

The Deeds of the Lord
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
June 21, 2015

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;
for God's steadfast love endures for ever.

² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those God redeemed from trouble

³ and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

²³ Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the mighty waters;

²⁴ they saw the deeds of the Lord,
God's wondrous works in the deep.

²⁵ For God commanded and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.

²⁶ They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their calamity;

²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunkards,
and were at their wits' end.

²⁸ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and God brought them out from their distress;

²⁹ God made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.

³⁰ Then they were glad because they had quiet,
and God brought them to their desired haven.

³¹ Let them thank the Lord for God's steadfast love,
for God's wonderful works to humankind.

³² Let them extol God in the congregation of the people,
and praise God in the assembly of the elders.

Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

In the four years since coming to you as your pastor, I have been changed profoundly through my weekly preparation to stand here before you, sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly and seismically. My regular encounters with God have broken me open, opening wider and wider to God's profound love and to God's call upon us to love in profound ways. God's profound love is one which, as I was taught many years ago by my own pastor, causes God to weep first when a child dies in a boating accident. And God's profound love knits together a community which steps forward, as I have seen you

do, to lift up in one prayer those we love who are living with, struggling with, suffering from mental illness and addiction.

And God's profound love causes me to name Susie, Ethel, Daniel, Sharonda, Cynthia, Myra, Clementa, Tywanza, and DePayne as my brothers and sisters in Charleston and to see with new eyes that these brothers and sisters are flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood because God has made us this way. We have been created from the same dust by the same hands and filled with the same Spirit. Infinitely smaller but no less indelible than our DNA is the same handprint of God, the same telltale stitch.

The woman who created many of my stoles makes one larger tapestry and then forms that into three separate stoles. She explains "The art in your stole is shared with two other clergy stoles, worn by clergy from other denominations & places. A reminder that the body of Christ is larger than our individual worshipping congregations. It takes the Spirit working through all parts of the church to make a whole. Just as we share in the art, we share in God's work and grace."¹ **God's** tapestry is endless and we, like these stoles, have been connected in the crafting of us. And in my ever-growing awareness of God's profound love, my awareness of my brothers and sisters grows and grows. I cannot distance myself from my family in pain because I now feel acutely the connection of family.

This morning's psalm was written for the family of Israelites. We read a selection from the psalm; what is omitted are three other calamities to go with the great storm faced by those who went down to the sea in ships. This Israelite family had been exiled and returned from exile and these four traumas emphasize the varieties of ways the people have suffered – hungry and thirsty in the desert, imprisoned, sick, thrown about in the ocean – and the many directions from which the threats come – from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Each accounting of terrible hardship is told in a similar way: a listing of the hardship, a turning point noted by the sentence "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and God brought them out from their distress," and ends with the instruction "Let them thank the Lord for God's steadfast love, for God's wonderful works to humankind." In today's reading, God saves them from the watery chaos of the deep, the mighty waters, which not so long ago were portrayed on maps with sea serpents and other varieties of unknown maleficence. The mighty waters represented a scary place. Our family is in the dark and dangerous deep.

Our brothers and sisters have ridden buses and shopped in stores and sat in movie theaters and, yes, even worshipped in churches but they were distrusted, were looked down upon, were threatened, were beaten, and, woe, even killed because of the section of the tapestry from which they were formed. But we do not say "then **they** cried to the Lord." As people of faith, these are **our** troubles. It is time **we**

¹ <http://www.clergystoles.ca/about-Jan-Laurie-clergy-stoles.htm>

cry out to the Lord as one voice. **We** are at our wits' end. As people of faith this calamity, truly this brutal tragedy of racism, which sometimes looks like ignorance and sometimes looks like murder and oftentimes looks like something in between, best dare not take away our courage any longer.

For all of the oversharing and endless complaining that Facebook seems to give audience to, it also makes space for great beauty and truth and painful, necessary honesty. A high school friend of Scott's shared this on Thursday: "Last night was like an event from the 1950s we read about in history class. Those people today in that SC church singing 'We Shall Overcome' shouldn't have to stand and sing that song anymore... But honestly, I don't think 'we shall overcome' anything, as long as WE don't speak up. Which is why I am, here in this very public forum...I have been belittled or shamed many times for trying to discuss ... racism in public. I have stepped back and kept mainly silent on [this] and many issues about hate, for fear of embarrassment, to try to keep the peace, or to avoid being attacked for too long."

She continues, "I, too, carry the blame for last night, by not speaking up and loudly every time I see or hear anything hateful- ... about people of any color, race, creed, or sexual persuasion ... I won't do it anymore. Because this monster killed nine innocent people on behalf of people like me, white women, whom he was 'protecting.' Someone taught this boy to hate. Someone gave him a gun. Someone told him to hate all African Americans, against every value and principle our nation is supposed to stand for. From now on, if you 'like' or repeat hateful speech, I will say something. I could easily unfriend you, but that would just make the bubble that you live in that much stronger. You should hear the criticism, and then you can unfriend me, if you don't like hearing the truth. I challenge my friends who are white or Christian or straight to stand up, as well, and declare that they won't tolerate it anymore, either. Share this or something similar and mean it. Don't let your family and friends spew hate any longer. Because this is the result. This is on all of us."²

My ordination vows are to pray for, serve, proclaim to, teach, and care for God's people. What I try to teach here are things I am learning for myself as well. There are things we can do together to heal this horrible, open wound which is racism but today I hope to teach around the things we can do as individuals. I grew up with tremendously bigoted grandparents and I will spend my life unlearning, or at the very least redirecting, the kneejerk thoughts which were early-embedded. I don't know what might have influenced you or what you can do differently. Maybe it will mean making eye contact with those who don't look like you instead of avoiding it. Maybe it will mean noticing a judgment or a stereotype as it passes through your head and then questioning it, correcting it.

² <https://www.facebook.com/pamtichy?fref=ts>

Maybe it will mean speaking up when an offensive joke is told. It is tempting to think that, if the butt of the joke is not represented in your company, it's safe to listen to, or even tell. But if we let those jokes be told, or those slurs be spoken, then our silence is assent and it affirms the less-ness of another instead of building up the equality. This takes courage. This takes heaps and heaps of courage in some settings. But if you would stand up for your mother, your father, your sister, your nephew, then you can stand up for Clementa and Tywanza and DePayne and so can I.

We must cry out to the Lord and so make room for God to bring us out from our distress. Lest you think we need to wait until then to praise God's steadfast love, note that we begin and end on it: God's steadfast love endures forever / Let them thank the Lord for God's steadfast love. It is, too, the unspoken but powerful current that carries through the psalm, through our lives. It is the current that flows through people and out of the mouths of family members who say "God forgives you and I forgive you."³ It is the current that flows through people and out of the mouths of people singing *We Shall Overcome*. And I hope by the Holy Spirit it is the current that flows through me and out of my mouth here in your hearing.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we are at our wits' end. Come bring our brothers and our sisters, our whole family out of distress, we pray. Amen.

³ <http://abcnews.go.com/US/dylann-roof-hears-victims-families-speak-1st-court/story?id=31896001> [Nadine Collier]