

Let's Not Keep God Waiting

Jesus inspired people. He reminded everyone that each one of us is God's beloved. He awakened all who would listen to the reality that the Kingdom of God is NOW – that God is fully present in this... and in every moment. Jesus called people to follow, but not on their own. He sent out his disciples two by two. He insisted on truth – no substitutes. He stretched people's minds and opened their hearts that all might receive God's call... to love everyone – no exceptions! And by his own restless and unrelenting hunger for justice, he stirred his followers to receive the Holy Spirit with such courage and boldness that they would turn the world upside down. (Acts 17:6)

But Jesus did not start church. His disciples did. They knew that if they wanted to be faithful followers, they would need community. They would have to hold each other accountable. They recognized that if they were going to awaken humanity to the glory of God, the gift of creation, and the portal to the eternal that each moment offers, they would need to confess, become vulnerable, and show one another the forgiveness and encouragement that God offers each one of us.

Our calling, as Church, is to be all of this and more. While Jesus didn't start the church, if the church is to be faithful, it must follow Jesus.

This morning, we've done just that.

[possible other brief comments if the vote]

In a time when the world is falling apart, Jesus is calling us to come together.

In a time of suspicion, manipulation, corruption, and lies, Jesus is calling us to trust his witness - what his life and teachings have taught us. And he is calling us to **TRUST one another** – to bind ourselves together in covenant so that we can wield our collective witness and repair the injustices of the world.

The forces we are up against are enormous. Their quest for power knows no limit. It is nothing to them...

- to disregard the cries of the poor,
- to separate children from their parents,
- to instill fear in of every person of color,
- to deny the rights and freedoms of GLBTQ citizens; and
- to reverse Genesis as they destroy God's creation in order to line their pockets.

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But we can learn from the courageous saints who came before us.

In 1962 Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. Four years later, while visiting South Africa, Robert F. Kennedy delivered one of history's most inspiring speeches.¹ In it, he quotes the proverb, "**May you live in interesting times.**" Looking into the desperate eyes of his African audience, Robert Kennedy declares that before them lies enormous opportunity. It was an unexpected yet truly inspiring message – one that shaped the determination of the students in Capetown over the next 23 years until Mandela was freed.

Our generation has been given a similar opportunity. Truth itself is on the scaffold² and all of creation is now in dire straits. Robert Kennedy was right – our generation has been given the greatest opportunity in history to make a difference – **to bend the moral arch of universe towards justice.**

Facing the horror of the Nazi rise to power, in 1938 Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel offered a courageous reflection to a group of Quaker leaders in Frankfurt, Germany. What Heschel had to say about his own times applies just as well to our situation today.³

There has never been more reason for [humanity] to be ashamed than now. We have bartered holiness for convenience, loyalty for success, love for power, wisdom for information, tradition for fashion. Let the blasphemy of our time not become an eternal scandal. Let future generations not loathe us for having failed to preserve what prophets and saints, martyrs and scholars have created in thousands of years. God is waiting for us to redeem the world. ///

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God is calling each and every one of us – as individuals, as congregations, and as the body of Christ – **to embrace a defiant hope.** God makes defiant hope available to anyone willing to reject all illusions, look reality in the face and **engage the redemptive work to which each of us is called.**

This is not a call to be caretakers of diminishing institutions. It's a call to leverage our

¹ <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Day-of-Affirmation-Address-as-delivered.aspx>

² James Russell Lowell

³ Quoted in Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World*, pp. 51-52.

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influence and use all of our assets – including the influence of our church in our community and in the Commonwealth – to stand up for justice; to protect the vulnerable; and to restore God's great gift of creation. ///

Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for engaging the opportunities that my colleagues and I have sought to make available to you over the past twelve years. Thank you for making Super Saturday a trademark of the Massachusetts Conference! Thank you for undertaking racial justice training as an essential step towards justice. Thank you for being vulnerable enough to bear the wounds of your congregation and for being alert enough to seek the guidance of your Conference staff. Thank you for the times you've called a halt to the status quo – and for courageously seeking a new way to be church together. Thank you for all the times you've praised your pastor, or your church moderator, or one of my Conference staff colleagues – never forget that we're in this world to make each other better. And thank you for extending to me and to my staff and Board colleagues your confidence and trust.

Now I want to ask you to lift up your blessing hands. And as you do, I want to assure you **that you are in good hands**. Look around.... God has called you to be the church ... in this time... in this place... facing the enormous challenges now before our nation and our generation. Know that you are in good hands. Your pastors, your congregation's leaders, the staff and Board of this Conference along with the Connecticut and Rhode Island conferences, and the national staff of the United Church of Christ.... All have been called by God as leaders in this time... in this place... to face the challenges in our nation and our world.

Look around. Extend your blessing to one another. And let your heart be filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have been called by God in such a time as this. Let us serve faithfully. Let us give each other courage. Let us be awash in gratitude for the gift of creation. And let us witness to the world the undying, defiant hope that inhabits our hearts. Amen.

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