



Spirit Inspired
Worship



Peacemaking
June 21, 2023
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Monday was a holiday that has only recently been gaining national attention. June 19 is “Juneteenth” and marks that day in 1865 when, in the wee hours of the morning, enslaved African people across the state of Texas, arose and went out to work into dark plantation fields. Before the day’s end, a battalion of federal troops led by Gen. Gordon Granger stood on Texas soil and read General Order No. 3: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.” Slavery had officially ceased Jan. 1, 1863 — 2½ years earlier, when President Abraham Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Good news sometimes travels slowly, especially when it is bad news for those in power.

Presbytery Evangelist Mark Fraley recently reflected on how Christian community can be called on to disrupt injustice. In the spirit of Juneteenth, I offer his and his colleague’s powerful message about what it means for us to be active peacemakers in a world where good news has been slow to arrive for all people equally.

On Tuesday, I gathered with two friends, Marcus White and Rev. Chris Boston, whom I first met upon moving here in 2005. As I visited with them, it was a time of fellowship, lament, joy and dreaming. I felt deep gratitude for having fellow travelers on my journey through life.

As we reflected on the challenges of our current moment as a community, state and nation, we found ourselves referencing the Sermon on the Mount and its power. Rev. Boston’s poignant comment on the term “peacemaker” has stayed with me all week. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus states, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Rev. Boston then differentiated peacemaker from peacekeeper. Given how often many of us have heard the Beatitudes, the term “peacemaker” has lost its power. We probably hear “peacemaker” and think “peacekeeper”, one who maintains the peace and avoids conflict.

A peacemaker is entirely different. First, the Greek word for peace (“eirene”) holds much in common with the Hebrew term shalom. Shalom refers to all people thriving and every person is deeply valued. If a person is lost, no matter whom, we grieve for them.

Our current place and time lack shalom. People suffer. People are dismissed, ignored and/or oppressed, and others benefit from this. A peacemaker challenges or disrupts the way things are. Peacemaking is done in how we treat one another, how we do our jobs, what we do with our money, and a variety of other means. We intentionally ground our actions in a deep agape love for all of God’s creation.

It is also important to note that the Sermon on the Mount calls us to act together as a community, where we each play roles collaborating with one another. The weight of this call cannot be placed on one person’s shoulders. Peacemaking must be carried as a community committed to living out this love. As we say often, “we get to carry each other.”

Indeed! May we be peacemakers, so that the Good News reaches all ears and can be lived out for all.