



“The End of the Nightmare”

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Scripture (CEB):

²² We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. ²³ And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. ²⁴ We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

Sermon:

Genocide. The destruction of the people.

Ezekiel saw it in the valley of the dead.

Surely it is the nightmare that was lived by Bosnians, Rwandans, the Irish during the Famine, the Scottish during the highland clearings, Africans in slavery, the indigenous tribes across the Americas, the Jews in the age of Hitler, the Syrians, the Armenians...the list goes on and on and on.

Valleys of bones, seas of blood; destruction, dismemberment, starvation, putrefaction.

The stuff of nightmares. Ask anybody who has been there.

Imagine it.

Then turn away, in horror.

But don't you dare ignore it. Don't you dare forget.

Amnesia will not stop such horrors.
And turning aside will not stop such horrors.

You and me, especially you and me, with our white privilege and our American empire;
living within the great military industrial complex in which we are embedded...we have to
face the horror and push back against it.

Whether you do so quietly, at the checkout stand, befriending someone who is not like
you... in your neighborhood, or in your pew...or
Whether you do so in political action, in letter writing, testifying, organizing, marching,
chanting...
Whether you do it in your job, as a foster parent, as a teacher, or doctor, as a nurse or
business owner...

We have to face our human capacity for creating horror, and fight back.
Fight back with our knowledge of our common humanity, living together upon our one and
only blue-green earth. Paul wrote that we, and all the creation, are groaning, waiting for
the new creation, for new life, God's design at last in the world. He didn't say it in so many
words, but I still believe, he would agree that we must:

Fight back with our capacity to understand others, even across our languages and cultures.
Fight back with our ability to experience compassion, our ability to stand with another in
sorrow, let compassion change us.
It seems impossible, you say. There are so many sorrows...
Well, so did that vision before Ezekiel's eyes.

So much death. Absolutely mind-numbing grief. Beyond tears.
Jesus and his companions knew it.
Under the imperial might of Rome, they knew the repression, the death, the wasting away
of life.
So much death, so much cruel power wielded without mercy.
Today, last century, 2,000 or 4,000 years ago.

The history of cruelty. The story of human violence and depravity.

It seems impossible, you say. We are groaning, you say.
How shall we fight back?

With Pentecost...with the power of God to make sense of no sense.

The power of God to bring life, where only death seems to dwell.

The power of God to bring humans together across their countless languages.

With Pentecost...the experience of communion and community, instead of alienation and separation.

With Pentecost, an experience of hope and action, instead of despair and silence.

Did we think Pentecost was simply a moment in history?

Pentecost is here and now.

1. In the call for a moral revival of Christianity in the United States, led by the Rev. William Barber and so many other leaders of conscience.
2. In the work of our own denomination and many others to dismantle racism, to address violence and oppressive discrimination against people of color. For our UCC leaders and ministers like the Rev. Traci Blackmon, standing in Ferguson and Charlottesville, for the Rev. Yvette Flunder and the inclusive black church, for the Rev. Loey Powell, lesbian and leader, for the Rev. Linda Jaramillo and the Latinex voices of the UCC. For our local pastors, like Pastor Jim CastroLang and Pastor Gen Heywood, working on the Poor People's Campaign in our town.
3. In the "Me Too" movement, and "Time's Up"...helping women find their voice and speak their truth against misogyny, violence and sexism. Including the voices of our own UCC ministers; Rev. Rachel Hackenburg, our General Minister and President, the Rev. John Dorhauer, our own Rev. Courtney Stange-Tregear, minister of church vitality.
4. In the work to protect and ensure the human rights of our LGBTQI siblings here in the US and across the world.

In the energy we expend, from the core of our lives, to see mercy and justice prevail.

Jesus didn't turn over the tables in the temple just once. He preached a new world, a different world, day after day after day. He taught, he healed, he fed and lived a new world, the world we are groaning for. Day after day. And after they thought they had killed him, he showed up with life power, anyway!

The disciples didn't just experience the enormous power of Jesus' example and God's Spirit upon them once long ago in history.

This power to upset the world as we know it, is ours, **right now**.

It is the Pentecost experience, right now.

- Every time we say, "this is not right", we experience the power of the Spirit blowing

down the deceit and destruction of human wickedness.

- Every time we take a risk to reach beyond our own little safe world, reach into the lives of those who are not like us, we experience God's power to make life in the midst of a valley of death.
- Every day that we determine to share our hearts and lives, risk for the rest of the human family, risk for the world that is our home...then it is Pentecost there.

This will be the birth of the new world. This will save the world, even as a new world is being born.

This will cause the world to become something other than a valley of dry bones, the place of heartless genocide, racism, misogyny, homophobia.

Let us begin here and now.

1. Let us continue to make this place not just an historic church, but a vital community of loving and generous, clear-eyed and spirit-filled people who change the world, right here and now.
2. Change it, for those who are without insurance and in poor health of body, mind or spirit. Let us be healers.
3. For those who are without family, and in need of love and support and kindness.
4. For those who are unheard, uninvited, whose voices are not at the table. Let us be the ones to listen.
5. For those who are oppressed, freedom beginning in here.
6. For the hungry, food.
7. For the angry, solace and freedom from its clutches.
8. For the blind, a chance to see beyond themselves.
9. For the despairing, a vision of life greater than death.

For all of us, a chance to see that God is taking the dry bones and wrapping them up in life.

For all of us who groan with the world in its suffering...let us begin to see that these groans can be the groans, the work, the grunting and the pushing that every mother knows as she brings a child to birth! It is our labor, our time to push for the new world of God's design to be born!

Push, people!
Keep pushing!