

Abortion Is Healthcare
Sunday, May 15, 2022, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

Help us, O God, to be masters of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take our lips and speak through them, our minds and think through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire, for Christ's sake. Amen.

For 28 years, George Regas stood in this pulpit and began his sermons with those words. They were the preamble to words of hope, words of challenge, words of inspiration, words of love.

One of the things I was taught in seminary is never to preach angry. And I so get where that was coming from.

There is a power to standing here in front of a more or less captive audience – although I've certainly seen some people try to tunnel out of here from time to time. Using that power to vent anger at you would be abusive ... the pulpit must always be a place of love and as bell hooks wrote "love and abuse cannot coexist."

And yet, here's the thing: I cannot escape anger this morning.

And so, while I pray that God will somehow take these words and speak through them, and somehow take our minds and think through them, and while I am certainly always struggling to be a master of myself so that I may be a servant of others, I do not need God to take my heart and set it on fire this morning because it is already on fire.

I cannot escape anger this morning. Even more, I cannot believe that God would have me or you or any of us do that. Because while abuse is not compatible with love, anger can be.

bell hooks also writes, "There can be no love without justice" ... and "the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be."

And when we see the world the way it is, we see so much injustice. So much that is that isn't the way it should be. And it makes me so angry. And I know anger is a secondary emotion. I know anger comes from pain or fear or sometimes both, so I know all that is churning around in there, too. And it needs to come out – for all of us.

It is the deep and sacred tradition of lament. Pain mixed with anger and often mixed with fear ... and shouted from rooftops and overturning tables in temples.

And that's where I am right now.

And I wonder this morning if I'm not alone.

I wonder this morning if you are feeling it, too.

There can be no love without justice ... and the heart of justice is truth-telling. And to tell our truths, we have to name them, as much as we are able, in the clearest possible way.

And I have three truths that I need to name this morning. And you may agree they are truths or you may dispute they are truths, but I cannot stand in the same pulpit that George Regas occupied and not at least strive for that heart of justice.

And my first truth is this:

Cancer sucks.

Cancer is cruel.
It is an abomination.
It is an injustice.

I am so angry at cancer. And the lives it continues to take from us.

This week, I had the privilege I so dearly wish I did not have, and that was to witness the deeply holy death of our brother, Cam Sanders, longtime member of Canterbury Choir. And it really is a testament to the power of God that something so awful can be so holy.

And ... Cam was 56 years old. And he was a joy, a bright light, he had a heart as big as a planet, an artist's eye and as gentle a spirit as has ever graced this earth.

And Cam is dead because of cancer. And so now he joins the long litany of names, faces, and loves that this awful disease has taken from us. And every time another name gets added to that list, I just want to scream "Cancer sucks. I am so done with cancer!"

But cancer never seems to be done with us, does it?

I'm not alone in this, am I?

I think of cancer.
I think of all the people we have said goodbye to far too soon.
And I am angry.
I am hurting.
I am tired.
And I wonder if you feel the same way. Can I get an Amen?

There can be no love without justice ... and the heart of justice is truth-telling. And to tell our truths, we have to name them, as much as we are able, in the clearest possible way.

So that's my first truth that sets my heart on fire this morning: Cancer sucks.

And here is my second truth

Abortion is healthcare. And healthcare is a human right.

At All Saints Church, we say we have been prayerfully pro-choice since 1989. That is when George stood in this pulpit and preached a powerful and scholarly sermon about abortion ... followed by a forum where three women, including our own Cathy Clement, gave their own thoughts followed by a vestry resolution to that end.

It was one moment in a long history of moments that lead us to claim not just justice but Courageous Justice as one of our core values ... for in 1989, a church proclaiming itself as pro-choice was courageous.

And ... it is 33 years later. And we have learned a lot since then ... and perhaps remembered even more.

We remember that scripture and church tradition have long allowed for abortion. That life beginning at first breath has a deep scriptural history and life beginning at conception has neither scriptural nor scientific basis. And that more than anything the question of when life begins is a matter of deep uncertainty.

We know now that even the language of pro-choice is used to perpetuate a culture of shame around abortion, essentially saying as a legal matter we will “allow” women and others who become pregnant to make the choice to have an abortion while reserving the right to judge and shame them when they do so. It allows tolerance without solidarity ... and that is not a Christian value.

Even the language of our own vestry resolution, passed in 1989 and reaffirmed in 2004, where we “advocate responsible expressions of human sexuality in the context of love and commitment,” deserves revisiting.

While expressing the truth that all sexual and other relationships should be grounded in mutual love, the language of commitment has strong undertones of convictions that sex outside of marriage is wrong and shameful – a conviction that has always been assiduously applied to women and often conveniently ignored for men – and ignores our experience that the joy and holiness of sex is not restricted to committed relationships, often flourishes outside of them and can sometimes be abusive within them.

And finally, we remember that abortion didn’t become a central issue for the American church and the effort to ban it a multibillion dollar fundraising tool for right wing politicians, churches and organizations until 1979 when they seized upon it to elect Ronald Reagan in an attempt to achieve their real goal, which was to maintain legal racial segregation in schools.

And so, when the brief indicating the Supreme Court's imminent overturning of Roe v Wade leaked, my heart began to burn with anger at the injustice and abuse that is incompatible with love. And I wonder if you feel the same way. Can I get an Amen?

Yes. We are angry. We are hurting and we are tired. Because what is happening once again is the removal of boundaries and erection of barriers.

You see, there is a difference between a boundary and a barrier. Boundaries ensure safety. Barriers prevent access.

Healthy boundaries in relationship help us grow deeply in love with one another. Barriers keep us from one another in ways that exclude and demonize and shame.

Healthy boundaries allow everyone to have autonomy and power and for each of us fully to live out our creative potential. Barriers allow those with power to use it to prevent others from getting it.

Jesus maintained boundaries and tore down barriers. But the church has too often done the opposite and this imminent attack from the Supreme Court does the same. And American Christianity's continued not only complicity with but orchestration of the continued attack on women, trans and intersex people who need abortion and economically impoverished and people of color who do not have the money to breach barriers to abortion is a betrayal of the good news of the revolutionary Jesus with whom we strive to walk.

There can be no love without justice ... and the heart of justice is truth-telling. And to tell our truths, we have to name them, as much as we are able, in the clearest possible way.

Now with cancer, all I felt I could do with my anger is scream it into the void and shout my prayers to God. But when that brief leaked, we knew there was something else we could do. And so, we contacted our dear friend and partner, Juliana Serrano, at Planned Parenthood of Pasadena and San Gabriel Valley, which is on the front lines of this battle, and asked "what can we put on a banner that would most help for a church to say at this moment in time." And Juliana said immediately:

Abortion is healthcare.

That's it.

It's that simple.

And I thought and prayed, and we discussed with other leaders in the congregation and we realized quickly three things.

First, that the statement "Abortion is Healthcare" is a simple, important truth that destigmatizes abortion and moves it from the shaming category of necessary evil to where it belongs as an essential option for reproductive health and human autonomy.

Second, that people might need some resources to help parse this statement and deal with feelings stemming from their own personal experiences of abortion, including how to talk with children about abortion, so we have been preparing those.

And finally, that just as “prayerfully pro-choice” was a statement of courageous justice back in 1989, Abortion is Healthcare is a statement of Courageous Justice for such a time as this. And that is why you will see that banner on the lawn this morning.

There can be no love without justice ... and the heart of justice is truth-telling.

So, my first truth that sets my heart on fire this morning is Cancer sucks.

And my second truth that set my heart on fire this morning is:

Abortion is healthcare. And healthcare is a human right.

And then there is the third truth. And this is not a truth that I say with anger.

It is the truth that helps me endure my anger.

The truth that gives me hope in the midst of anger. I

t is the truth that after expressing my anger helps me beat my own swords into plowshares.

It is the truth of the psalmist when she sings “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” and “you spread a table before me in the presence of my enemies and my cup runs over.”

Because while bell hooks is right that “There can be no love without justice” ... and “the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be.” We also need to see the world the way we want to be, the way we trust it can be, the way God dreams it to be.

And so, the third truth this morning also comes from George ... and it sets my heart on fire not with anger but with hope. It sets my heart on fire not with rage but with love. And that truth is:

“Whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith you are welcome to come to Christ’s table.”

What was revolutionary about Jesus ... what we strive to be and become every time we gather and what we strive to take out into the world ... is a table where everyone has a place. That is Christ’s table of love.

And love absolutely has boundaries ... you may not come to this table and do violence to another. You may not come to this table and hate.

You may not come to this table and violate the autonomy of another or try to take away another's rights.

You may not come to this table and denigrate another's personhood or shame them in any way.

This is Christ's table of love ... and while Christ's love is not always or even often comfortable ... it is always safe and the only way you remove yourself from it is by making it unsafe for others. And even then, there is still a place waiting for you.

And there are no barriers to love. Love is for all. And love is for all of you. And anyone who is willing to try to walk the way of love is welcome here.

That's what Radical Inclusion is.

No barriers.

No power plays.

No in-groups for someone to decide if you are worthy to enter.

No us that if you say the right thing or look or act the right way you get a chance to join.

Just God's beloved community of love.

Everyone with an equal place at the table.

Everyone equally beloved.

Everyone equally embodying and respecting the other deep truth of this community

... that God dwells in you.

At least part of the infuriating injustice of cancer is that it takes people from us far too soon ... and yet this table reminds us that though the pain of separation is real so is the truth that love never dies ... that we are always connected by the greatest power in the universe. That when we say "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" George and Cam and all who have gone before are standing in our balcony singing with us.

At least part of the infuriating injustice of abortion bans is that they are nothing new. That they are the merely the latest barriers erected by white men in power who love talking about equality and justice for all ... just not enough to give up any real power for ourselves. Who shapeshift oppression of women from disenfranchisement to abortion bans the same way we do for black people from enslavement to mass incarceration.

And yet, this table reminds us that there is no barrier that cannot be removed by the power of love.

That every time we commit a sibling who has died of cancer or anything else to the earth, through our tears we still sing our song: Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

That if the state decides to build a 20 foot wall between a pregnant woman or trans man and the abortion health care they need, we will be there with a 21 foot ladder to go over it until our bulldozers can knock it down.

I lift up bell hooks one final time. She writes:

“Everywhere we learn that love is important, and yet we are bombarded by its failure....This bleak picture in no way alters the nature of our longing. We still hope that love will prevail. We still believe in love’s promise.”

That is why we are here. That is why we keep coming back again and again and again. Angry. In pain. Exhausted. Holding onto each other for dear life. Looking around at the world that is and infuriated at the injustice. And yet this bleak picture in no way alters the nature of our longing. We still hope that love will prevail. We still believe in love’s promise.

And so, we continue to gather and we will always continue to gather... in love. Holding boundaries and removing barriers. Speaking our truths clearly and listening to one another deeply.

Trusting that God’s radically inclusive love will not only touch us but transform us.

Trusting that God’s radically inclusive love is enough to hold and heal our anger and our pain.

Trusting that God’s radically inclusive love will help us be masters of ourselves that we may be servants of others. Take our lips and speak through them, our minds and think through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire, for Christ’s sake. Amen.