

**Annual Meeting Address**  
**Sunday, March 27, 2022, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Mike Kinman**

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change ... I am changing the things I cannot accept.”

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Years ago, I heard Madeleine L’Engle share about a conversation she had with a friend who was about to embark on a solo cross country driving trip.

Now this was way before cell phones, so she was truly on her own. And that seemed daunting to L’Engle ... so she asked her friend:

“Well, what if you get scared? What if you get lonely? What will you do?”

Her friend, who was a recovering alcoholic, said. “Oh, that’s easy. I’ll just find a meeting.” Knowing that wherever she went, somewhere there would be a 12-step meeting that would welcome her and give her the community she needed.

The ease and certainty with which her friend said that, stuck with L’Engle. She was a fairly faithful Episcopalian, and yet there was something her friend was describing she had never found in a church.

She wondered, “If I walked into a church ... and just said, ‘I’m lonely’ or ‘I’m scared.’ What would they do?”

The answer was neither easy nor certain.

It’s not that she didn’t believe in the church’s goodness, or compassion, or even desire to help those in need.

When it came down to it, she couldn’t trust that the church would stop whatever it was doing and just take the time... whatever time was needed .... to meet a scared, lonely person where they were and just listen to them and be with them in love.

Madeline L’Engle’s lament was not so much an indictment of followers of Jesus but a statement of reality of what the church has become ... and not just recently.

Centuries ago, the church that Paul speaks to this morning. The church that is given the mission of reconciling the world to God ... of turning the world that is into the world that can be.

Centuries ago, the church made a survival bargain with that world.

To live by the same economic rules as the world.

To join the world in trusting that its survival depended more on income and less on God.

The church became an economic entity.

A benevolent, even transformative one at best ... but an economic entity all the same.

And it has far more been conformed to than it has transformed the economic system that rules our lives.

And so, we have learned to measure our success by the metrics of white supremacy culture of which capitalism is the delivery system:

Perfectionism

Quantity over quality

Progress is always bigger and more

A right to comfort for those in power

The church has measured her success and measured herself against one another by those ABC's of Empire:

Attendance,

Buildings, and

Cash.

It's not that we haven't been compassionate or don't provide wonderful pastoral care for one another and for the stranger. That capacity wasn't the source of Madeline L'Engle's uncertainty.

It was that she couldn't trust that we would stop and just take the time ... whatever time was needed ... to let love do its long slow work of transforming fear and loneliness into healing and wholeness. There is too much else we feel we have to do to keep the engines running.

And yet for the past two years, that is precisely what we have done.

The pandemic did not create our fear and loneliness ... it revealed it. It stretched and continues to stretch us ... and at times exhausted us to the point where increasingly we could no longer hide our fear, our loneliness and countless other things which we had gotten so good at hiding from each other ... and all too often from ourselves.

And ... it revealed other things, too.

The depth of our compassion.

Of our resilience.

Of our creativity.

Of our generosity.

It revealed the steadfastness of our love and the tenacity of our joy.

It revealed that of all the things we missed, the greatest was not the programs, or even this beautiful space ... but each other.

And so, we found new ways to come together,

to be together,

to hold each other when we couldn't even touch each other,

to grieve when we never had a chance to say goodbye.

You ... all of you ... are heroes of the faith.

We have done this ... and we are still doing this.

And we were able to because we had the courage to stop what we were doing and just take the time ... whatever time was needed ... to meet each other where we were and help each other to know that the love that created us all, the love that heals us all ... is right here for us all.

We didn't do it perfectly ... and that was part of what made it wonderful.

We are learning even more than before that love and laughter is more important than perfection.

That as Brother Gerald Rivers, our master djembe drummer reminds us, there are no mistakes, just different choices.

That quality of time spent in healing is more important than quantity of programs offered and ministries launched.

That progress is measured not in bigger and more but sometimes in smaller and less.

And we are learning that power and privilege do not give us the right to comfort. In fact, usually, it's exactly the opposite.

One of the grounding elements of the twelve-step movement is the serenity prayer. I have used it more times than I can count and have found it a source of great solace and healing.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
 Courage to change the things I can.  
 And Wisdom to know the difference.*

The brilliance of the Serenity Prayer is it reminds us that we can't do everything AND we can do some things. Incredible things. Things that require great courage.

The brilliance of the serenity prayer is it invites us to stop and breathe.

To break the cycle of action, reaction and compulsion to function.

To remember that it is God, not income or popularity, that sustains us.

The serenity prayer recognizes that we live in a highly addicted culture, and whenever we have addictions, we crave control so we will never lose the object of our addiction.

The prayer reminds us there are things we cannot change and that trying to is a waste of spirit. And that those things can suck our energy away from the change we truly can make.

In this age of 24-hour internet and cable crap. Where ginned up outrage is packaged to us in the form of news, and tragedy porn manipulates our sense of compassion to keep us clicking and watching, the Serenity prayer is both essential grounding and healing balm.

And yet even this prayer has its challenge.

The Serenity prayer is based on a prayer written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the early 1930s. And yet there are a couple key differences.

See if you can spot them.

Niebuhr prayed:

*God, give us the courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other.*

Did you catch them?

First, for Niebuhr, this is a communal prayer ... not an individual one. Not "God, grant me" but "God, give us."

The journey is never a solo trip.

Following Jesus is too hard to do by ourselves and too wonderful to keep to ourselves. The healing and transformation the world needs is too great to be done by ourselves and too profound to be just about ourselves.

Next, Niebuhr begins his prayer asking for courage ... not to change what we can ... but change what *must be altered*. Implicit in that is the conviction that if it must be changed, God will give us – US -- the capacity to change it.

The challenge of the Serenity prayer as it stands today is it begins not only in singular instead of plural but with accepting the things we cannot change. And the systems of this world that oppress and imprison God’s children thrive on convincing us they cannot be changed ... that we simply must accept them.

A few minutes ago, I began this address with words attributed to the great American prophet Angela Davis:

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change ... I am changing the things I cannot accept.”

Davis is taking the Serenity prayer and giving it a radical reading ... literally reaching back to its roots.

There is so much we are told that cannot change, that we are stuck with. From this economic system that with every passing year disenfranchises more and more of God’s children ... to the system of white supremacy that convinces us that not only is this the way things are but it is the way things ought to be.

Davis is reaching back to Niebuhr and articulating the heart of what Jesus came to give us .. that if we are to follow him, there are things we cannot accept ... things that must be changed. And we ... us ... together ... will be given the capacity to change them.

Last week, we cried “Story! Story!” ... and you all cried “Story! Story!” and we told a story of once upon a time, a world that once was and that could be again. And we rejoiced that more than our job it is our joy to bring that world into being.

And then came last week.

And throughout the week, we watched as as brilliant a jurist as exists in this nation, the Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson, was subjected to indignities and offenses never before seen in the Senate Judiciary Committee and yet part of the everyday life of every black woman in the history of this republic.

If we had an ounce of decency in us, we were scandalized by the unchecked boldness of the abuse of Senator Ted Cruz and others.

And yet we should not have been surprised because as Halle Berry once said, “the Black woman is the most unprotected, unloved woman on earth ... she is the only flower on earth that grows unwatered.”

This week, if we needed to be, we were reminded of the distance between our vision of tomorrow, the once upon a time that can be again ... and the world with which we are faced.

We were reminded ... and we need to be reminded because as Angela Davis reminds us, “We live in a society of an imposed forgetfulness, a society that depends on public amnesia.”

We were reminded why we claim walking with a revolutionary Jesus, because nothing less than a revolution is needed in this society.

For we cannot just wag our heads and cluck our tongues at people like Ted Cruz. Share and like the articles on social media denouncing him, announce our statements of solidarity and quietly count ourselves as among the enlightened, saying “thank God I am not like this sinner.”

We cannot be merely passive allies, we must be fellow revolutionaries.

In this morning’s Epistle, Paul could not make that more clear:

“For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now everything is new! All this is from God, who has made us ministers of reconciliation.”

Paul wrote these words from the perspective of a colonized person writing to a colonized people. Both Paul and Jesus saw Judaism as involving a reaction against empire and domination.

The Exodus and freedom from enslavement was the defining liberating event in their history, and Christ had come to overturn the tables of Empire everywhere and set all the captives free.

We have domesticated the word reconciliation. Turned it into “playing nice’ with a theological gloss.

In 1993, when South Africa was preparing for a transition process that would end Apartheid and lead to the election of Nelson Mandela as president, the ANC was pushing for a “truth commission” that would address the crimes of the Apartheid era.

Then-President F.W. de Klerk insisted on including the words “and reconciliation” in the committee name, believing it would tame the process and make it more palatable for a white public terrified it would actually be held to account for its abuses.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his colleague, theologian Allan Aubrey Boesak, delighted in this suggestion, knowing the deep biblical roots of the term.

As Boesak later said, “The radical nature of the Christian faith and the very reality of biblically motivated reconciliation would often push the TRC into deeper waters than it wanted, or had planned, or could be allowed to go.”

That’s because the word Paul uses for reconciliation, the Greek *Katallassō* means literally, “to change, or exchange; to effect a change.”

As Boesak and American theologian Curtiss Paul DeYoung write in their book, Radical Reconciliation:

*“Reconciliation can be understood as exchanging places with ‘the other,’ overcoming alienation through identification, solidarity, restoring relationships, positive change, new frameworks, and a rich togetherness that is both spiritual and political.”*

Earlier in that letter, Paul talks of a Christ “who, though he was rich, for your sake became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9)

As the title of Boesak and De Young’s book states, this is understanding reconciliation as a radical thing ... both in the literal meaning of getting to its roots and in the colloquial meaning of revolutionary.

The word radical has gotten a bad name. It has been used to demonize those who actually dare to stand for Gospel justice.

We embrace this word at All Saints Church with deep intentionality.

For the core of our values as All Saints Church are not so much in the words Inclusion, Justice, Spirituality and Stewardship. Any number of churches can and do claim those values and are able to do so quite comfortably.

No, the core of our values is in the challenging and at times uncomfortable modifiers:

Radical  
Courageous  
Joyful  
Ethical

Radical reconciliation. Radical inclusion is recognizing that true “heart justice” ... justice that comes from the core of our being with love at the center ... cannot bear any separation... and knows that the only way to overcome estrangement is not just the proximity of which Bryan

Stevenson has spoken so eloquently, but total identification with the other. Literally “exchanging places” with those who would be “the other.”

It is what Greg Boyle talks about when he says our mission is to “gather at the margins until the margins disappear under our feet.”

It is a mission that is and will be both profoundly uncomfortable and deeply rewarding for those of us of power and privilege. For as Boesak writes:

*“Reconciliation for the powerful and privileged means trusting those who have lived under oppression and even following their lead in becoming a new humanity.”*

And that is also the work we have begun and continued in the past year at All Saints Church.

We have claimed dismantling white supremacy and becoming actively anti-racist not as some random social agenda but as our Gospel mandate to bring about God’s beloved community on earth as it is in heaven.

To be the generation of the church that at last says: “We are no longer accepting the things we cannot change ... we are changing the things we cannot accept.”

Your vestry and program staff have been engaged in in-depth monthly trainings and conversations about white supremacy culture.

We have multiple study groups wrestling with the prophetic wisdom of Verna Dozier, Christina Cleveland and Gayle Fisher-Stewart.

Alfredo Feregrino is leading a class in faith development entirely in Spanish in partnership with the Diocese of Oregon.

We are the new home for PRISM restorative justice, meeting Christ in the jails and working to overturn the system of mass incarceration.

We have groups diving deeply into our history and starting to tell the whole story of the land which we occupy and the stained glass windows which have focused our worship for generations so we can more and more be the change we need to see in the world and bring those core values of radical inclusion, courageous justice, joyful spirituality and ethical stewardship to life in all we do.

For we cannot just wag our heads and cluck our tongues at people like Ted Cruz.

Our passive disapproval and even outrage will not save Judge Brown Jackson nor will it save us.



When people like Senator Cruz try to trap her like the Temple authorities tried to trap Jesus with questions like “Do you agree with (the 1619 project) that one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare independence is because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery?”

Or “Do you believe books like ‘Critical Race Theory: An Introduction,’ ‘The End of Policing,’ ‘How to be an anti-racist,’ and ‘Anti-racist baby’ should be in school curriculum?”

...we not only say “Sir, that is an irrelevant question to ask a candidate for the nation’s highest court and she should not have to answer”

... but we will also answer “but if you must know, yes, we actually do agree because our faith in Jesus compels us to grasp the mission of reconciliation that begins with telling the uncomfortable truths of the past so we can have the joy of together creating God’s beloved, once upon a time, dream of the future.”

And that is who we are as All Saints Church. It is who we have been for generations, it is who we are today, and it is who we are becoming as we move together into the future.

A community of  
*Radical* Inclusion.  
*Courageous* Justice.  
*Joyful* Spirituality.  
*Ethical* Stewardship.

For centuries upon centuries, the church has conspired with Empire to keep God’s children enslaved. To convince us that these things cannot change and in fact they are the way they are supposed to be.

Now we get to be the generation that says: No.

We get to be the generation that says we are ready to claim the Gospel mission of radical reconciliation.

We get to be the generation that has the courage to trust that we can stop and just take the time ... whatever time is needed ... to let love do its long, slow work of transforming fear and loneliness into healing and wholeness.

We get to be the generation that says together:

“We are no longer accepting the things we cannot change ... we are changing the things we cannot accept.” Amen.