

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC
July 1, 2018

**“Healing What is
Bound, Buried, and Broken”**

“Daughter, your faith has made you well.
Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”
Mark 5:34

Prelude:

(There is a considerable amount of material I'd like to cover this morning - an overarching theme, or question I've been wrestling with, is how best can we, as Christians, celebrate the holiday this week, the 4th of July, given the zeal and pride typically associated with our nation's birthday?)

On the cover of our bulletin this morning is the image of a Sankofa, an African symbol - a mythical bird, full of significance.

Look closely:

you can see the bird is carrying an egg,
seed of the future yet to unfold;

look closely:

you can see the feet firmly
planted forward, making advance;
but note also, the body is turned,
the head is curiously looking backwards.

Sankofa is variously translated -
“return to the past to make the future”
(Donald Shriver, *Honest Patriots*, p. 189).

Sankofa – **“return ... go back ... look, seek, take what is worth taking”** (Berea College website, “The Power of Sankofa: Know History”).

Sankofa - a literal translation (so I’ve read) –
**“it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk
of being left behind.”**

The 4th of July is looming on the horizon,
so the city is ablaze with flags and
poised for fireworks,
celebrating with rockets and red glare
the birth of the nation.

In the summer of 1776 – 242 years ago –
the Continental Congress adopted
a colonial resolution
from a committee of five; Thomas Jefferson
took the lead in composing the
Declaration of Independence –
the first, and one of the foremost, documents
signaling birth of our nation.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident,
that all men are created equal, that they
are endowed by their Creator with certain
unalienable rights, that among these are
life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
That, to secure these rights, governments
are instituted among men, deriving their
just powers from the consent of the governed.
That, whenever any form of government
becomes destructive of these ends, it is the
right of the people to alter or to abolish it,
and to institute new government, laying
its foundation on such principles,
and organizing its powers in such form,
as to them shall seem most likely to effect
their safety and happiness.*

This morning I want to make an appeal –
that we celebrate cautiously, wisely,
tempering our love of land and country,
with Christian conviction,
and with love of God,
and the new covenant brokered by Jesus.
This morning I plead that we not presume
America is – or ever has been –
the best, the greatest, the most favored
among many nations of the world.

There is great peril in idolizing the nation
that often captures the heart of its people,
and I would have us spared the tragic
consequences that often come from such zeal.

As practicing Christians, it is ingrained in
our faith that we “**return to the past to make
the future.**” As citizens in the commonwealth
of God, we want to “**fetch**” what is **at risk** of
being left behind, that we might advance
where Jesus leads. We would hope to do so
in ways that uphold and affirm what is excellent
and best in both our religious and our civic virtues.

First, let’s return to the scripture reading,
for there are lessons worth fetching there.

In the 5th chapter of Mark, Jesus is on tour,
going to and fro we might say, criss-crossing
his favorite northern lake – in this case the
Sea of Galilee. He has had quite a time of it,
really, teaching, preaching, through all sorts
of challenges, and mingling with all sorts of
people. The wind has taken him to the east,
and in our reading this morning – the wind

returned him to the west shore.

This is home for Jesus, it is familiar landscape.
He is among his own, we might say.
A great crowd is clustered around, and from
out of the crowd comes a rabbi, Jairus by name,
who is clearly panic stricken.

“My little daughter,” Jairus pleads,
**“is at the point of death. Come, lay your hand on her,
so that she may be made well and live”** (Mark 5:23) .
Mark doesn't mince words, he simply notes:
Jesus went with him.

An observation – this is an emergency.
A bona fide crisis.
This is 9-1-1 legitimate.
Action is required, post haste.
There is a little child,
priceless and precious,
under threat of death,
with an alarmed parent,
who has no recourse
other than appeal to Jesus,
and the power of his grace.

So off they go.

On the way, though, the crisis is interrupted
(This is what intrigues me about this passage from
Mark – the laying of two very different encounters).
A crowd has followed along, and within the crowd,
there is a woman. She isn't in a crisis; she is caste
in a chronic condition, afflicted with bleeding that
defies any ancient remedy. She is living in a state of
daily depression. Mark tells us **“she had suffered
much under many physicians.”**

This is complicated suffering.

This is not simply having a malfunctioning body that is a burden. She also suffers from having no support, no understanding, no sympathy. If the medical system failed her, so also has a social system abandoned her.

This had gone on for years –
she was “**unclean, unclean**” –
day after day, month after month,
year after year. She is not just sick.
She is sick of being sick.
Which means she is desperate.

Jesus then draws near,
and her mind goes to work.

**“If I but touch the hem of his garment,
I will be made well.”**

She transgresses, this woman,
sick of being sick.
She commits an indiscretion,
she breaks a rule enforcing social boundaries.
Yet she does reach. And touch. And she is healed.

Note – verse 29 – **“she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.”** Sweet relief.
No more sick of being sick.

This strange interlude to the crisis
of the rabbi’s daughter
being at the point of death,
isn’t over.

Who touched me?, Jesus asks.
And the woman steps up. Makes a confession.
In fear and trembling, we read she told Jesus
“the whole truth.” Imagine that. Telling Jesus
the whole truth and nothing but truth.

Jesus responds: **“Your trust has cured you.
Go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”**

This is a remarkable statement.
It suggests there is
 a healing to consider
 beyond the healing;
there is a cure beyond the miracle,
a wellness beyond cure.

The bleeding stopped in v. 29.
The woman is no longer sick of being sick
 right then and there.
But the wellness, the wholeness of the woman,
doesn't come until Jesus provides clarification,
commending her trust, and bids her go in peace,
free of all that afflicted her. This is a healing that
is more than cure; it is healing of body, mind,
and spirit, a healing of much that has been
bound, buried, and broken.

The crisis still looms. The little girl, Jairus'
daughter, is near death. Not only near death.
Word is received. She died.
She's gone. Help is too late. Jesus, though,
sees more than the eye can see. Jesus persists.
He continues on, through unbelief,
through laughter and scorn,
to get to the child a community seemed
 content to bury.
“Little girl, get up!” “Talitha cum.”
Up she got. Raised. And Jesus instructs,
“give her something to eat.”

Lot going on in this lesson. We look back to fetch
what is at risk of being left behind,
for what we need now,
to advance into the future.

Jesus, we see, is a healer, a liberator,
whose presence is power to raise
a child others are ready to bury,
to alter chronic conditions in which others
suffer in a poverty of sympathy.

We - in the church -
equipped with faith and trust,
gifted with love like that of Jesus,
are called to be a reservoir of hope,
healing what is
bound, buried, and broken
in our time.

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Permit three thoughts that pertain to our
Christian calling (healers), and our role in
serving as citizens in a land celebrating its birth.

We are a nation at risk of forsaking our ideals;
And we are a nation in need of healing,
a healing of much that is bound, buried and broken.
The scales have tipped, outweighed with
anger and fear and contempt,
insufficiently balanced by faith and trust.

“Civility is on life support,”
presidential historian Jon Meacham
observed earlier this week. He meant, of course,
that public discourse has become coarse;
crude; outlandishly impolite.

If we as a people are blessed with **“better angels,”**
as Lincoln suggested, we are also capable of
being brutish, of spawning “know-nothing”
miscreants who bring misery into the world.
We - in the church - need resist being
accomplices to the misery that already abounds.

An appeal – let us resist the temptation
to use anger as an excuse for bad behavior.
Jesus literally sought to diffuse our
capacity to retaliate when aggrieved,
by teaching: **“Turn the other cheek.”**
Do not engage **“hate for hate.”**
Do not respond **“in kind”** with threats and taunts,
physical actions.

Pray another way. We have to overcome what is instinctual,
with what is religiously acquired,
with what is spiritually maintained
with love’s discipline.

It was Emerson who once said:
**“Your goodness must have some
edge to it, else it be none.”** This is part of
our creative challenge – to find our edge
and work it well, to help right what has become
so twisted in our nation’s life.

Edmond Burke:
**“To make us love our country,
our country ought to be lovely.”**

And our country is lovely
when it is good.
Our country is lovely
when it is just,
and generous,
and merciful,
and kind,
seeing good in the heart of others,
different though others may be.

In my library this week I came across a book by Donald Shriver, Jr., written shortly after the second war in Iraq commenced (2003) - code named Operation Iraqi Freedom - entitled: "Honest Patriots - Loving a Country Enough to Remember its Misdeeds." It was Shriver who inspired use of the Sankofa image on our bulletin, reminding us of our need to fetch from the past lessons that portend wellbeing in the future.

If we can't remember and learn from our misdeeds, we will never learn a thing

It was Bonhoeffer - who loved his country enough to suffer (martyrdom) in opposition to its Nazi worst - who wrote from prison:

**"gratitude makes my past fertile
for my future."**

Yet gratitude was conditioned by contrition.

"In gratitude and contrition my present life
and my past are united."

Which is another way to say:

Be thankful for the capacity to change (repent);
to repair.

**The greatness of America,
Alexis de Tocqueville observed,
lies not in being more enlightened
than any other nation,
but rather in her ability
to repair her faults.**

Without acknowledgement of any fault -
(which is the flaw of "make America great again")
contrition is denied, gratitude squandered,
and the nation betrays its most noble creed.

So bury my heart at Wounded Knee.
I won't forget.

Break my heart at all war memorials
that christen the lost and maimed as heroes,
without acknowledging the folly and madness of
war's scourge.

Let me weep - in shame - at the lynchings
orchestrated by white rage - home grown
terrorism - making sport
of a people whose crime was daring believe what
Jefferson wrote in the summer of 1776:
That all men are created equal.

Let us weep -
for the children and teachers of Sandy Hook,
for the saints of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, SC,
for the young adults of the Pulse Nightclub,
and the teens and teachers of
Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS, Parkland, Florida.

Let us kneel for the nation blind to its
imperfections, that wants blessing and favor
without being a model of Christian charity
(John Winthrop).

I'm grateful to live in this land of such
great promise. But I'm also quite contrite
over its birth defects.

Memory - is an ethical act according to Susan Sontag.

Memory - "achingly" is our connection to the dead.
To forget is betrayal is it not? So, we fear not to speak
of our dead, in doing so we honor them. "**Heartlessness
and amnesia seem to go together,**" so Sontag once
wrote (*Regard the Pain of Others*, p. 115).

This gets dicey though. Never forget, we sometimes say.
Yet too much remembering embitters. Remembering

grievances nurtures hate of anyone, any people, who don't fit what tapes play of our past.

Memory for the Christian is
 "dangerous" (Johann Baptist Metz,
 Roman Catholic).

We vow to remember the life,
 Death, and promise of Jesus Christ.
 We remember the liberty he instills,
 the suffering he embraced, the people for whom
 he died, that they might have life abundantly in his love.
 And we remember:
 he didn't die for a race, or for nation, for a class,
 or for a creed. He died for the world,
 that the world might know his peace, his love,
 his reconciling power to save and heal.
 So may we honor the memory with what time is ours.

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We aspire to a love that is greater than loyalty;
 Edith Cavell, a British nurse serving in Belgium
 during WWI, when Belgium was under German
 occupation.

A Cavel memorial sits on a corner of Trafalgar Square in
 London. Four squared granite pillar topped a cross, over
 a Madonna and Child; inscribed on the sides of the pillar are these
 words: **fortitude, devotion, sacrifice, and humanity.**
 Edith is there in figure form - "**humanity**" written over her
 head, and under her feet, a quote, recorded the night before
 her execution.

As a nurse in Belguim,
 Edith was an indiscriminate nurse,
 who served whoever came into her ward.
 She tended to Allied soldiers,
 she tended to German soldiers.
 The edge of her goodness was viewed

with German disfavor. A German court judged her a criminal guilty of treason, and for that crime against the state, she was executed.

**Standing as I do in view of God and eternity,
I realize that patriotism is not enough.
I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone**
(Edith Louisa Cavell, October 11, 1915).

We are not all there yet, having grasped what Edith Cavell grasped, that our love of God and neighbor would have us harbor no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.

But that's the prayer we are wise to pray. That's the trajectory we are wise to follow.

The 4th of July is soon upon us. Watch out for the fireworks! Let us celebrate the birth of our nation. And let us fetch what good lies bound, buried, and broken, that we may do our part to advance a land and people pleasing and acceptable in God's sight.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*