

Peace with Justice Sunday and...Trinity Sunday

*“Peace with Justice for the Whole Creation”*

Hebrew Bible reading: Jeremiah 17:8 (NRSV)

They shall be like **a tree planted by water**, sending out **its roots** by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 (NRSV)

Finally, brothers and sisters, community, rejoice! Put things in order, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the **sharing in the Holy Spirit** be with all of you.

New Testament: Revelation 22: 1-2 (NRSV)

Then the angel showed me the **river of the water of life**, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is **the tree of life** with its **twelve kinds of fruit**, producing its fruit each month; and the **leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations**.

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**Intro:**

So let's put on our history hats! Let's start our sermon time with a bit of historical memory.

On Jan. 1st, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the “Emancipation Proclamation.” This executive order would impact the lives of 3 million enslaved people. But Lincoln's order was issued in the midst of the U.S. Civil War, which ended on April 9th, 1865, so for nearly 2 ½ years the Confederacy refused to comply with the proclamation, prolonging the trauma for enslaved people.

But the fulfillment of freedom took over two more months, for it wasn't until June 19th, 1865, that Union Major Gen Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston, Texas, to announce to the Confederate troops there that the war was over, and that in accordance with the proclamation, all enslaved people, 250,000 of them in Texas, were now free with “absolute equality”. One story has it that it took two long months for the news to be communicated--in those days! But another story has it that the people doing the enslaving held out in resistance for as long as possible. Why is it that the work of peace with justice takes so long? Still, progress was made, and is still being made, step by step, as now, nearly 156 years later, Freedom Day--or as many descendants of enslaved people call it--Juneteenth--is on the verge of becoming a national holiday. In this way, all US citizens can recognize the significance of the day in our national “long walk to freedom”.

1. Well, in the United Methodist calendar, there are special days too. Today is a special day. We call it the annual celebration of “Peace with Justice” Sunday. We might say, in one sense, every Sunday should be Peace with Justice Sunday, as peace with justice is at the heart of the good news that Jesus proclaimed and embodied. But this Sunday is also known as “Trinity Sunday”, following after the big red fiery Pentecost celebration last Sunday. You can recall that Pastor Riva preached about God's Spirit re-energizing the followers of Jesus, who then followed what she called, “The Leading of the Spirit,” out from beyond their fearful closed doors. Trinity Sunday symbolizes the flow of God's energy and healing going on in the lives of people, extending the possibility of transformation to the whole world. Thus today, the two themes come together as we affirm our hope for “Peace with justice for the whole creation”!

2. Yet in the life of our world, we find ourselves in a challenging time. When we stop to think about it, peace with justice doesn't just arrive on our schedules or timeframes! We know this so well. Think about this past week. Last Tuesday marked the one year commemoration of the murder of Mr. George Floyd. Has it really been a whole year since we first saw the video of former officer Derek Chauvin slowly crushing the life-giving breath out of Mr. Floyd? Many of us can remember gathering at peaceful protests across the metro area, joining thousands more around the world. But then there was the violence, rioting, and damage that erupted in flames and tear gas billowing up and down the streets too. Has it already been a year? So much has happened.

This past week there were many news reports, articles and posts asking variations on the question, "One Year Later--What Have We Learned?" Black historian Dr. Anthea Butler asked in a column, "What Has Changed: Everything. Nothing." On the one hand, so many energies emerged for transforming police practices, funding, and public safety. Something like 243 different reform bills were passed across the states. Books about racism and antiracism climbed the best sellers list. Advocates worked to get out the vote in marginalized communities. Examining practices and policies is underway across many fields--education, business, health care, and social services.

The focus on what difference a year has made for justice is a tough question to reflect on, especially when there have been more deaths of people of color in police encounters across the US. Sure, Derek Chauvin was judged guilty of murder, yet we await his sentencing and the trial of the three other officers involved. Now we have the forthcoming judicial process for Kim Potter, involved with the shooting of Daunte Wright. Sure, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act has been passed by the House, but what about the Senate? It is so hard to persevere between when injustice occurs, and the transformations we hope to see. Change seems so slow in coming. A commentator this past week asked a guest panelist, "Is it two steps forward and one step back, or one step forward and two steps back?" No wonder the Spirit of God groans for the time of transformation.

Today as we look back over the Floyd commemorations, we can remember how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr remarked, echoing the words of Unitarian abolitionist Theodore Parker, that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Yet hopefully we can all lean in to help bend that arc a bit faster!

3. Well, maybe we need to pause. Maybe we need to turn to scripture. We're not the first ones to cry impatiently for justice. "How long oh Lord," the writer of Psalm 13 grieves aloud. Our spiritual ancestors had keen insight, they too thought hard and long, prayed long and hard about justice. In the bible, one of the images that arises again and again about the steadfastness of faith and hope is a tree.

In the Hebrew Bible, the prophet Jeremiah encouraged the people to hang in there just like a tree with deep roots drawing water from a nearby stream. When the hard times come, and they did, the people deeply rooted wouldn't dry up or lose their fruitfulness. In the New Testament, the visionary John of Patmos imagined the fulfillment of justice as a huge tree right in the middle of the city, so big a river would flow through it, and the leaves would be the medicine for the healing of the people and creation.

The thing is about trees, we can see them as individuals--their separate trunks and canopies holding forth against the sky. But what science is now showing is that really, the main action is what goes on underground, between the roots of trees and the fungi networks of tiny tubular hyphae or mycelia sharing nutrients and chemical communications that both feed the trees and protect them from harm.

As humans, we don't usually see the vast underground. So maybe our ancestors were on to something that we can reclaim today through the image of faithfulness as a tree, trusting that one is

part of a vast flow of transformation beyond what we can see or experience as individuals. Our work is to do our part. To entrust ourselves to the network of relationships.

Like Bridget Floyd, George's sister, who said this past week, when asked, "I have no choice but to continue this fight...If I didn't get up, get dressed, and start my day, I wouldn't be honoring my brother's legacy or fulfilling my purpose. I began planting seeds of hope, because if not me — then who? I simply had to do my part. I know that God qualifies the called."

4. Today the invitation before us is what are the seeds of hope God is calling you to plant for the network of peace with justice for the whole creation? Recently we've seen some lovely seeds planted from within this congregation. Have a look at the June newsletter. There's news in there about seeds of ministry being planted as we speak!

Karen Schneider let us know about the children's Sunday evening Christian ed program where they learned about the importance of alpacas in creating sustainable communities. The children raised a generous amount of money to purchase 6 alpacas to gift to struggling families.

Then, the United Methodist Women have been exploring how our church could become an official "Climate Justice Congregation" to help slow the damage to our world.

Mary Tholkes was recently commissioned as a Hopeful Earthkeeper in our MN Annual Conference, helping us all become more aware how climate change impacts the most vulnerable, especially women and children of color, and what steps we can take to be engaged in change.

Veronica Johnson serves at the Columbia Heights Recycling Center.

Rondine Mehling has encouraged us to Adopt a Drain in our neighborhoods.

All these seeds, so many ways we can get up each day and be part of the vast network of justice-making for people and the planet.

5. So in closing, this Memorial Day weekend, when we reflect on the lives of women and men who have lost their lives in military service to our country, we want to also ask ourselves, what will we live our lives for? How may our lives be of service to the freedom of all people to thrive in a healthy, healing world? May we open our hearts today to hear God's Spirit calling us to live our lives for peace with justice for the whole creation.

AMEN.

*Sermon Resources:*

1. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*
2. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/abolition-of-slavery-announced-in-texas-juneteenth>
3. [https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/arts/juneteenth-galveston.html?campaign\\_id=37&emc=edit\\_rr\\_20210522&instance\\_id=31390&nl=race%2Frelated&regi\\_id=86642187&segment\\_id=58763&te=1&user\\_id=772c235d187c4741068475ed51cb24df](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/arts/juneteenth-galveston.html?campaign_id=37&emc=edit_rr_20210522&instance_id=31390&nl=race%2Frelated&regi_id=86642187&segment_id=58763&te=1&user_id=772c235d187c4741068475ed51cb24df)
4. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/26/states-policing-bills-490850>
5. <https://people.com/crime/bridgett-floyd-continue-fight-justice/>
6. <https://www.allure.com/story/bridgett-floyd-george-floyd-essay>