

Come Back! Come Out! Come On!
Sunday, February 19, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

That is our charge as All Saints Church for such a time as this.

It is a charge as ancient as the scriptures we read this morning.

It is a charge as familiar as the words of George Regas we say before every Eucharist.

It is a charge as fresh as the newest one of you to come through these doors or tune in online.

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

We are living in unprecedented times, that's what we keep hearing, right?

But, seriously ... when haven't we been?

John Lennon sang "Nobody told me there'd be days like these ... strange days indeed." But really, I think John just wasn't listening too well. Because all our mommas and our mommas mommas and our mommas mommas mommas and more have seen some mighty strange days.

It was strange days for Jesus and the disciples when they gathered on that mountaintop and Moses and Elijah appeared before them ... and instead of letting them stay in that place of nostalgia and safety, Jesus told them it's time to go back down that mountain and face the Romans and your own people who want to imprison and kill you.

Strange days indeed.

It was strange days for All Saints Church in the early 1970s when the nation was being torn apart as it is still by what Dr. King called the three evils of society – poverty, racism and militarism ... and George Regas took a stand up against the war in Viet Nam and a group formed in the congregation called "Save All Saints" and urged people not to give to the church in an effort to force him out as rector.

And yet now, we view our opposition to that war as one of the defining times in our congregation's history.

Strange days indeed.

And it is strange days for All Saints Church now. Hoo-boy.

It is strange days for All Saints Church now as we struggle with a call to become Christ's multiracial, multicultural, multilingual, multigender, multiracial-in-your-own-blank Beloved Community in a world that is more polarized and segregated than at any time since reconstruction.

Where the full implications of George Regas' call that all are welcome to an equal seat at Christ's table are becoming painfully evident to those of us who have had higher seats than others.

It is strange days for All Saints Church as the so-called Silent Generation (that thank God was never really that silent) that built so much of what we hold dear is gradually moving from pew to balcony in the communion of All Saints.

...as the Boomer generation that pushed and marched and fought for civil rights and gave so generously to support the work of All Saints Church is moving into retirement but certainly not irrelevance

... as Millennials and Gen Zers are bringing with them more financial insecurity and debt than any generation in our nation's history and yet if the church will allow them are also bringing new blood and new life into the church, challenging us to be not just a place but a community that walks with the revolutionary Jesus truly living out loud our values of RADICAL inclusion, COURAGEOUS Justice, JOYFUL spirituality and ETHICAL stewardship ... and if the church doesn't that's OK, they will go ahead and build their own.

...and if you notice that I didn't mention Gen Xers... that's OK. Nobody else mentions us either. We got any fellow Xers in the house? Y'all know what I'm talking about out. That's because we aren't the stars of the show. And that's OK, too. We are the midwives trying to help the transition happen. That's my job as your rector.

And, of course, It is strange days for All Saints Church as the pandemic has moved from crisis to chronic, leaving us unable to be the church we once were and yet in some cases both longing for that past for all that was good about it and unsure as always about what the future holds.

Strange days indeed.

Most peculiar, Momma.

And when the days get strange, the Holy Spirit clears her throat and the Church hears her call.

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

First, come back!

Now if you are an athlete, the definition of a mixed blessing is winning the comeback player of the year award. It means you have had a great year ... you have excelled beyond expectations ... and it also means that you have endured something really hard that you had to come back from.

Now, here's the thing about athletes when they come back ... they are never the same as they were before that injury or trial they had to endure. Sometimes they are worse. Sometimes they are better. They always are different. Because the trial is a teacher and age brings both new challenges and deeper wisdom.

And here's the thing about comebacks.

You actually have to come back.

Peter, James and John stood on that mountain and were happy just slipping into their PJs and watching Moses, Elijah and Jesus entertain and enlighten them with their conversations. They were happy to be spectators. But Jesus said, no ... we have to come back. We have to come back down that mountain and roll up our sleeves and get our skin back in the game.

All Saints Church ... it is time to come back.

Back to this community IN PERSON.

Now I know that some of you are unable because of either infirmity or distance to come back here in person ... and I have a good word for you in a moment. And for the rest of you who are already here and especially to those of you who are not it is time.

We have gotten into new habits. We are still tired and traumatized from the pandemic and so many changes and losses. Sometimes coming back seems too hard and streaming and zoom is almost as good. And yes, we are so grateful for these technologies and ... there is nothing that can replace being in the same place together.

Looking in each other's eyes.

Embracing each other and feeling that warmth.

Holding each other when we weep and leaning on each other's shoulders as we laugh.

All Saints Church, as you are able it is time to come back. Many of you have and you know what I'm talking about ... and it is time for all of us to come back. So if you are out there, get back in here. And if you are in here saying "What do you want from me ... it's 10 o'clock Sunday morning, the church is packed, and I'm sitting right here!" well we get to get out there and bring our friends and family and everyone we meet back. If there is someone you haven't seen for a while, give them a call and tell them it's time to come back to All Saints Church!

We gotta and we get to bring people back, bring people in who have never even been here before.

All Saints Church, say it loud ... it is time to come back!

And for those of you who are unable to get here physically for whatever reason, we need you to come back, too. And we will be working with you to find ways that this community can be more than just something you watch on Sunday morning. We will be creating new ways of connecting and acting and loving online and in communities where you are, and we need you to come back, too.

You see walking with the revolutionary Jesus is never a spectator sport.

Because as we come back, we are also going to come out.

Now All Saints Church has a long history of being a community where it was not only safe to come out but where it was celebrated to come out. Many of you have come out in this community not only as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer ... you have also come out as activists and artists, singers and dancers, theologians and prophets. You have come out as preachers and teachers, as counselors and caregivers.

Because coming out is discovering and becoming whatever and whoever you truly are. Coming out is claiming with pride and joy that we are more than what we can produce.

That we are more than the labels others might put on us.

That each one of us has a deep beauty that needs not just to be tolerated but celebrated. That each one of God's children ... that YOU ... deserve nothing less than to come out and come fully alive as the beautiful person God created and is still creating you to be!

All Saints Church, it is time to come back and it is time to come out.

It is time for us to be an artist's colony not just for an outwardly talented few but where every one of us can explore and become the artists, singers, dancers, actors, writers and more that God the creator creates us to be.

It is time for us to come out as fragile, grieving people who have tears we have been too afraid to shed in public for fear of being seen as weak. Come out in a community that follows Jesus' model of vulnerability as strength and love without judgment as the true golden rule.

It is time for us to come out not just as accepting the presence of those among us who are transgender but celebrating and embracing your leadership and lived expertise as people who know what it's like to become who you truly are for a church that is trying to become who we truly are.

It is time for us to come out as unashamedly who we are ... Black, Latino, AANHPI, native, and yes, European-American like me ... without the white supremacy that impoverishes us all.

All Saints Church, as we have done throughout our history, once again it is time to come back, and it is time to come out.

All Saints Church, say that loud:

It is time to come back!

It is time to come out!

And that means, finally it is time to say, "Come on."

Come on is one of those phrases that can mean opposite things.

It's like dusting.

When I dust a cake, I'm adding something to it, but when I dust my dresser, I'm removing something from it.

"Come on" can be objection or encouragement ... and it is time for both.

The first one, I know you know what I mean.

How many of you have looked at your phone first thing in the morning and seen the latest atrocity that happened while you were sleeping and your first reaction was

Oh ... come on!

Anybody? As Chase says, you don't have to raise your hands, just blink, I got you.

We say, "Come on!" when we see something that we just know shouldn't be.

We say, "Come on!" when we are tired of it all and we want it just to stop.

We say, "Come on!" when something deep in us will not let us be silent anymore.

"Come on!" is a prophetic cry and it is in our DNA as All Saints Church.

We see a nation where the color of our skin and our zip codes do more than any other factor to determine our education, economic fate and life expectancy and we say "Come on!"

We see our city spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on new helicopters and Shotspotter while our schools have to cut art and music and counseling programs and we say, "Come on!"

We look at a world that continues to deny climate change ... or perhaps even worse accept its reality but refuse to do anything about it and what do we say?

"Come on!"

We look at a government that takes not just reproductive rights but workplace rights, pay equity and rights to safety from women, trans and nonbinary people and we say,

"Come on!"

We live in a nation that sees gun ownership as a sacrament and education and health care as options and what do we say:

"Come on!"

Any church who is not saying "Come on!" Any church who is not being the voice of protest against all that is unjust and unloving is part of the problem and should disband right now and let someone else have their buildings who is willing to speak up, speak out and do the work.

And the good news is ... that is who we are as All Saints Church and that is who we have always been in the living memory of this congregation. And we can't rest on the laurels of the past ... and we are not. We have been and will continue to be a voice of "Come on!" in Pasadena, Los Angeles and throughout the national and global church.

But come on... doesn't stop there.

Because there is another type of "come on."

Come on is also a word of deep encouragement.

One of the many gifts the historic black church gives us is that sermons are co-created conversationally with the congregation. And so, if the preacher is saying something that is

resonating, something that is bold, something that needs encouragement and support ... people in the congregation step up and say:

Come on!

Because it is never enough just to object. The first step is identifying there is a problem ... and ...we get to be part of creating the solutions. And we never do that by ourselves. We do that in relationships of mutual love and encouragement that transcend boundaries of faith, race and politics.

Two weeks ago, a team of us visited Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago and pastor Otis Moss III, one of the great faith leaders and preachers in the nation today celebrated the possibilities of a partnership of mutual learning and encouragement with us and other progressive communities throughout the country by saying "if you are down with liberation, we are down with you."

"Come on!" is about finding partners in liberation for all God's children. About not just being concerned with surviving as a church in a difficult time for churches but growing movements of liberation that are the church's very reason for being.

And so, if we go down this path together not just with Trinity but with other amazing communities, we can look at the amazing work like what Trinity is doing with their community development corporation and welcoming new members into their community and speaking truth to power and using their iconography to tell a more complete story of the revolutionary Jesus, and we can say "Come on!" and encourage and be encouraged by them.

And those other communities can look at how we as All Saints are and are becoming even more a community where people of all genders and sexual orientations are not just welcomed but celebrated and where we are tackling head on the dehumanization of homelessness and lack of housing, where we are embodying joyful spirituality in new ways and they can say to us "Come on!" and encourage and be encouraged by us.

And just like come back and come out .. this is nothing new for us. We have wonderful historic partnerships with faith communities like Leo Baeck Temple and the Islamic Center of Southern California. With organizations like Union Station, Day One, Friends in Deed, Young and Healthy, Planned Parenthood and more.

We have new and growing partnerships with Rabbi Heather Miller and Keeping it Sacred and the Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney and her brilliant scholarship . And they are all ways for us together to spot where the Holy Spirit is moving and say "Come on!" ...and encourage and support each other to create beloved community not just in here but in the world down the mountain to which God sends us.

The best days of this Church are not a topic of history and nostalgia.

The most transformative days of this church are not something to be mourned at funerals for All Saints Church held at dinner tables of those who have left this community.

God is doing new things. Amazing things. Healing things. Challenging things. Transformational things right here, right now, through us and through you.

We walk with a revolutionary Jesus ... and he ain't lounging around in his PJs. He is headed down that mountain and we get to follow him, heal and be healed, change and be changed, love and be loved.

These are strange days, All Saints Church ... but what else is new. And when the days get strange, the Church suits up. And the call of Christ is always the same.

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

Say it with me

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

One more time ... let them hear us in Florida!

Come back!
Come out!
Come on!

Alleluia. Amen.