

Session #8: Living Signposts: Saying “Yes” in Hope to the Work of God’s Spirit

Summary of the Big Picture: God’s reign of Shalom, God’s in-breaking social order, the new creation Paul talks about, was inaugurated by Jesus in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. In this time between the times (between Jesus’ inauguration of the reign of God and its consummation at the end of this age), we as a community of followers of Jesus are called to bear witness to this new reality, this new age, this future that has broken into our present, by being living, embodied signposts that point to this in-breaking reality, this reign of Shalom. We do this by receiving with joyfulness and gratitude God’s good and life-giving gifts with open hands, asking the Spirit to use these gifts to transform us more and more into the image of Christ, and to empower us to keep these gifts in circulation so their transformative power might be extended.

Reminders:

The good news of the Reign of God is astonishing good news. God is restoring and reconciling all things in Christ, and we have been invited to be part of this beautiful restoration project, which is equally astonishing.

God will never ask us to give anything we have not first received. “Freely you have received, freely give.”

Every time God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, God’s reign of shalom, God’s future, breaks into the present and is visible to those who have been given eyes to see. God’s will is that all creation might move more and more toward wholeness and flourishing,

St. John of the Wilderness is already being used by God to point to God’s in-breaking future. One of your most important and joyful tasks is to discern together your sense of how God has in the past and is right now using you and your parish to bring a greater measure of healing, wholeness, and flourishing to God’s world. These don’t have to be dramatic; in fact, to much of the world this work will remain largely invisible, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t having a transformative effect. A little yeast leavens the whole loaf. Celebrate and give thanks to God for these ways you are already being used as Spirit-empowered agents of God’s restorative work in the world.

We live in the tension between the already and the not yet, the already-arriving reign of God and the not-yet-fully-consummated reign of God. Living in this “time between the times” requires us to acknowledge that the kingdoms of this passing age continue to vie for our allegiance and loyalty, but we engage with them not on their own terms, but as citizens who seek by the Spirit’s empowerment to bear witness to God’s in-breaking reign of Shalom. (See Jesus’ second temptation in Luke 4:5-8, where Jesus is tempted—as he is in the other two as well—to be a Messiah on the world’s own quite “reasonable” terms.)

Our hope as followers of Jesus is not a form of optimism nor a form of wishful thinking. It does not require us to ignore the pain and brokenness of the world and simply look on “the sunny side of life.” Nor is our hope grounded in our faith in the human spirit or human progress. *Our hope is grounded in the character and promises of the Triune God who has promised to bring to completion the good work that God has begun.* This hope is grounded in God’s promise never to abandon us, even when we feel abandoned (as even Jesus did on the cross). As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:31-39: “If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, for I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

Prayer in honor of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador
Martyred on March 24, 1980

It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

What exactly is forgiveness? (Excerpts from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, *Strength to Love*)

Probably no admonition of Jesus has been more difficult to follow than the command to love our enemies. Some people have sincerely felt that its actual practice is not possible. It is easy, they say, to love those who love you, but how can one love those who openly and insidiously seek to defeat you...?

Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival. Love even for our enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world. Jesus is not an impractical idealist; he is the practical realist...

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction...

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. Whoever is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. It is impossible even to begin the act of loving one's enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity, over and over again, of forgiving those who inflict evil and injury upon us. It is also necessary to realize that the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some great hurt, the recipient of some tortuous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression. The wrongdoer may request forgiveness. They may come to themselves, and like the prodigal son, move up some dusty road, their heart palpitating with the desire for forgiveness. But only the injured neighbor, the loving father back home, can really pour out the warm waters of forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning...