

August 2, 2020

1 Peter 5: 5b-11

Psalm 86: 1-10

Bold Humility

The Reverend Evans McGowan

Growing up, there were a few shows we watched as a family. I wonder what shows you might watch or watched as a family?

In the Golden Age of Television, with highly produced shows available on more networks, all on demand and available on any of our plethora of devices, it is easier than ever to find your favorite show... and perhaps harder than ever to find a show that the whole family can watch. I remember *Cheers*, *The Cosby Show* and *Full House*, to name a few that we generally all liked.

But then there was one that captured my imagination, awe and wonder. It began with these iconic words:

Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. ***To boldly go where no one has gone before!***

Star Trek: The Next Generation took me to places I could only dream of, showing me what might be possible in other worlds... and also what might be possible here on earth.

And the show did go to some fascinating places, exploring strange new worlds as they sought out new life forms and new civilizations. They also broke barriers in other ways, with a very diverse cast and showing the first interracial kiss on American Television. Most recently, as my wife and I watched the most recent *Star Trek* adaptation, the enjoyable Picard series, I was reminded of the bold humility embodied by Captain Jean Luc Picard, played by Sir Patrick Stewart. As a captain, he inspired his crew to act boldly in a crisis, and yet also to remember to be humble in the face of complexity and diverse views.

I was thinking about *Star Trek* as I watched NASA launch their latest mission to Mars, dubbed Perseverance. Perseverance happens to be our new summer theme for this month. As we continue to meditate on our overarching summer theme, New Beginnings, we move into this sub theme of perseverance: and Lord knows we need it now.

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What has been characterized as an American Carnage is now an American Catastrophe.

This week we confirmed our worst fears: our Economy is shrinking at the fastest quarterly rate on record. There has been 18 weeks straight of over 1 million people losing their jobs, and unemployment is on the rise once again. The recovery has stalled as the virus continues to spread.

It makes sense that someone might want to delay returning to work, starting school, or traveling via plane... they maybe even want to delay an election. Fear runs rampant and hate threatens to infect us all.

On top of it all, “caution fatigue” is setting in as we prepare for the Fall, or what the CDC Director Robert Redfield predicts will be “one of the most difficult times” in public health ever.

We are indeed, as the psalmist cries out, poor and helpless. We cry out to God in times of trouble, trusting our cries will be answered.

If we’re going to get through this, we’re going to have to work together. We need to be bold in our actions and humble in our approach.

I’m reminded of our Session’s deliberations around Black Lives Matter and what it means for this congregation to stand up for Love in the Face of Hate. After the “We have work to do” sign went up outside these doors, our Head of Staff wrote in an email to our colleagues: “[I’m] so proud. And humbled by all that is now before us.”

We are taking bold actions. And we humbly have more work to do.

We are going through a time of revelation, of revealing what is truly important to each of us and collectively... of revealing the hard truths of systemic racism and how it affects each of us. Of revealing how mixed messaging and competing values threaten to rend the very fabric of society.

As the Psalmist reminds us:

We need a God who is Great
Who does miracles

We need God’s strength to persevere. To not be satisfied with yard signs... or proud of our practices... but to humbly walk with God through these uncertain and fearful and frustrating times.

We need a perseverance, to paraphrase the late John Lewis, that looks like the Freedom Riders, where change doesn’t happen overnight. As he describes it: “We didn’t know what would happen, but we knew it **had** to happen.” That is faith. That is perseverance.

This is where bold action with a humble approach comes into play, as the writer of 1 Peter advocates. We humble ourselves before God, that God may exalt us all in due time. We suffer for a little while, knowing that God's eternal glory is coming to restore, support, strengthen and establish the Reign of God here on earth. We are instructed to cast our anxieties on God, to be disciplined and stay alert, staying steadfast in the faith, "for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." Don't these words ring true today, just as much as they did then? We are all undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

Whenever we take action - or no action - we are going to make mistakes, just like the crew on the starship Enterprise. They weren't always right, just like we aren't always going to be.

This summer, our college students read *Accidental Saints*, a gem by Nadia Boltz-Weber, that describes various people stumbling into God's grace, picking them up when they have fallen flat on their face. One of her conclusions is that "Church isn't perfect. It's practice."

Indeed, as the Body of Christ, we are not called to be perfect. We are called to practice our faith in the love and hope we have in Christ. To do so in the strength of the Spirit, which combines the boldness of God with the humility of Christ.

In a country that prides itself on liberty and justice for all, John Lewis reminds us that "**Freedom is not a state; it is an act... Freedom is the continuous action we all must take**, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society."

It's not just about individual freedom. It's also about collective action. "**Peace cannot exist where justice is not served.**" We have a lot to learn, y'all.

Again, John Lewis: "When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something."

There is Blood in the mud. There are cries of our own and those who are suffering the worst of this crisis.

We are hungry for justice. We are starving for mercy. How do we boldly move forward while also remaining humble?

Maybe it looks like putting up a sign as we continue to study how and why systemic racism is deeply rooted in our society.

Maybe it looks like getting arrested 40 times for peaceful protesting, or making “good trouble in order to shake the soul of a nation.”

Maybe it looks like getting in the way when those meant to protect us are overstepping their power and abusing our fellow human beings.

Maybe it looks like voting, what Lewis calls “the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democracy.” Your next chance is this Tuesday, August 4th!

Maybe it looks like defunding violence.

As we move from privilege to progress, let us keep these words from C.S. Lewis in mind: “There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind.”

So, as we move ahead, we will be leaving some things behind. May you remember that you are not alone.

Yes. You’re not here. But it isn’t about you. It’s about who ELSE isn’t here. This is where we can lead. This is where we can act boldly and approach humbly.

While we are not here, where are we going? When we come back to this place, and we will, how will we have used our time? How will we have been humbled...How will we have acted boldly... not on behalf of ourselves, but on those who are not here.

This is how we will learn to live long and prosper.

To God be the Glory, Now and Forever. Amen.

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