

# “Live Peaceably with All”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, September 3, 2017  
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Readings from Scripture: Matthew 16:13-20 and Romans 12:1-8

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, ‘I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.’ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said further, ‘I am the God of your father; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

*Then the Lord said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ He said, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.’*

*But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I am has sent me to you.”’ God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.*

**Exodus 3:1-15**

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

**Romans 12:9-21**

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations, and our faith to you and to the power of your Holy Spirit. I pray that you would take the words and images that we carry within, the words that we've offered in song and in prayer, the words that we've heard read from scripture and the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share. Touch, bless, and transform all of these words into the living word of Jesus Christ. And let that word do its work in each of our hearts, in our lives, in our community, and in our world. May it be a word that comforts us in times of need and challenges us in times of comfort. May it be a word that guides us along the way of faith, in all that we do, in all that we say, may that word be on our lips. In Christ's name, we pray, amen.

So in the midst of all the things that happened this past week that you're well aware of, you may have missed one significant event that had just a tremendous impact on the world's well being. There was a presbytery meeting on Thursday, and I went to it. Presbytery meetings are when ministers and elders from churches gather to discuss the business of the regional church. And I got there and showed up and people came up to me and one after the other said, "What are you going to do with Karen being gone? How are you going to survive [laughter]?" When the first one came, I thought to myself, well, okay, we're fine. Then the second one came up and asked the same thing, and then the third one came up and said, "Hey, are you going to get a temporary interim associate pastor?" And I said, "Seriously? For two months? No." "Well, how are you going to make it?" And I realized this--I thought about the questions. I'm not sure what they expect, but I'm so glad that Karen has the chance to be on sabbatical. I'm glad that she gets to take time for a breather, to renew and reflect, and to sort of let her soul be refreshed. Because the one thing that maybe people don't know about Karen, at least in my colleagues' realm, is she's really professional. I have lists in my office of all the home-bound people that will get communion over the next two months, and the names of the people that will serve communion to those 34 people. And I have lists of all the Sunday school classes and the teachers, and who's going to get a check to pay for the teacher, and who the contact person is for that class and for that teacher. Karen is really quite good at what she does and she got things very organized. And then one person said, "Well, what are you going to do about worship?" "Well, we're going to have people like Sam help out." There's been tremendous volunteer interest in helping to provide the liturgy at 8:15 and at 11:00. Everyone's kind of stepping in and doing what they need to do. So in other words, I sat there and prayed for all my colleagues and their churches because I thought what would they do if someone left that did so much--this just makes sense to me. We do what we need to do, we get it done, and we move on. It's not a big deal. But to them, it was a big deal. There've been a lot of examples, and I don't want to sort of conflate someone's willingness to help out with liturgy, but it's important with this other example of stepping in, but there have been so many examples this week with the Harvey response of people stepping in and doing what needs to get done. It's not just something that we do as Christians, stepping in and doing what needs to get done, it's what we do as humans. When there is a need and it triggers something within us, we step up and say, "Hey, I'll help." When I put out the call for liturgists at session and by email, Sam and others said, "Hey, I'll help." There've been other people, choir members, and just members of the congregation, "Hey, I'll do that." Without any question about it, "I'll do that." When people were trapped in streets in Houston and elsewhere in Texas, the word went out, "we need boats," and people showed up, and said, "I'll do that." I heard from someone earlier this morning who's going to help take supplies down to a staging area near Houston because that's what we do when there's trouble. We step in and we do what we can. And what's important for us all to remember and realize is that we kind of do it in the vein of Moses, because in Exodus, the Creator of the universe and the God of Israel is watching God's people in Egypt complain and moan about being oppressed and in bondage. And so God finds a completely unqualified Sheppard, and says, "Hey, I want you to go roll up your sleeves and free my people from Egypt." And to

paraphrase Moses response, "Oh, who, me? I can't do that. What do I say? And if they ask, on whose authority do-- why would Pharaoh meet with me?" And God says, "Because I'm going to send you, and I'm going to go with you, and when you speak, my words are going to come out of your mouth, and when you act, my actions will be embodied in you." And so Moses, who is supremely unqualified in the moment, sees a need, hears the call, gets God's voice in the bush, and decides, it's like, "Okay, I can do this because God is going with me." And he goes down, and as we all know, he liberates the people and leads them right to the edge of the promised land. When there were people flooded, the word went out over social media, Facebook, and other applications, and the people from Louisiana in the Cajun Navy showed up in their John boats and their air boats, doing whatever they could to go and find fellow Americans, fellow humans, who simply needed help. When the call came just a couple of days ago from the American Red Cross for PDA to send volunteer chaplains into each of the shelters that the Red Cross had opened, there was an overwhelming response from the national response team, and there are now 12 people who are either there or preparing to go to South East Texas and Louisiana to be chaplains for an unknown period of time to provide emotional and spiritual care to the people that have been devastated by Harvey. These people are going and it's part of who we are as the body of Christ.

The insert offers one way for you to support PDA in those efforts by giving of your money. Where's Cheryl? Is she in here? Oh, way in the back. Cheryl told me that this morning she went online to PDA and actually just gave over the website and already got a response thanking her and a notification of her tax deductible gift has already come back to her. So, if you want to do it that way, you can do it. I know that we spend, as a congregation, a lot of energy moving our understanding of mission away from giving checks to more hands on things, but this is one of those disasters where checks are incredibly welcome. So, you can give now or anytime in the weeks, months ahead because, as you're aware, the recovery will take a long time. At this Presbyterian meeting, besides being inundated with questions about how would we survive without Karen for two months, there were presentations that were given. And one of the things that came to me while I was sitting there listening to one of the presentations was that when we support people in ministry, somehow that's us doing that ministry and being engaged in it. So, when you support PDA, sending chaplains to shelters in southeast Texas, that's us being present in southeast Texas.

The way that this came to me was a pastor named Miriam Foltz who does UKIRK, which is a college outreach to students at Wash U and SLU, got up at the Presbyterian meeting and gave a presentation about the ministry that she did. She talked about reaching out to students who wanted to learn more about Christ, who wanted to be in fellowship with Christians, or who just were curious about a mission opportunity. Those sorts of things. And she does that at Wash U and at SLU. And one of the things that she said during her presentation is if you support my ministry, that's you reaching out to those students in need. As I was driving home, I kept thinking about what she had said and what came to me is this idea that First Pres Kirkwood has an outreach to college students at Wash U and SLU. Now we don't actually go down there and do anything. Maybe some of you volunteer, I don't know. But because she does it and because we support her, that's us doing that ministry at Wash U and at SLU. If we believe that in fact, we are the body of Christ, all one in Christ Jesus, then as she does it, so do we. So do we. All of this is to say that when I read Romans 12:9-21, I get exhausted with thinking about all the things I need to do to be a good Christian. I need to let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another, on and on and on and on and on it goes. If this were a score card, I would fail. Maybe I do one or two or three of these things really well, but I can't do all of these things all the time and be in my sense what I think God wants me or us to be.

This week, what I've come to realize is that we do all these things together. That each of us does our part that maybe some of us are better at loving, some of us are better at discerning what is evil and resisting it. Some of us are better at holding onto what is good. Some of us live in harmony with each other, it's easier for us to do that, but the point is that the community does these things and lives out all of these ideals. It's not just us as an individual person to carry that burden of doing everything ourselves even though we are willing to step up when we see a need. We do not have to do it all. And in a situation like Harvey, we know that we can't do it all. In fact, for many of us, we realize there's not really much we can do except give of our time and our money. Our time and prayers and our money and support of our ministries. I don't know about you, but every now and then when I see things on television, they hook me. Some of them in maybe a good way and others in not so good way. This week, as my wife Jani and I were watching television, a commercial that came on and the very first thing it mentions is of a dog in a cage. And the dog looks like it needs to be bathed and fed and as soon as it comes on, I know where that commercial's going and I click the channel because I don't want to see that. I get hooked and I want to do something and it just makes me angry.

I saw another image that did that this week. The image of the folks in the assisted living facility in Dickinson, Texas sitting in a wheelchair or in a chair knitting as the water was rising up to their waist. I got hooked by that image and I wanted to do something. I wanted to get in the car and drive to Texas and swim to where they were and do whatever I could to get them out, but I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it by myself. What I realize though is that sending that picture out was an invitation for help and thankfully the National Guard saw that picture and went and got those people. When we find things in life that seem overwhelming to us and we're not sure what to do, we need to remember that as the body of Christ, we are engaged in responding not only in what we do personally but in what all Christians do together, and I would say this week, not just Christians but all humans. For when each of us sees a disaster that is overwhelming, our instinct is to help out, and to me, this line sums it up the best: if it is possible so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. When we see disaster, we do everything we can to restore peace and wholeness in the communities that are affected. And for that, I'm grateful. Amen