

"Safety in an Uncertain World"
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First Congregational Church of East Hartford
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Gen. 1:27-28
Deut. 15:7-11
Acts 4:32-37

Please Note: These are notes to a lively speech hopefully more akin to poetry or spoken word than a lecture or academic paper. Physical movement and delivery cannot be captured on the page, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of what was shared in worship.

Last week I mentioned briefly the courage it takes to claim one's faith,
especially for young people today.

I was referring to Jacob, the 10 yr old who was baptized last week.

This past week we learned of a horrendous shooting,

where college students who claimed their faith as Christians were shot in the head.

It was a senseless crime that sent shock-waves through our country,
and re-traumatized many.

Shootings like this - in places and in times unexpected -shake us,
in part because they reveal the uncertainty of our world.

We like to think that if we play the game "right",
we will be safe and secure.

When a tragedy hits, it takes our plans and sense of knowing what is to come,
and turns it upside down.

This morning we look at safety in an uncertain world.

We seek out God's grace, in moments of tragedy.

In the midst of chaos and uncertainty,

we seek out how to tie into the sacred and find safety.

PRAYER

To find safety and the Divine in the midst of today's uncertainty,
let's look to what God has done in the past,
in the midst of yesterday's chaos.

In Genesis we read that in the beginning, there was chaos.

God breathed over the chaos and formed the earth, the animals, and all creation.

God took chaos and made order.

When God was finished setting up creation,

God told humans:

you have dominion over all the plants and animals.

you will be caretakers and guardians of creation.

Out of chaos and uncertainty,

God commands the faithful to care for all creation.

When God's people entered the Promised Land, there was chaos.

The people did not know how to govern themselves.

They had trouble following the one who had delivered them from oppression.

In the midst of their chaos,

God created order.

God gave the people Israel a blueprint for a good and just society.

God set out parameters for the country:

they would rotate their crops to preserve the soil,

they would care for the widows and orphans,

they would make sure that all had enough,

they would give to neighbors in need.

Out of chaos and uncertainty,

God commands the faithful to care for the poor and assure that all have enough.

When the messiah was murdered, the followers of God were in disarray.

They did not know when or how Jesus would return.

They did not fully understand what they had witnessed.

But, they held to what Jesus Christ had taught them.

and they tried to live out his commandments in the midst of their uncertainty.

As we read in Acts, they shared all their property and all their goods.

Everything was held in common.

Everyone had enough.

Out of chaos and uncertainty,

the followers of God lived together, sharing all they had as one.

This idea of living together and sharing what they had was passed down through the ages, countless Christians would strive for communal living as an expression of their faith.

These three stories about the divine call amidst the chaos may seem rather separate, but

This morning I'm going to argue that:

we bring safety and unity to our chaotic world,

when we follow God's commands to care for creation and care for the

poor.

One way we can care for creation and the poor is through communal living.

Climate Change and Poverty are two major contributors to the chaos in our world.

They are related issues with multiple solutions needed.

Pope Francis has become well-known for his dedication to serving the poor

and also his commitment to stewardship of the Earth.

Care for the environment took up the majority of his first speech on his recent visit to the US.

Earlier this year Pope Francis issued a major declaration about the environment -

claiming our responsibility to cut pollution and stop the burning of fossil fuels

in an effort to curb climate change.

The pope shared what scientists and activists and theologians have said for years:

climate change disproportionately hurts the poor of our world.

When the climate changes,

we get more severe weather: floods, draughts, hurricanes, wild fires, etc.

poor countries have significantly less resources to cope.

The result is millions of people displaced or dead.

As our climate changes, the level of uncertainty increases:

more frequent storms continue to hit and communities are thrown into chaos.

In the midst of chaos, God's command to care for creation makes sense:

if we do not care for creation, our world becomes only more uncertain.

The pope is also clear about means to address climate change:

we need investment in solar and wind technologies,
and there needs to be a grave decline in consumption and waste.

As a country we simply cannot continue to produce and consume and buy at the current rate.

We produce too much carbon, too much trash, too much pollution:
polluting our air and our water
and messing with the natural rhythms of the earth.

There are countless ways to mitigate the chaotic uncertainty of our world and address climate change and poverty.

We need them all.

This morning I would like to share a distinctly Christian response:

communal living.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps anyone?

Jesuits: catholic order of priests (from which Pope Francis came)
with a focus on social justice and care for the poor

The Jesuits formed a group called the Jesuit Volunteer Corps,
inspired by the passage in Acts describing early Christians sharing with one another.

While Christians have been living in intentional community since the beginning,
this program has roots going back to the 1960s

The idea is that young people live together in service.

They share resources by living in one house together.

They practice spirituality (spirituality nights; weekly church, spiritual mentors).

They work in organizations that serve people on the margins:

after-school programs
food programs (soup kitchens)
housing assistance: transitional and more permanent
addiction services
legal assistance for those who need it, but can't afford it
health care clinics

They live in the communities they serve and they live simply:

no internet, no expensive electronics, no tv

It is a volunteer program, so participants' basic needs are covered,
but they are not paid a full salary.

The program has had over 10,000 volunteers

and has spurred and informed countless similar programs, including the peace corps.

In fact, the UCC, our denomination, has its own version of the JVC.

Programs like these are not only clear expressions of the Gospel,
they also curb the uncertainty and chaos of our world.

The JVC and similar programs certainly serve the poor:

the volunteers sign up to do just that.

Communal living also follows God's command to care for creation.

When you live together, there are less products to buy and less resources consumed.

Instead of 5 people heating 5 homes, you heat one.

JVC and similar programs of communal living help create a safer world by mitigating the impacts of climate change and lessening the impacts of poverty.

We could decide as a congregation to host such a community of young adults.

They would bring insights, energy, and community.

They would be able to carry out a number of our mission programs
and strengthen our partnerships with the wider East Hartford community.

The spiritual benefits of communal living can also be gleaned without physically living together:
one of the biggest benefits of intentional community is the connections across
differences and through struggles.

over the centuries the church has developed a number of ways to build connection:

we build connections over potlucks and at the table;

we share stories in Bible Study, on retreats, and at coffee hour.

we share resources in the food bank and through the offering plate.

Whether we build connections with housemates, neighbors, or fellow church-goers,
those connections tie us to the divine and bring safety amidst uncertainty and chaos.

story from my year serving as an americorps volunteer at a soup kitchen in Philly:

fearful at first [staff meeting: everyone has a gun?!],

but a growing sense of safety over the course of the year:

I got to know the folks who came every week;

I learned to count on and trust my housemates/coworkers:

in the final week we, with other homeless people,

diffused a potential fight by working together,

as if in a dance, to calm the angry man searching for glasses!

There will always be sociopaths and eruptions into our everyday lives,
but we do have means to build a safer world.

Safety comes in people joining together to alleviate the suffering of climate change and poverty.

When we actually share our resources,

we help to mitigate the crippling impacts of climate change and poverty.

Safety comes from being a part of a community

- a house community or a wider church community.

When we make connections, especially when they are across difference,

it helps to widen our views, strengthen our compassion for others,

and gives us a network to lean on when chaos intrudes.

In the midst of uncertainty and chaos,

may we band together in service;

whether in a single home or across homes,

may we strive to preserve natural resources and share equally,

that all might have enough.

may we listen to God's call to care for all creation -

the air, water, all the animals - including all of humanity.

As we strengthen those connections between one another and all creation,

may we find safety and hope, in the midst of uncertainty. Amen.

Morning Prayer:

Prayer from the Global Day of Prayer, Transformations Ireland

Spirit of the living God,

Apart from you, we can do nothing.

Transform your Church into the image of Jesus Christ.

Release your power to bring healing to the sick,

freedom to the oppressed

and comfort to those who mourn.

Pour your love into our hearts

and fill us with compassion to answer the call of the homeless and the hungry.

And to enfold orphans, widows and the elderly in your care.

Give us wisdom and insight

for the complex problems we face today.

Help us to use the resources of the earth for the well-being of all.

Holy Spirit, we need your comfort and guidance.

Transform our hearts as we join your people around the world in saying the prayer you taught us....saying...Our Father....Amen