

And then they came for me
March 26, 2017

Readings:

The first reading this morning is from the book of Matthew Chapter 25 Verses 34 to 40. I am reading the King James Version (since I like the poetry) from the church's bible printed in 1858.

³⁴ Then shall the King (speaking of Jesus) say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

³⁵ For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

³⁶ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

³⁷ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

³⁸ When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

³⁹ Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

⁴⁰ And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The second reading was written in Germany by Reverend Martin Niemöller. Reverend Niemöller was a supporter of Adolf Hitler until Hitler started arresting Lutheran clergy. When he protested, he was arrested and put in a German Concentration Camp in 1937. He was released by the American Army in 1945.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me –
And there was no one left to speak for me.

Sermon:

We are now at a time when our American freedoms are under threat in a dozen different ways. And we are all directly affected.

They are attacking Muslims – and we have Muslims in our congregation.

They are attacking LGB people – and we have gay men, lesbian women, and those of both genders who do not identify in either of the binary roles in our congregation.

They are attacking Transgender people – and we have people who do not identify with their biological identity in our congregation.

They are attacking Obamacare, Medicare, and Medicaid – and we have people who depend on those insurances in our congregation.

They are attacking women – eliminating funding for Planned Parenthood, eliminating foreign aid to those organizations that even mention abortion. We have people in our congregation that need those services.

They are attacking global health by encouraging fossil fuels and also by reducing aid to poor nations.

They want to reduce voting access for people who won't vote their way.

They encourage brutality by the police and other citizens particularly against people of color

They want to build a bigger army to wage war.

So what do we do as a community of faith? We must stand strong together.

I want to start with the Essentials of Non-Violent Action written by Dr. King in 1963 in the Birmingham Jail and laid out by Dr Bradwell a few weeks ago from this pulpit. The first thing is Information Gathering – we need to find out the facts – what is really happening and what is false news. Then to make a Personal Commitment – we must be ready to go for the long haul and be prepared for suffering. The next step is Discussion/Negotiation - can we change their heart or change their mind. Finally we do Direct Action – standing up and applying moral pressure. And then we must encourage Reconciliation – reaching out to others rebuilding the bridges.

But there are so many issues. Where do we start?

Dr. William Barber II says we cannot pick and choose between the various problems. We must do them all. He says:

(We) might work with all people of goodwill to uphold the most sacred moral principles of our faith and constitutional values, which are:

1. Protecting and expanding voting rights and ending voter suppression and unconstitutional gerrymandering. We must also pursue women's rights, immigrant rights, LGBTQ rights, labor rights, religious freedom rights, all with a commitment to the fundamental principle of equal protection under the law.

And then:

2. Pro-labor, anti-poverty, anti-racist policies that build up economic democracy through employment, living wages, the alleviation of disparate unemployment, affordable housing, direct cash transfers and other support for all families struggling to get by; and by critiquing policies around warmongering that undermine our moral standing and ability to address domestic issues.

3. Equality in education by ensuring every child receives a high quality, well-funded, constitutionally diverse public education, as well as access to community colleges and universities and by securing equitable funding for minority colleges and universities;

He says:

4. Healthcare for all by expanding Medicaid in every state, ensuring access to Medicare and Social Security, moving decisively towards a universal, transparent, and equitable healthcare system, and by providing environmental protection and protecting women's health;

5. Fairness in the criminal justice system by addressing the continuing inequalities in the system for black, brown and poor white people and fighting the proliferation of guns;

We do not believe that these are left or right issues. They are right or wrong issues.

I believe that as a Beloved Community of Faith we have to stand up on all of these issues. We have to support each other as we go forward. Here in this church many people have taken the lead on various issues. We need to stand by them in support. I am not gay but I need to stand with those who are fighting for LGBT rights. I will not take leadership on bringing Refugees to Ithaca, but I will stand with those who are leading that challenge.

I will do the same on Women's rights, Veterans rights, Single Payer Health, Racial Justice, Reproductive Rights including a woman's right to end her pregnancy, and Energy Use. And most importantly I will stand with those who are advocating for issues that are not critical to me. In fact, I may disagree with their idea and think they are wrong. They may be using methods I don't approve, but I must not say, "Oh that is not my issue and walk away". I must as a member of this community stand up with all of us who are challenged. I will ensure that they are heard. If I do not, then just as Reverend Niemöller said, "No one will stand up for Me"

The UUA and the UUSC have called for a DECLARATION OF CONSCIENCE by its members. How many of you have seen this declaration on-line and signed it? I have.

It says:

At this extraordinary time in our nation's history, we are called to affirm our profound commitment to the fundamental principles of justice, equity and compassion, to truth and core values of American society.

In the face of looming threats to immigrants, Muslims, people of color, and the LGBTQ community and the rise of hate speech, harassment and hate crimes, we affirm our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

In opposition to any steps to undermine the right of every citizen to vote or to turn back advances in access to health care and reproductive rights, we affirm our commitment to justice and compassion in human relations.

And against actions to weaken or eliminate initiatives to address the threat of climate change – actions that would threaten not only our country but the entire planet – we affirm our unyielding commitment to protect the interdependent web of all existence.

We will oppose any and all unjust government actions to deport, register, discriminate, or despoil.

As people of conscience, we declare our commitment to translate our values into action as we stand on the side of love with the most vulnerable among us.

We welcome and invite all to join in this commitment for justice.

The time is now.

I invite all of you to sign this declaration after the service in the parlor at the Social Justice Table, and to make this declaration on-line as well. Let us all stand up together.

Our closing Hymn is number 108. Nancy and I sang this hymn at our wedding. The last verse honors our mentors.