

**June 7, 2020 | Journey worship service**

**TEXT: [Matthew 28:16–20](#)**

**TITLE: Taking it to the Streets**

*By the Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy*

To say that 2020 has been a difficult year is an understatement. When it became evident that the nuevo coronavirus would become a world-wide pandemic, the streets in almost every country, city and town around the world almost immediately became deserted. In an effort to stymie the spread of the disease that ravages a person's respiratory system and takes away the ability to breathe, it was evident that the best way to protect ourselves and others was to stay home, to separate ourselves.

And then came the video that has been seen around the world. The video shot by a brave and courageous teenager and that took our individual and collective breaths away. The murder of George Floyd, whose very breath was denied him by a knee that pressed down on his neck. This display of total disregard for human life, and the denial of Mr. Floyd's personage, compelled people around the world to come back into the streets holding vigils and protesting the ceaseless death of black and brown people that is in direct conflict with God's creation. In the book of Genesis, God created humanity in God's image and blew the breath of life into them that they would become a living, breathing, image of God. God created one family that we might realize we all descended from one man and woman.

Our prejudices, explicit and implicit bias, lack of understanding, ignorance, and sometimes just plain evil divides us. Our divisions are on display when we diminish or deny someone's agency; when we disregard or disrespect someone's intelligence; or when we figuratively or literally take the breath away of another living person by being so focused on our own agenda that we belittle or reduce another person to being inconsequential. That's what put the knee on George Floyd's neck and choked the life out of him, and that what puts the proverbial knee on the neck of persons of color, women, immigrants, the LGBTQ community and people who are seen or deemed as other or expendable.

Jesus' breath was snuffed out because he did not fit the government or religious structures of his day...he was not about business as usual. But just as Jesus promised to be raised from the dead and to send the Holy Spirit to abide with and within the people of God, Jesus also promised to bring all of God's people back into relationship with God and one another. And so, after his resurrection, Jesus sent word to his disciples that he would meet them in Galilee on the mountain.

Mountaintop experiences were not new to Jesus' followers. They were well-aware of the ancient stories of Moses ascending and descending Mt. Sinai communing with God. They had watched Jesus go up the mountain to pray. Jesus delivered the Beatitudes on the top of the mount. It was on a mountaintop that Jesus was transfigured. Jesus was crucified on the mount of Golgotha, and his body was buried in the tomb carved out of a mountain. So, the disciples met Jesus on the unidentified mountain to receive their

marching orders to go out into the street, to go out to all the nations. Or more appropriately interpreted as go to the Gentiles, to all people, period, point blank. And they were told that they were going out under the earthly and heavenly authority of the risen Christ.

It is under the authority of the risen Christ that we are authorized to point out injustice everywhere and to work for equity and equality at all times and under every circumstance. It is under the authority of the risen Christ that we are authorized to speak truth to power and to act on that truth. It is under the authority of the risen Christ that we have the responsibility to care for the least, the lost, and the left behind—to feed the hungry, to care for the sick, to lift up the down trodden, to use societal privilege and perceived power to advocate and accompany everyone whose breath has been restrained or choked out of them.

It is under the authority of the risen Christ that we have the authority to take back the streets where the crimes of humanity, injustice, oppression, and the wonton use of unbridled power are perpetrated—not by repaying violence with violence, but praying for those who would do evil, and by exercising our civic right and duty to vote. To vote into office individuals who will govern and lead with integrity, intelligence, humility and wisdom. That right and responsibility is what so many of my ancestors fought and died for.

Jesus told his disciples, go out to all the nations and make disciples of all people, 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. Now, as a pastor in the reformed tradition, I would be remiss if I did not share that today is Trinity Sunday. The Sunday we specifically acknowledge the triune God, the three in one personage of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am also obligated to tell you that the author of the Gospel of Matthew did not sit down to provide us with a theological doctrine on the mystery of the Godhead.

The writer of Matthew was conveying to those who had ears to hear that they and we, have been given authority and power in the name of God the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit to go out into the streets to not only cast out unclean spirits, heal the sick, and proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near (Matt. 10:1, 7). Now our authority has been expanded to make disciples of all people, baptizing and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus Christ had commanded. One commentator states:

The doctrine of the Trinity was not dreamed up in a theological think tank but was articulated by actual worshiping and serving Christians who, under stress and in the face of questions and challenges, were sweating it out to say with clarity why they were willing to live a life that looked foolish to others, caring for widows and orphans, suffering persecution, and spilling their own blood—all of it for the wild notion that the Spirit had gathered them into the life of the God, who in Christ was making peace with the world. Matthew's challenge was not, how do the persons

of the Godhead relate to each other, but how can we get the provincial and timid followers of Jesus of Nazareth to venture out into the frightening world with the gospel? (Thomas G. Long, *Feasting on the Word*)

The challenge and charge remain the same. How do we, finite and fallible, imperfect and sometimes culpable people of God to go out into the streets to make disciples, teaching them, and being ever mindful ourselves of the commands of God? It is only with, through and by the same power that was available to Jesus. The power of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Commentator Thomas Long states: "The work of the church cannot be taken up unless it is true that 'all authority' does not belong to the church or its resources but comes from God's wild investment in Jesus the Son and the willingness of the Son to be present always to the church in the Spirit."

God's wild investment of Jesus and the Spirit gives us the power and the authority to first examine ourselves to ensure that as much as it is possible, we are not the choking the breath out of others by denying them the ability to exercise and share their God-given gifts and talents with us; to ensure that we are not guilty of implicit bias or unintentionally silencing others. We are called to examine ourselves to ensure that our motives are pure and just, that we are not promoting some and undermining others; and to ensure that we are not making the world unsafe for anyone created in God's image. Only after we have examined ourselves, we can go out into the streets, and in the words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

There are times when our words ring hollow and fall on deaf ears because we are talking loud yet saying nothing. The spirit of God is best exhibited in our actions and by how we walk in the world. When we show up to accompany an immigrant who has a desire to learn our language, to work to provide food and shelter for their family; when we donate to worthy causes; when we ensure that all voices and people have been heard; when we show up to mentor a young person or single parent who needs someone to encourage them; when we show up at protests and vigils to demand that no other person of color be gunned or knocked down, trampled over or gassed by those sworn to protect and serve; when we show up to accompany and advocate for the marginalized; when we show up and express our righteous indignation over policies and practices that are contrary to the commands of God, then we are rightly exercising the power and authority given us.

And by the way, just as the disciples worshiped the risen Christ, and some doubted, we are not called to be "sinlessly" absolute, or to get it right all the time. There will be times when the strong will carry the infirmities and burdens of the weak. There will be times when we become weary in well doing. There will be times when we doubt that God has called us for such a time as this. There will be times when people, situations and the world appear to be so out of control that we doubt that God is in control. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he wrote:

“God’s grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-11)

Thomas Long says: “The expectation was never that we would go out in our own power and authority, but that we would just show up and the Spirit of God would be with us every day.” Jesus’ words confirm and assure us – “Remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus has not given up nor abandoned his authority or power, nor has Jesus forgotten his commitment to be with us each and every day to the end of the age. So, we go out into the streets and stand for all that is right and just and equitable.

In the words of the gospel song of old, “I don’t feel no ways tired, come too far from where I started from. Nobody told me the road would be easy, but I don’t believe God brought me this far to leave me.” God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has created us to a righteous people, breathed the breath of life into us, goes before us and is with us, and always will be.

Amen.