

“Going With God”

The Rev. Drew Willard,
UCC at The Villages, FL
October 28th, 2018
Harvest Sunday
Jeremiah 31:7-14
Mark 10:46-52

The LORD says:

*Celebrate and sing for Israel, the greatest of nations. Offer praises and shout,
“Come and rescue your people, LORD! Save what’s left of Israel.”*

Jeremiah 31:7

Let us pray... O God,
Save us from being anxious for security, or deceived by wealth wanting more,
or allowing lust to crowd of thinking, or pride to block our seeing.
Help us to bend and not break, give without counting the cost,
and to cultivate hearts that love anyway, no matter what...

Amen

A great innovation for how we conduct business
at the UCC FL Conference Annual Meeting, is the “Town Hall Meeting.

During our Town Hall Meeting this time,
One of my pastoral colleagues got up to speak and told about how
he was approached by someone who asked,
“Are Republicans welcome here?”

That is a real concern and perhaps, a real fear for some people –
that even though the United Church of Christ says that,
‘No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey,
you are welcome here’ – that this may not apply politically.

Please hear this:

Republicans are welcome here along with Democrats.

What is not welcome here is politics from the pulpit –
that is to say, urging people to vote for any particular party or candidate.
The reason for that is that the Word of God must not be used coercively –
the Law of Love demands mutuality, respect, and the freedom to choose.
However, the presentation of “issues” as moral and ethical concerns
is a different matter, and protected by law.

There is an obligation for preachers to speak up against injustice.

We know from current events there is widespread anger and frustration –
but also a great yearning for people to talk civilly and work together.
We are not there yet.

It is important to stay engaged with those with whom you disagree
with a willingness to listen and speak patiently,
without compromising yourself.

Willard, p.2

That goes for conservatives and progressives – don't compromise yourself,
but keep your heart open to examine your beliefs and be discerning.

Together, we must stand in direct opposition
to sado-masochism in whatever form it takes.

Sadism is fear-based and suppresses others who are perceived as a threat –
but will settle for the most vulnerable group to bully.

Masochism is also fear-based, where vulnerable people feel compelled
to surrender their freedom as a trade-off for security.

Sado-masochism, therefore, is a perfect marriage made in hell.
Love or rational loving-kindness, on the other hand, requires vulnerability
to be open for mutuality, respect, and the freedom to choose.

I fear we are living in such a time
that could see our most cherished values as Americans,
eroded by opportunists who wouldn't hesitate
to take advantage of fearful, angry people.

This may be new for most of us, but not so for minorities
who expect distrust and have to live defensively –
like immigrant farm-workers.

It has been important for us to maintain a connection
with the people of Calle de Milagros – the 'Street of Miracles'.
They could not send a speaker this year, but we do have a message
from Pastora Margarita Romo...

"Narsedalia lost her baby several days before she realized he was dead[.]

T]he week before she was told to bring her \$36.00 dollars to be seen[.]

S]he was high risk diabetes[. B]aby weighed 11 pounds[.]

[W]hy did they wait? Was it because she was Mexican?

Because[s]he could not speak English? because she was poor?

We went through over 24 hours of induced labor before [the] doc said[.,]

[E]nough['] and she was taken to surgery for c section[.]

[W]e prayed[.,] cried [.,] sang to Jesus[.]

Resurrection [H]ouse paid for burial[and] performed [the funeral] service[.]

His name is Mateo... Matthew...

[T]he part I wanted to talk about was last Saturday[.]

[W]e had a baby shower for 10 women[.]

[Narse] came to help me though she had just buried her child[.]

[T]hen she had to take a mom's place

because [the mother] was not there to play all the games[.,]

pick out clothes[-] and [Narse] never showed her pain[.]

[N]ow that's Jesus example"

Willard, p.3

The migrant community has a lot to teach us –

besides the fact that they need allies and resources.

They can teach us to be patient in the midst of powerlessness, hostility, disappointment, and tragedy.

They remind us that fortunes can change and balances of power shift and that the system can turn on its own,

like what happened in the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Great Recession just a decade ago.

John Steinbeck has given us an important lesson – and a warning, with his novel, Grapes of Wrath, which was brought to the movie screen by director John Ford.

If you are unfamiliar with the story,

it is about a family and close relatives who must leave their farm in OK because of famine and predatory financial practices.

They load themselves and what little they can take with them aboard an old truck and set out for CA to harvest the orchards – a job which we are told Americans wouldn't do these days.

Joining them is their son Tom,

who had returned from prison and was on parole for murder; and with him is Casy, an evangelist who had lost faith.

Eventually, they reach CA, but discover that locals despise them as 'Okie' refugees, and they are preyed upon by the large orchard owners with support from the police.

When these Okie immigrants strike for a livable wage

Casy is killed for organizing them and

Tom becomes a fugitive for striking back.

I want to show you a clip from that film as Tom says goodbye to his mother...

[Film clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8SDI7pAUo4>]

Here's the part of that dialogue that's had me thinking about all the violence that has been breaking out in supermarkets and synagogues, elementary schools and churches, high schools and college campuses, a VA hospital and military bases, city streets and suburban neighborhoods...

Ma: Tommy, you're not aimin' to kill nobody?

Tom: No, Ma, not that. That ain't it.

It's just, well as long as I'm an outlaw anyways...

maybe I can do somethin'... maybe I can just find out somethin', just scrounge around and maybe find out what it is that's wrong and see if they ain't somethin' that can be done about it.

I ain't thought it out all clear, Ma. I can't. I don't know enough.

Willard, p.4

I haven't 'thought it out all clear' myself,
but I believe that the problem is pervasive
and the responses must be comprehensive.
I believe we need to find out what's wrong
and see if there isn't something we can do about it.

Our Gospel lesson today is about a poor blind man
sitting beside the road.

His name is Bartimaeus which means the "Son of Honor" –
so he was somebody important, a proud man who lost his sight
and got kicked to the curb.

He is a metaphor for when people get blinded by their pride
and through suffering, gain insight.

Jesus healed him, saying.

"Go your way. Your faith has made you well."

But Bartimaeus – the Son of Honor, got up and began to follow
the Way of Jesus.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Jeremiah 31:7-14,
describes a hopeful vision for the people of Israel
who had been carried off into exile.
It is a metaphor for all who have been refugees, captives, or immigrants
seeking a safe place to be their home...*

7 The LORD says:

Celebrate and sing for Israel, the greatest of nations. Offer praises and shout,
“Come and rescue your people, LORD! Save what’s left of Israel.”

8 I, the LORD, will bring my people back from Babylonia
and everywhere else on earth.

The blind and the lame will be there.

Expectant mothers and women about to give birth
will come and be part of that great crowd.

9 They will weep and pray as I bring them home.

I will lead them to streams of water.

They will walk on a level road and not stumble.

I am a father to Israel, my favorite children.

10 Listen to me, you nations nearby or across the sea.

I scattered the people of Israel, but I will gather them again.

I will protect them like a shepherd guarding a flock;

11 I will rescue them from enemies who could overpower them.

12 My people will come to Mount Zion and celebrate;

their faces will glow because of my blessings.

I’ll give them grain, grapes, and olive oil, as well as sheep and cattle.

Israel will be prosperous and grow like a garden with plenty of water.

13 Young women and young men, together with the elderly,

will celebrate and dance,

because I will comfort them and turn their sorrow into happiness.

14 I will bless my people with more food than they need,

and the priests will enjoy the choice cuts of meat.

I, the LORD, have spoken.

Our Gospel lesson from Mark 10:46-52 provides a metaphor about a proud person, who had been blinded and reduced to poverty, who regains not only his sight, but insight as well...

46 And they came to Jericho; and as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimae'us, a blind beggar, the son of Timae'us, ['the Son of Honor'], was sitting by the roadside.

47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you."

50 And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus.

51 And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight."

52 And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

And immediately he received his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.