

June 21, 2020
The Second Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 7—Year A
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Genesis 21:8-21
Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

Last week the Supreme Court of the United States handed a surprise win to the LGBTQ+ community. “The court said the language of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sex discrimination, applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.”¹ Add that to the list of things I never thought I would see in my lifetime, a list that already included my federally recognized marriage to Jakki.

It was great news, well-timed for Pride month. In these trying days, it was especially nice to have something to celebrate. Still, I was reminded of my concern that gains for LGBTQ+ people have outpaced gains for African Americans. Even the fight for justice seems to be unequal. I've pondered why this might be. I suspect that one reason is access to wealth. Things really shifted for the LGBTQ+ community back in the 1990s, when white gay men became a marketing niche.

During my adulthood, capitalism has shifted into ever higher overdrive, and those without access to wealth have only gotten left farther behind. As you know, African Americans and other people of color are disproportionately represented in those numbers.

The fact is, Jesus had absolutely nothing to say about homosexuality. One could argue that he had nothing to say about sexuality, period. On the other hand, he had a lot to say about poverty and sickness. He had a lot to say about wealth and power. And he had a lot to say about what happens to those to speak about such things in such a way as to cause disruption.

In today's Gospel reading we pick up from last week. Jesus is sending the twelve disciples off to heal and preach. Before they go, Jesus describes what awaits them—we got the first half last week and the second half this week. He paints a pretty glum picture, one of disruption and chaos.

Jesus is trying to change the world. *Of course* there will be disruption and chaos. Change always requires disruption and chaos, it's only a matter of degree. That's true when we experience change as individuals; it's true when we experience change in community. When the stakes are high, the forces of stasis count on our *fear* of disruption and chaos, our *fear* that change will only make things worse. Those forces count on that fear to keep us sitting exactly where we are. Maybe that's why Jesus so often said, “do not be afraid.” Jesus could say that, because God knows what God is doing.

For the most part, I expect that we church people come to church for consistency and serenity, not for disruption and chaos. But I expect that Jesus would challenge us on that. In a world that is yet governed by the interests of power and wealth, one might even wonder whether it's possible to bring the Gospel *without* causing disruption and chaos. Conversely, if disruption and chaos are *signs* of the coming of the Kingdom, we might take heart from them, and even from the fear that they arouse.

Change *is* coming. It's in the air. The Black Lives Matter movement of the last few weeks has brought a degree awareness that won't go away. But we're just at a starting point. We know that, we know how huge the problem is, and it can feel massively overwhelming. We need a roadmap of where we might go next. For one option, we might turn to the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.² Dr. Barber is recreating Dr. King's vision of a coalition of poor people, one built across lines of race and creed, one that for Dr. Barber is also built across lines of sexuality.

Yesterday was to have been the Campaign's March on Washington. Instead, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a digital gathering. It lasted nearly three and a half hours and featured dozens of speakers from all walks of life. I watched most of it "live"; you can now stream it anytime. I want to play a clip of Dr. Barber from yesterday.^{3,4}

[Show recording, starting at 27:10.]

Dr. Barber mentioned that the event would feature people affected by poverty, and it did. There must have been hundreds of them, from around the country, using their voices to call for this wealthy nation to seriously address its unconscionable and sinful level of poverty.

The national Episcopal Church has signed on to the Poor People's Campaign. I want to close with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's contribution to yesterday's event.⁵

[Show recording, starting at 11:58.]

Notes

¹ Adam Liptak, "Civil Rights Law Protects Gay and Transgender Workers, Supreme Court Rules," New York Times, June 15, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/us/gay-transgender-workers-supreme-court.html> (accessed June 21, 2020).

² Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival website, available at <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/> (accessed June 21, 2020).

³ A full recording of the Mass Poor People's Assembly and Moral March on Washington digital gathering is available at <https://www.june2020.org/> (accessed June 21, 2020).

⁴ In the clip shown, Dr. Barber mentions the organization's "Poor People's Moral Justice Jubilee Policy Platform," which is available at <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/moral-justice-jubilee-policy-platform/> (accessed June 21, 2020). It is said to be "grounded in" these five principles:

1. **Everybody in, nobody out.** Everybody is deserving of our nation's abundance.
2. **When you lift from the bottom, everybody rises.** Instead of "trickle-down, we start with the bottom up.
3. **Prioritize the leadership of the poor, low-income and most impacted.** Those who are on the frontlines of these crises, must also be in the lead in identifying their solutions.
4. **Debts that cannot be paid must be relieved.** We demand freedom from servicing the debts we cannot pay.
5. **We need a moral revolution of values to repair the breach in our land.** This platform abides by our deepest moral and Constitutional commitments to justice. Where harm has been done, it must be acknowledged and undone.

⁵ This is from the above-linked digital gathering.