

God's Mission, Our Journey: Act¹
Rev. Curtis J. Preston

Lakewood United Church of Christ
November 13, 2016
Genesis 12:1-5a

My brothers and sisters, I have a word to speak today. It was not the word that I thought I would be bringing during the months and weeks that have led up to today.

[Material related to the church's budget and stewardship campaign was here].

But today I have a more important story to tell. It is a story that is wrapped up in this election, and it is wrapped up God's mission and our journey. It is relevant to what we are doing here today as we praise God, and we sing and pray, and as we prepare to collect and dedicate pledge cards and offerings. It is relevant to who we are, who God is calling us to be, and how our voice matters.

I don't presume to make the assumption that every person in the room today voted for Hillary Clinton. In fact, I know not everyone did. And I know lots of really great people, smart, thoughtful, kind, beautiful people who either didn't cast a ballot, or cast a ballot for a 3rd party candidate, or cast a ballot for Donald Trump. We must not presume to know why people voted how they did. There are lots of reasons—some economic, some social issues, some a strong sense that we, as a nation, needed change. So we must be very careful as we discuss this election and discuss who voted for whom, because the truth is we don't know people's reasons. And we would be wise not to paint all others who voted differently from us with the same colored brush. This election, and the people who participated in it are more complex and complicated than that.

So while I don't presume to know why people voted how they voted, I do presume to know what kind of church we are. I do know what we are about as a people carrying forth God's mission. I do know that for more than 60 years we, as a congregation and community, have been seeking a more just, a more peaceful, and more hopeful world for all of God's children with no exceptions. I do know that we as a congregation have been to the Islamic Center of Golden and that we care about our Muslim brothers and sisters. I know that we are an open and affirming congregation and that we take pride in the fact that we march in the Denver's Pridefest every year. And I know that we care about our GLBT brothers and sisters and that their love for their husbands, and wives, and partners is a beautiful reflection of God's perfect love. I know that we

¹ This is an edited version of the sermon that was preached at Lakewood United Church of Christ on November 13, 2016. This version has removed all the specific references to the church's budget and stewardship campaign. Although these portions were important to the congregation in which this sermon was preached, it may distract from the central message for those not affiliated with our congregation.

care about refugees and about immigrants and that we take seriously the places in scripture which command us to show respect and compassion to the “foreigners in our midst.” We are a better nation, a stronger nation, because of those who have come to this country from another place. And we are a better and stronger nation when every voice is heard, not just the voices who already agree with us.

I know that our vision of God’s kingdom here on earth includes people from every walk of life. I know that our vision of God’s kingdom was dealt a significant blow on Tuesday night. Over this past week I have sat with parishioners and with pastors and with folks not connected to this church or the UCC and they, we, are mourning. We are grieving. We are despondent. Not because our candidate didn’t win, but because our vision of who we are as a nation didn’t win. Because justice, and peace, and hope, and radical inclusivity, and gender equality, and interfaith relationships, didn’t win. We are mourning and we are grieving not because we elected a reality tv star over a person with a lifetime of political experience, but because we elected a person whose campaign was an appeal to fear and frustration, to bullying and to bashing, to name calling and to division. We elected a candidate who appealed to a nostalgic sense of our history when it was okay to be just a little bit racist, as long as you did it behind closed doors; when it was ok to see women as objects to be ogled and assaulted as long as you held the power; when it was ok to presume if you are a straight, white, heterosexual male, you should always be at the front of every line. We are mourning and grieving not a political reality, but a social and theological reality—how far we still are from the kingdom of God. We are indeed a nation divided, not as Republicans and Democrats (which is ultimately a superficial distinction) but divided about the core identity of what it means to be a “true American.” Divided by what it means to be a place and a people where all people are seen and treated as God’s beloved.

If you read the letter I wrote before the election you have already heard me say that regardless of who is elected as president our work does not change. It may have gotten a bit more difficult on Tuesday, that is yet to be seen, but it did not change. And we can and should make peace with the fact that one party won and one party lost—we already knew that was going to happen. And we can and we should make peace with our neighbor, our family member, our co-worker who voted differently than we did. The gospel compels us to. If we are to move closer to the kingdom it will take as many of us as we can get pulling in the same direction. But we should not interpret God’s call to make peace with our neighbors as a call to just get over it. We will seek to make peace with people, but we know that the gospel will not make peace with hatred. And the gospel will not make peace with misogyny and assault on women’s bodies. And the

gospel will not make peace with xenophobia and the fear of the foreigner or stranger. The gospel will not make peace with racism. It will not make peace with bullying and name calling as a way of getting what you want. The gospel will not make peace with greater economic prosperity for a few at the top and it will not make peace with continued oppression of those at the economic bottom. We are called to love our neighbors, and that means even the neighbors who voted differently than we did, but we will not love division, we will not love fear, we will not love intolerance.

Brothers and sisters, beloved of God seeking to share God's love of all people as beloved, has it ever more clear than now that a church like ours has not only an important but an invaluable voice to offer to our community and world? Has the message of God's radical love, inexhaustible grace, and tireless care for those on the margins ever been more needed than right now? If we believe Jesus when he says that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also, then this is the time to put some treasure behind where I know your heart already is. Today is the day to make a real and tangible investment in the future that God is building through us. In today's reading from Genesis we get in on the very beginning of God's relationship with Abram. We get in on the very beginning of thousands and thousands of years of God choosing to work with and work in and work through human beings to achieve divine ends. Go to the land that I will show you, God tells Abraham. Go. Go. Do not sit still. Do not stay in place. Do not worry about how exactly it will unfold or what you will encounter along the way. Do not think that it will always be easy. Do not get discouraged when the days are long and the work is hard. And do not doubt that I am with you every step of the way. Go God's people. Go followers of Jesus. Go all who want justice, who want inclusion, who want diversity, who want and who will work for the kingdom of God here and now. Go to the land that I will show you.

On Wednesday as we gathered for our regular bible study and we talked a bit about the bible and a lot about how we were feeling, and as part of that conversation, it came up about our sign out front. It came up about how sometimes when you pray to God to move a mountain God hands you a shovel.² Brothers and sisters, I believe we have been handed a shovel this week. We have some really big mountains to move. And we will work with any and all who will work with us: liberal or conservative, republican or democrat, libertarian or green party, Muslim, Jew or Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, spiritual but not religious, anyone at all. We will work with anyone who will work with us. And we will work around any and all who seek to stand in our way. But we will go to work. We will go where God is leading us. And we will go together.

² A quote from Shane Claiborne

[Material related to our budget and our stewardship campaign removed].

We are a people of good news and a people of action. We are a people who already know the story of death defeated, of oppression overcome, of freedom for the captives, and of new life when we least expected it. We are a people of hope, and joy, and peace, and love. And so, let us not despair. Let us pick up a shovel and start moving some mountains. Cause we are going where God is leading us, and nothing can stand in our way. Amen. Amen. Amen.