



December 13, 2020
Third Sunday of Advent

Introduction

Invitation

Prelude

Call to Worship:

We can make a difference! We can bring the joy that changes someone's life! We are called to care for all God's children. As we worship this morning, may we be uplifted and inspired to go into the world as God's ministers!

Lighting the Advent Wreath - Justice

Hymn: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Reading the Word: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Ministry of Music

Message: "What is Justice?"

Prayer:

Gracious God, we are mindful that, in this season when we anticipate the joy of Christmas, there are people for whom there is no joy. There are people who are grieving, afraid, lonely, or struggling just to make ends meet. Yet, you remind us that we can make a difference, to help bring justice to the oppressed and marginalized, and care for our brothers and sisters who are in need of your love and grace. May we be their companions on the journey, and thank you for loving all your children. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Star Child"

Blessing

A Vision of God in the Temple

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” And he said, “Go and say to this people:

‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.’

Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed.”

Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said:

“Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate.



**SERMON TRANSCRIPT
GIVEN BY
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson**

Message “What is Justice”

Rev. Dr. Debra Hanson

What is Justice? The phrase that came to my mind was “leveling the playing field,” so I decided to find a more specific definition. According to thefreedictionary.com: “If you say that you want to level the playing field, you mean that you want to make a situation fair by ensuring that nobody has an advantage over other people.”

Justice means finding ways to “level the playing field” so everyone is treated fairly. I suspect we all have had times when we were pleased to see justice in action. Today’s scripture from Isaiah 61 reminds the people of Israel that God seeks justice, not just for them, but for everyone.

When Jesus began his ministry, he was tempted in the wilderness, and then he returned to his home town of Nazareth. One Sabbath, he went to the synagogue and read these passages from the Torah which was on a scroll. At the end of the reading he rolled up the scroll. Imagine how proud all the town’s people were that Jesus had been so eloquent. He was, after all, one of their own, the son of Joseph and Mary. But then, Jesus spoke, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4) The people were outraged at such blasphemy at claiming he was the fulfillment of the prophecy, and they tried to throw him off a cliff.

Jesus’ life and ministry were focused on leveling the playing field, finding justice for the poor and outcasts, the sick and lame, the rejected and marginalized. Isaiah’s message to the people of Israel who had returned to their homeland was one of the promise of God and a commission to care for others, to level the playing field, to be part of spreading the word of God’s justice, hope, and love. They were to carry on the work of God in making the world a just world where all were valued, honored, respected, and nurtured.

That is the call to the Church even today. We see so many who are in need, so many who are marginalized, ignored and rejected by society. Where is their hope? How do we as followers of Jesus live to help level the playing field? We want to help, but we feel so overwhelmed when we recognize how much there is to do that we often get stuck in the wondering and not moving forward to the action. We may think that we just don’t have enough resources to make a difference to others, that our efforts would just be too small.

There is a story about a man who used to go to the ocean for exercise. One day, the man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he came upon a boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. The boy paused, looked up, and replied “Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can’t return to the sea by themselves,” the boy replied. “When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water.”

The man replied, “But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I’m afraid you won’t really be able to make much of a difference.” The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, “It made a difference to that one!” (adapted from The Star Thrower, by Loren Eiseley (1907 - 1977), found at <https://positivelifebalance.com/blog/star-fish-beach/>).

We can make a difference in someone’s life through our actions and in our caring. Like Isaiah, God has anointed/commissioned us to bring Good News to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners, to comfort those who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2) In our communities, our nation, and our world, we have opportunities to level the playing field through our support of programs and projects that are in place to help others. All of us can participate in whatever way possible to help others, not just this time of year, but all year long.

Here at First United Methodist Church, Portsmouth, we have focused on “Share the Joy” this Advent season. We are helping foster families – guardians and children – to have a blessed Christmas not just with toys, but the basic needs of life: food, clothing, shoes, and much more. We will continue this program through the year with our “Kids First” ministry. This is only one way our congregation and many other generous people have responded to our call for justice for these families. I believe it only scratches the surface for them.

But we are making a difference. All of us can make a difference. If you live somewhere else, in another town or state, find a way to make a difference through organizations that are working to level the playing field. Or check on a neighbor who lives alone or someone who is homebound, lonely, sick. Donate to a food pantry or clothing collection. Stand against racism, homophobia, sexism, ageism, or any other kind of “ism.” We can make a difference! We can speak out when we recognize injustices, and we can work to bring justice to our world. Part of our mission and ministry as followers of Christ is to be prophetic voices for those who have no voice. We can be part of the call to justice.

I would like to share a prayer that was written by a colleague, Nancy E. Wichmann.

“Almighty God, you have gathered us into your family and anointed us with prophetic voices, even in this Covid wilderness, to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of your favor. Help us, O God, to take on the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit, and to promote your justice and mercy all around us.

May you sanctify us entirely; and keep our spirits, souls, and bodies sound and blameless until the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

(From Daily Updates NEAC, Nancy E. Wichmann, Pastor, East Parish UMC, Salisbury, MA)



PRAYER LIST

Bill and Gayle Gardei

Erin

Evelyn New & Family

Erika

Earl

Amy

Jim

Juliann

Dennis Hoskins

Robert (Babe) Williams and Family

Jim Slater

Charles Gilman

Roseanne

Jeanne Rasch's Family

Christine

Barbara Glidden

Gil & Marilyn Stebbins

Danny Westbrook

Dan Strange

Bobbie Noble

Pixie & Wayne Balt

Brandon

Fred

Durgin Pines Residents & Workers

Riverside Rest Home Residents & Workers

Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19

Those in nursing and assisted living care

Our Denomination

Our Church Family



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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