

Creating A Space For Love
Pastor Ben Heimach-Snipes
June 11th, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[\[d\]](#)

"I can't take it any more!" These were the surprising words that I heard on my first Sunday here at Morgan Park Presbyterian Church as your new pastor. This statement was surprising to me, first of all, because of who said it. It was not someone on the worship committee who has been working, creating and organizing worship here every week without a pastor since November. It wasn't someone from session who has had enough questions about the boiler, church finances or the pastoral nominating committee. It wasn't someone who always works hard to provide delicious food and hospitality to members and visitors without getting due credit or gratitude. These and many other official and unofficial leaders in the church are alive and well, somehow thriving in this very difficult time of transition. For this I am grateful.

"I can't take it any more!" is what I heard from the five year old young man who I sat down next to during the luncheon after church last week.

The comment is surprising also because of the context in which it was said. He did not say it out of protest of his brothers who rolled their eyes from across the table. He did not say it in response to the requests and commands of his father seated next to him. This young man said to me, "We watch the news a lot and I keep hearing about people being killed with guns and knives and other things." And in this context I asked him, "How do you feel about this violence?" he said, "I can't take it any more."

Surprising.

Surprising because it came up unprovoked. We had been talking about Sonic the hedge hog, an

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important topic in its own right. From this place of play and openness came something profoundly human and deeply painful that almost brought me to tears.

Surprising because it is true. And true for me as well. “I can't take it any more”: The lack of hope that leads our government, our communities and our children to choose death over the hope of reconciliation. In my first week with you at Morgan Park Presbyterian, I can't take it any more: The fear that infiltrates our hearts and minds when exposed to our context of violence, reshaping our actions and ways of being. Reshaping our hope in God's love for all into a hope that we might be able to at least love those we trust. Reshaping our communities from spaces that nurture life to places that promise death.

Without hope we are lost. So what does it mean to hope, anyway?

Hope is what empowered the disciples to go to the mountain in Galilee where Mary had said Jesus would meet them. Our New Testament scripture is the very next paragraph after the Easter scene unfolds in the book of Matthew. Out of the hope that they might see their teacher again, Jesus' disciples traveled to Galilee. They left their house in Jerusalem where they had been hiding in fear for their own lives and walked for several days out in the open - risking arrest - to get to Galilee, to get to Jesus.

Two weeks ago, my wife, Abbi and I hiked thirty-five miles of the Appalachian Trail through the Smoky Mountains. We hiked for a week and thirty-five miles was a huge triumph! There were many moments where we needed to find hope, especially during the last mile, always the longest mile, of the day!

Jesus disciples walked three times this distance and the scripture just says, “they went.” They went because they had hope.

It is surprising that among the eleven disciples that came to the mountain in Galilee, there were those who doubted. Matthew 28:17: “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”

It is surprising because of who said it. These were not Roman guards or passers-by. These were Jesus' hand picked disciples who had followed him during his life, who had witnessed his healing miracles, who had learned his teaching, who had been with him at the last supper. Among these disciples, some doubted.

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It is surprising because of the context. These disciples were not hiding in their houses, afraid for their own lives. These disciples had already risked their lives to travel to this special place in Galilee to find Jesus. And when Jesus arrives in living flesh after the miracle of Easter, the disciples worship him. And STILL some doubted.

This is surprising because this reaction to doubt in the presence of Jesus recorded in scripture happens to me too. When I hear the calling of God to go, risking everything, to follow Jesus, I too have gone and still doubted.

I knew being a pastor might be a strange life: finding community based on a belief and a tradition rather than a set of common interests; embodying a religion that has been used by empire to enslave many for the benefit of a few; meeting people in vulnerable places and being trusted to help people discern life choices that I too am struggling with.

I followed this path to ministry out of my own need to discern God's call in community, my need to listen for the Holy Spirit in the voices of my elders and journey together toward God's kingdom here on earth - creating a space for love.

And all the while that I have been working to learn how to be a pastor and meet the requirements to be a pastor in our Presbyterian Church USA, I have doubted. I have doubted how God works. I have doubted that I might be included in God's plan. I have doubted that God's grace could empower me to act for love. I have doubted that I could confront violence with God's love. I have doubted everything that I believe, and yet I went to worship God. I doubted, and yet you have accepted me.

It is in this place of doubt and vulnerability that Jesus commissions his disciples to bring the love and grace of God to all nations. Jesus entrusts his ministry to people who worshiped at his feet and still doubted. Jesus had hope in them. Jesus had hope that God would continue to work in the world through these broken people.

You have chosen me to be one of those broken people in ministry at Morgan Park Presbyterian Church. And when I doubt that we are big enough, strong enough, inspiring enough, loving enough to create a piece of God's kingdom - create a space for love in this community - I know that God has hope for us.

I don't believe that doubt is a sin, but I do believe that sin creates doubt. The sin of racism can

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make us feel powerless to change the oppression we see in our communities. The sin of economic exploitation that informs our institutions empowers a culture of fear and scarcity that can cause doubt that this church is even worth investing in. The sin of violence causes doubt that we can even survive meeting our neighbor, let alone loving them.

To break the cycle of sin, we need a power greater than ourselves. It is God's grace that can free us from our enslavement to sin. Grace allows us to look beyond the broken doubting creatures that we are to find our identity in God. Grace gives us freedom to fully live as God created us. Freedom to create a space for love.

David T. Shannon writes in his essay on African American preachers that "just as liberation is integral to the being and action of God, liberation is also integral to the thought and intention of God. Freedom was not an afterthought. God intended for humans to be free... Humans are to be in partnership with God and with each other.

In partnership with God and with each other, we are meant to be free. Our freedom is freedom from sin and systems of sin. Our freedom is found in the grace of God. We are free to create. Out of freedom, God created the heavens and the earth. Out of freedom, God creates us and calls us good.

Out of freedom, what will we create?

Create a space to love a child?

Create a space to love each other?

Create a space to love our neighbor?

Create a space to love a broken institution?

Let us create a space to love.

On this Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost, we remember our Triune God: Creator God, Redeemer God, and Sustainer God.

Our creator God creates the world anew each day and each day invites us to create with God in

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community. We are invited to create even though we doubt. We are invited to create even though we don't always believe we can create something good. We are invited to create even though we are broken. We are invited to create a space for love.

Our Redeemer God, Jesus, redeems us from sin through the power of grace. We are forgiven so that our sin cannot run our lives by making us feel unworthy of love, unworthy of doing good, unworthy of creating a life that brings joy. Through Grace, Jesus empowers us to think beyond the limited and sinful world we have inherited and toward the infinite and loving world that Jesus came to create. Jesus commissions us to this work of creating a space for love - creating a space for the Kingdom of God.

And with us now is our Sustainer God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells among us now. The Holy Spirit is the wind that rushed over the waters at creation. The Holy Spirit fills us with life with each breath we take. The Holy Spirit bubbles up in us when we discover a passion in life for love. The Holy Spirit dwells among us when we discern our actions together as a church community. The Holy Spirit reminds us that God is with us, even when we feel lost, broken and afraid.

It is surprising that God can be so many things. It is surprising that with God we have been called to create a space for love.

Amen