

Can We Just Take a Moment?
Sunday, June 20, 2021, 11:15 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

Can we just take a moment?

Sometimes we just need to take a moment ... and look around ... and realize where we are ... and remember where we have been.

So just take a moment and look around.

For those of us who are here in this space together, look around and see each other.

For those of us who are out on the lawn, look around and see each other.

For those of us who are watching online, you are a part of this ... you are a part of us, too. Know that you are a part of what is happening today, just as you have been a part of what has been happening throughout this ordeal. Whether you are participating online from here in LA or across the country or around the world, you are not some afterthought add-on to this All Saints community ... you are as much a part of this community as anyone else.

So, look around ... really ... look around and see each other.

You all look SO good.

It is SO good to see you.

It has been 67 weeks since we last gathered in this space.

Let that sink in for a moment. 67 weeks.

67 weeks ago, I stood at that door as we all left worship, and we laughed and were vaguely annoyed about not being able to hug or take wine at communion. About using hand sanitizer and making sure we didn't touch our faces. Do you remember that?

We had no idea what was in front of us. We had no idea that we would not even begin to be back in this space for 67 weeks.

We had no idea that within weeks, this church would be transformed into a refuge for those among us who had been turned out of homeless shelters because of the pandemic. That members of this community most of us had never met would call this place home and care for it and challenge and enrich All Saints Church in so many ways.

67 weeks ago, there was no such thing as a Congregational Response Team or a Community Care Team.

We had no idea that we would spend the next months making thousands upon thousands of phone calls. We didn't know what a Zoom meeting or a Discord server was. We had never uttered the words "You're muted!"

67 weeks ago, we didn't know we were going to have to learn to preach to a little green dot and sing to click tracks. We didn't know that drive-bys were about to become a good thing and that those grabby extender things were about to become more important than chalices and patens for spreading Christ's love.

67 weeks ago, we didn't know that we could have a youth minister work from Idaho and a finance chair from Indianapolis and a driving force of our new website team work from Chicago and our entire staff and congregational leadership work from home. We didn't know that cats jumping onto tables and children peeking into camera view and waving could add such joy to vestry and committee meetings.

We didn't know that beautiful images of God from as far away as Ethiopia and Brazil would be with us every Sunday as lectors ... and that Wilma Jakobsen in South Africa would suddenly not be as far away as we thought.

67 weeks ago, we didn't know what it was like to ache so much for a hug ... and that six feet apart could feel like an ocean away.

We didn't know how complicated the simplest question of "how are you doing?" was about to become.

67 weeks ago, we didn't know the fear of developing a cough or a fever ... or of dropping someone we loved off at the door of a hospital and having to wait outside hoping they would come out.

When we walked out of this church building 67 weeks ago and we said goodbye ... we had no idea that we were saying goodbye to so many of us for the last time. To staff who no longer work here ... and ... to dear friends and family who no longer walk this earth.

We had no idea that we were saying goodbye for the last time to voices who have thundered from this pulpit, sung sweetly from our choir, that we were touching for the last time hands who have gently prepared this table, hugging for the last time arms who have embraced us, seeing for the last time in person dear beloved images of God who have been our companions and leaders for years unto generations.

We had no idea that we would not only have to endure so much death ... but not be able to come together and remember and grieve.

And so, as we look around this morning, O my God, you all look so good, and my heart is swelling with joy and this is absolutely a day to celebrate ... and ... I know the empty spaces in the pews are not just about common sense risk reduction and continuing to prioritize the most vulnerable, they are about the deep losses that we have endured as a community.

We need to acknowledge that. We need to acknowledge *them*. So if you are able, can we please stand ... and can we just take a moment – wherever you are – and either aloud or silently in your heart say their names. Names of those you have lost – of those we have lost – since last we gathered in this space.

(Pause for names to be said)

This is a wonderful day, a day I know I have been looking forward to for more than 15 months. My heart is bursting with joy. I want to scream and I want to shout and I want to shake my fist at COVID and at death and scream You. Did. Not. Get. To. Win. This is Easter, and we are here ... and love has triumphed. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

And ... there has been a cost. And just as Good Friday and Easter changed who Jesus' followers were, this experience has changed and is changing us.

I have to imagine that first post-resurrection gathering of the disciples in the upper room was complicated. So deeply glad to be together again, so joyful of the glimpse of life on the other side of death that the women who had gone to the tomb had given the community. And yet anxious, afraid, and still in the trauma of all they had endured, all they had lost, all that had changed.

I have to believe that room was filled with so many things .. with anger, relief, shame, confusion, joy, grief, hope and so much more. And so, they did the only thing they knew how to do ... the one thing we have been unable to do for 67 weeks. They came together.

And then something happened. Jesus came among them ... not just once but twice. And when he did, the way he proved to the disciples it was really him was that he showed his wounds. He not only showed them, he invited Thomas to touch. "Put your finger in the holes of the nails," he said. "Here, put your hand in my side."

Jesus and his friends had all been through a terrible ordeal ... and it wasn't over. And he knew that the only way they were going to get through it was not pretending it didn't happen and somehow trying to go back to normal, whatever that was ... but to show and share their woundedness not as weakness but as their greatest strength. To rededicate themselves to what Jesus had taught them ... that love lived out in community is the most powerful force for healing and justice in the universe ... and that whoever you are, wherever you are and wherever you find yourself on your journey of faith, you are welcome to offer your whole self at the table and receive sustenance, healing and love without bounds in return.

This was nothing new. It's what we hear in this morning's Gospel. A crowd of people come together around Jesus ... and they weren't pretending to be just fine. The Gospel says: "Great crowds came to him, bringing with them disabled, blind, and mute people, and people missing body parts along with many others."

And what happened? As they gathered in community with Christ at the center, showed and shared their wounds, Jesus "healed them so that the crowd was amazed when they saw mute people speaking, people missing body parts made whole, disabled people walking, and blind people seeing."

And when they needed something to eat, there was enough for everyone, for the Gospel says, "And all of them ate and were filled." But the reading doesn't stop there, we read that "they took up the abundance of fragments, seven baskets full."

That's sign and sacrament, too. It's not just about healing all the broken pieces of us ... it's about knowing that all of our broken pieces are gathered up and loved – that being healed and whole, if we ever truly get there, is never a prerequisite for love. The feeding of the four thousand is a tale of all of us ... of us showing and sharing our wounds, and about all the broken pieces of us – our broken bodies, our broken spirits, our broken hearts – being gathered up and cradled in love.

That what the world calls damaged, Christ calls blessed.

That what the world calls broken, Christ calls beloved.

That who the world discards, Christ welcomes.

That who the world shames, Christ exalts.

That who the world wounds, Christ heals.

I am convinced that is what Jesus' friends remembered as Jesus came among them and invited Thomas to place his finger in the holes of the nails and his hand in Jesus' side. That they were a beloved community of healing and ain't nothing was gonna take that away.

And as they spread this Good News of the resurrected Christ, they realized as we did during this pandemic that in this life we are all caught in the same storm and ... we are in very different boats, some incredibly strong and seaworthy and some just about to come apart. And what you do to boats in a storm to make sure everyone makes it through is you tie them together. And that is what we have tried to do throughout this pandemic. To look for the boats among us, those among us who were most vulnerable and made sure we were tied together so no one was left to face the storm alone.

Yes, that is about Safe Haven, but not just Safe Haven. Even the most economically secure among us have in the last 67 weeks been in boats that have felt like they were about to break apart in this storm ... I know I have been ... and we have tried, albeit incredibly imperfectly, to make sure that no boat is left on their own. To tie us all together.

Jesus' friends realized that, and that's why as they began to consider what it meant for them to be church, as they came together in the first gatherings that were the midwives for the very different church we have become 2,000 years later here is what they did in this morning's reading from Acts:

"All who believed were as one and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Daily they continued with the same purpose in the temple; they broke bread at home and ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. They praised God and had the gratitude of all the people."

Throughout the centuries, the church has become a very different community than this. We have too much become co-opted by the empire that killed Christ out of the fear of the transformative power of this very kind of love. We permit some among us to be homeless, encourage hiding our wounds in shame, hold back our gifts in fear there will not be enough, and equate success with those ABC's of empire ... attendance, buildings and cash.

And ... this is a moment when we can make different choices. In some ways we are the same All Saints we have always been, and in other ways, we are a different All Saints Church than we were 67 weeks ago. And so as eager as we are to return to this space and to return to the comfort of the way things were in hopes that we can put the trauma of the past 15 months behind us ... I am going to ask us once again:
Can we just take a moment?

Sometimes we just need to take a moment - and probably more than just a moment -
... and look around ... and realize where we are ... and remember where we have been.

Can we just take a moment ... and probably more than a moment ... and answer the invitation Rabbi Sharon Brous offered to us earlier this month to consider "what is the new world that we are called to imagine together?" To accept the gift she gave us from the wisdom of her tradition that birthed our tradition when she said:

"First, let us grieve. Let us become the storytellers of our generation. Let us create the most generative, the most creative, the most imaginative forms of public grieving and ritual. Let us read and write and weep together for all that we have lost.

"And then let us practice telling the truth. Be more honest than we are used to being. Be willing to get uncomfortable.

“And finally let us dream audaciously about what the next chapter will look like, stretch our imagination, trusting that this moment, our time, that this is an inflexion point, a once in a generation opportunity for transformation.”

It has been the honor of my life to be your rector for these last 67 weeks. It has been the honor of my life to be a part of what we have done and are continuing to do together ... both our incredible staff and all of you not just in this place but literally across the country and around the world. I know that I have never loved and missed a community more than I have loved and missed you and that I have never been more grateful to be anywhere as I am to be at All Saints Church.

You all look SO good.

It is SO good to see you.

My heart is bursting with joy seeing who is here.
My heart is breaking with grief knowing who is not.

And I don't think I'm alone in that.

So let's just take a moment ... and maybe more than a moment ... and breathe. And rejoice. And rage. And sleep. And grieve. And speak the truth. And hope.

Let's just take a moment ... and maybe more than a moment ... and look around... and realize where we are ... and remember where we have been. And dream audaciously of where we will go together. Amen.