

Ordinary People

The outpouring we have seen these last weeks of ordinary people filling the streets, peacefully seeking change in how we organize our police, in how we organize our economy, in how we organize our communities, has stirred fear in some and tentative feelings of hope in others.

Fear comes up when folks like me, white men who have enjoyed a privileged place in our interactions with police, in our place in the economy, in our place in our community – are suddenly challenged not to **share** power, nor to allow others **in on** power, but to actually **give up** power; to release it, to let it go.

Not an easy thing.

And yet, doing exactly that is the price of our own salvation.

Funny how so many claim America as a “Christian” nation, all the while demanding the right to remain in control of its power politics, its vastly disproportionate wealth, its priorities geared toward those with too much already.

These demands of course fly directly in the face of all that Jesus commands us to do.

Today, as we complete the last Holy Season of the year, as the season of Easter, which gives way to the feast day of Pentecost, and then is consummated in celebration of the Mystery of the Trinity, today, we find ourselves back on the road with Jesus.

It’s the dusty road we know all too well.

It’s a road filled with regular folks, up against typical struggles, seeking a new world, that for all the world, seems merely to be a pipe dream, an illusion, a mirage.

Here we stand, today, as Jesus rounds up his closest followers.

We call them apostles.

From the Greek for "send forth" or "messenger."

We all have our Sunday school memories of these folks.

They have halos over their heads and we learned that in the end nearly all of them died for the faith, sometimes gruesomely, always bravely.

And yet, when we meet them today, the first thing you notice is that they're really ordinary people.

They are, in every sense of the word: "Everyman" and "Every Woman."

We don't have Peter the Rich or Andrew the handsome or Mary the politically connected.

They are just a bunch of working stiffs, ranging from ordinary fishermen to a rebel or two, to a hated tax collector, to an eventual traitor.

And what they're sent out to do is NOT to become some kind of magicians or witch doctors or exorcists.

They are sent out after having bathed in a relationship of compassion and mercy and gentleness with Jesus.

Jesus has introduced them to the true face of God.

The God who gives a child to 99 year old Sarah.

The God who laughs with us.

And so the apostles are sent out to bathe other folks in relationships of compassion and mercy and gentleness.

And laughter!

And when they do, why, miracles really do begin to happen!

People are healed because so much of our sickness is caused by alienation, fear and isolation.

Communities are restored when sharing becomes the by-word, rather than hoarding.

Relationships blossom when "I'm sorry" is met with: "all is forgiven, I love you!"

This is the mission Jesus sends the apostles on — and it's the mission he sends us on too!

Who are the apostles today?

I am!

You are!

And if we can summon the intestinal fortitude to live out our sacred calling, why, we find ourselves returning to our true selves.

We find ourselves returning to a people who long for the companionship of each another.

People who revel in the gifts shared by different races, creeds and colors.

Now, you may have wondered why it is that Jesus sends the apostles only to the Jewish people?

Why the order to stay away from the Samaritans and us, the gentiles?

It's not that he's got something against them.

It's that the whole point of the Jewish people is to reflect God's vision of what society can and should look like in the world.

The whole point of Israel is to reflect God's great love and care for the widow, the orphan, the stranger.

To create a society where no one and no group accumulates more than they need, and no one lacks basic needs.

Jesus reaches out to them first because they have a history with and words for and experience of a society based on compassion, mercy and kindness.

Even though they may have long ago forgotten, it's still there, bubbling up just beneath the surface, insisting to be heard.

Just so today, we Americans pride ourselves on being that shining city on the hill, an example to other nations that a people can be formed, not only of one blood or race or creed, but a people can be formed out of common hopes and dreams, no matter the blood, race or creed.

We, like the Jewish people, often fail.

And when we do, the response can be and often is, anger.

Anger that initially poured into our streets after Mr Floyd's murder.

Truth be told, "we all need a way to channel and reconcile our anger — with our faith.

Because anger, for communities under siege, is a spiritually healthy response to injustice.

It can contribute to spiritual restoration.

Just as fire can both destroy and heal, so it is with anger.

Anger invites us to wake up to the hypnotic influences of relentless oppression.

Allowing individuals and communities to shake off the shackles of denial, resignation, and attitudes of 'what's the use?'

Anger can create healthy boundaries.

Meaning, it's never been permissible, and hopefully will soon be illegal, for white police officers to stop a man for walking or driving or jogging, while black.

Indeed, truly righteous anger can translate communal despair into compassionate action, heroic truth telling and relentless justice-seeking.

Isn't that what's been on display these past several weeks?

Creative, community-based, collective anger is redirecting our attention away from humdrum issues, toward the healing of our community.

And there is this.

Far too often, the true mother of anger, is grief.

During a demonstration in Minneapolis, Minnesota, after the police shot an unarmed black man in 2016, Pastor Danny Givens publicly and peacefully challenged the Governor of Minnesota.

This was his lament to the governor:

'Your people keep killing my people.

You keep telling me that you're going to do something.

I just want you to put some action on it, put some respect on our people's names.

This isn't black anger,' he thundered,

'This is black **grief!**'

Pastor Givens wants the governor to understand that grief and anger are so very often inseparable.

And yet, there is something else unexpectedly mixed in with anger and grief.

Something that wells up from the deepest parts of the souls of our African American brothers and sisters.

It is joy.

Perhaps you've seen some of the too many funerals of people of color slain by the police, where, amazingly, shouts and songs of joy are common.

Not "joy" in the sense of happiness or feeling carefree.

But the profound, yes, mystical joy that erupts when a wounded community gathers in solidarity, celebrating its resistance and resilience, with dance and song, even against impossible odds.

The Word is preached with alleluias!

The community dances!

All in defiance of death, and the society that spews it." R.Rohr,
Meditations, modified.

The world that the first apostles encountered was, at bottom, no
different than our world.

Two worlds, in which worship of money, power and fame are the coin of
the realm.

Two worlds, where might, of course, makes right.

And into these worlds steps the God who creates all things.

The Word, who pitches his tent among us.

Born to an unwed teenage girl.

Born to show us what Life ought to be.

We are his apostles today.

We are the sent.

We are the messengers.

So go!

Live the Word!

Embrace the Word!

Be the Word!

+amen

