car drove through a crowd of counter-protesters killing one woman and sending more than a dozen others to the hospital. Now, I grew up in a world that said the KKK and white supremacy was all but dead. We read about it in history class and were told that "People don't act like that any more." When I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, there was a Klan rally in my hometown of Kettering, OH. The event took place at a local park less than a mile from my house and across the street from my high school. As soon as news broke about the Klan's plan, a counter demonstration was planned. It would be an opportunity for people to come together and peacefully share stories of diversity, acceptance, and love. Nearly 1,000 people came out to the peaceful counter demonstration...only a handful showed up for the Klan rally. In my 6<sup>th</sup> grade mind this all but solidified the fact that the Klan, its perpetuation of hate, and its insistence on violence were all but dead.

Yesterday's events demonstrated just how wrong I was. The Klan did not die. White Supremacy did not die. I'm not even sure it is dying. The Klan is alive, perpetuating racism, division, violence, and hate. Just saying those words...The Klan is Alive... breaks my heart for us as a community and as a nation. I don't know where you were during the Civil Rights movement...Maybe you were standing shoulder to shoulder with Dr. King and others marching in the streets of Selma. Maybe you were in your house unsure of what to think about the whole thing. Maybe you thought they were wrong and they shouldn't be marching at all. Maybe, like me, you were not even a twinkle in your parents' eye and would only read about it in history books years later...

In seminary I spoke with pastors and teachers who had marched with Dr. King. White and black, they had traveled down from Ohio to join peaceful demonstrations to change the way we view the world. They marched, they told me, because they had caught a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and it was a kingdom that was not divided by race, that was not divided by income or political affiliation. They caught a glimpse of a Kingdom that was united by the God who created us, knit us together, counted the hairs on our head, sculpted us out of the clay, breathed life in to us, and sent Jesus Christ to live and be killed on this earth so that we might return to the Kingdom. They caught a glimpse of this kingdom and they marched, to offer that vision to their children and their grandchildren and their great grand children. They marched so that we could live in a world that was less hateful. That was more concerned with caring for one another than dividing ourselves up. They marched so their grand-children would only ever read about groups like the Klan in history books.

But the Klan is still alive...And it tears me up to think that we and our children still live in a world where someone can hate and threaten someone else simply because they were born with a different skin color. (Where White Supremacy is considered acceptable, taboo perhaps, but acceptable.) Because Hate is not what we were created for. Hate was not why God planted Adam and Even in the Garden. Hate was not why God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. Hate is not why God brought the Israelites out of Exile in Babylon. And Hate is certainly not why God sent Jesus Christ.

We were created to be creatures who loved God and loved one another. We were intended to become ONE in Christ...Where there is no longer Jew or Gentile, Slave or Free...But there is ONLY Christ.

And in Christ there is no place for Hate. In Christ there is no place for Racism. In Christ there is no place for sexism, classism, ageism, or any other ism that WE have created to claim a false sense of superiority. In Christ we are made to be one. To stand hand in hand with sisters and brothers of all races and backgrounds and create a more peace filled...a more hope filled... world for our children.

I need to be honest...I don't know what you think about what I just said: that in Christ there is no place for hate, no place for racism...That in Christ we were created to be one and stand together with those who are different from us. I don't know what you think about that. Maybe you agree with me. Maybe you think I'm being naïve. Maybe you want to walk out. I don't know what you think...but I know that God has a vision for all of us. It's the vision of Isaiah 25 where God provides a feast for ALL people. It's the vision of Revelation where the Tree of Life grows along the river with leaves that are Healing for the Nations. It's a vision that does not involve white supremacists perpetuating hate and violence.

Now, I was supposed to spend this morning talking about hope...And if there is one thing I am certain of it is that we all need more hope. When cancer takes hold. When jobs are lost. When nations are at war. When the Klan walks openly through the streets. We all need more hope.

So...let's put our hope in the only thing that will never fail us: the God who promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars. In our reading today, Paul reminds us that Abraham was OLD, and Sarah wasn't supposed to be able to have children. But Abraham placed his hope in God because he knew that God would uphold the covenant. And WE know, that God fulfilled that covenant through Jesus Christ. So in the end...I do have hope this morning... I have hope because I know the Klan and white supremacists will not have the final word. I have hope because the Word of God was being proclaimed as clergy from across the region marched arm in arm through the streets of Charlottesville in silent and peaceful protest of the vision of hate that was being cast. I have hope because the God of the universe is at work in this community and communities like it across the country to be places for healing and reconciliation. I have hope because I look at each one of you this morning and I know God will use you to share a vision of unity in Christ. I have hope because I look at our children and I know God will use them to put an end to unfounded hate for their sisters and brothers. I have hope...because the Tomb is Still empty...and God has promised that Love, not hate, will win. (have the final word.)

*God Loves Each of You and I do too.*

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