June 7, 2020 • Trinity Sunday • Online Worship • In-Home Communion

“Go, Therefore…”
Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Psalm 8
O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Matthew 28:16-20
Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

These are difficult, painful, and challenging times. The coronavirus brings not only a devastating and debilitating, often deadly illness, it also laid bare horrible inequities of poverty, inadequate health care, striking people of color far out of proportion to their numbers. It opened our eyes to the self-sacrificing, underpaid, under-protected work of people we casually call ‘service providers’, as if humans could be divided into those who serve and those who somehow deserve to be served.

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In the midst of this pandemic, the whole world witnessed the agonizing death of George Floyd while detained in police custody. And in his dying breath echoed the names of so many, far too many, who have gone before: Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor… names now written in the Book of Life. The pandemic of racism has also been made excruciatingly clear. We tremble to see ourselves and our brokenness so clearly.

Protests have been held across this nation, around the world even, even now as we worship this morning, placing ourselves in the presence of the Most Holy God—asking forgiveness, seeking understanding, craving solace, pleading for a vision of a new future with hope, healing, and justice for all.

These are difficult, painful, and challenging times. As people of faith, we are called to listen, eyes wide open, to hear the cries of the oppressed as does our God, to study, to pray, to act, and resolve that together we will be part of creating that new future with hope and justice for all.

This morning, let us return to the Word of the Lord. Jocelyn read so beautifully from Psalm 8: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.”

You have made them, O God, every single one of them, and crowned them all with glory and honor.

That's where we start, in these difficult, painful and challenging times. That's where we always start, with that ancient affirmation that every child is a beautiful and precious child of God, should be seen as such, treated as such, loved and nurtured and respected as such.

And from there, Jesus sends us out into the world to embody the truth of who and whose we are. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” he said. “GO, therefore: make disciples, baptize, teach,
remember.” Bishop Gregory Palmer of the West Ohio Conference reminded us this week: “Every baptized Christian already has the authority to act like, walk like, talk like a disciple of Jesus the Christ.”

That work, that kingdom-building work, will require a lot of us in these coming days. There’s work to be done at every level of our society to bring justice and wholeness—from laws to budgets to education to policing policies, all while maintaining healthy best practices in light of the still expanding reach of the coronavirus.

One place we can all start, in these difficult, painful and challenging times, is with our renewed commitment to our neighbor. Sounds kinda corny, I know. But I heard this asserted this week in an interview that surprised me and caused me to think again. Patrick Skinner served for a time as a CIA case officer. He left the CIA to return to his home in Savannah, Georgia, where he now lives and works as a police officer.

It was his choice, he said, to be a cop in the community where he lives. He advocates a “neighbor mindset” for policing and sees it as the most effective approach. “I believe in it,” he said. “I live here, I work here. I call people my neighbors because they are… the people I’m dealing with every day are my neighbors, and so I have to treat them as such.”

Neighbors. It’s pretty basic in addressing both pandemics. Rev. Laquaan Malachi, pastor of the North United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, said this week: “You can’t love your neighbor if you don’t show up for them.” The reason we wear masks and keep that appropriate physical distance is out of concern for the health of our neighbor. And the reason we seek wholeness and justice for each member of our community is because each child of God is our neighbor. In the actual sense of living together. And in the biblical sense of the commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and our neighbor as ourself.

It’s not everything by any means, but it’s the place we start. “Use me, God,” Martin Luther King, Jr., said. “Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.”

Church, we are compassionate, creative, resourceful, caring, resilient, faithful people. Let us earnestly pray to God to take who we are and who we want to be and what we can do and use us for a purpose greater than ourselves, in these days building a new nation in which each and every child of God thrives in health and wholeness, free from fear.

Together we will pray, study, grow, cherish all our neighbors, show up for them, and walk through these difficult, painful and challenging times—one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

A contemporary four-fold blessing which comes from the Franciscans:

“May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your hearts.

May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom and peace among all people.

May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed with those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God’s grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.”

Amen.