

200830s13aP

“Keep Hope Alive”

The United Methodist Church of Geneva

Exodus 3:1-15

August 30, 2020

Rev. Mary Gay McKinney

ST. MARK 16:1-6

Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Special thanks to the Rev. Jessie Jackson. I borrowed his famous phrase for a title to my message today. “Keep Hope Alive!”

In the early ‘60’s two men were travelling with their families through Mississippi and Louisiana. One of them, of modest means, had saved money to visit family in Texas. Along the old US highway 80 they stopped for the night at a modestly priced motel. The desk clerk treated the man with the utmost respect. “Sign here, sir. We’re happy to have you and your family with us for the night.” The daughter enjoyed the pool out front before and after a delicious meal at a nearby restaurant. All in all, the experience especially for the young daughter, was enjoyable and memorable.

A second man also travelled along this road that year. A man of means and fame. He had money for the best wherever they stopped. He, his family and others travelling with him had made a reservation at the Holiday Inn on the north side of the city. Upon arrival the clerk THERE told this well to do man he needed to move on and suggested a different motel in a certain section of town. When the man protested his wife pulled on his arm and whispered, “They’ll kill you. Now let’s go.” Upon arrival at the recommended motel the police were waiting to arrest him for disturbing the peace at the Holiday Inn. He went to jail.

The first and pleasant situation involved my father, a white man. The second situation as you might have guessed, involved a black man. That man was Sam Cooke.

Sam Cooke was a musician. Some say he is the father of soul. Sam Cooke had made good. His music was of love and the intimacies enjoyed between man and woman. Today we would call him a crossover musician. He had more than one constituency. Many whites, even those who shared the biases of the desk clerk at the holiday inn, loved his music on the radio and bought it. The night in jail demoralized Sam. He was and embarrassed. And the jail was not a safe place for a black man. Maybe in the dead of that night words and music began to come. But what might that song do for his career? When Billie Holliday of earlier fame recorded "Strange Fruit," a mournful song about the lynching of black men and women, her popularity had suffered with whites and blacks.

He wrote it anyway, and placed it in the hands of a musician of the caliber of our music director Scott Stevenson. Scott, thank you for putting this "songs of protest series together for us and gathering these amazing musicians to play and sing them for us. Sam Cooke's arranger was Rene Hall. He scored it for full orchestra. Sam recorded the vocals as the orchestra played. He sang it before a live audience only once. Perhaps it was a sacred song of painful memory, a turning point for courage and conviction. The song? "A Change is Gonna Come."

Change can be a slow process. The children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. How long, O Lord, must this continue? And then came Moses, a runaway fellow under the protection of Jethro, remembering little if anything of the God of his ancestors, the stories no longer being much told amidst hopelessness. And then that God came to

him, spoke to him, called him to lead his people from enslavement to a land brimming with promise. It took a while to convince Moses that he could be a man of courage and conviction. He returned to his people for the hard work of change, of liberation.

Change can be quick, like the change the treatment by a desk clerk and the police and a night in jail made in Sam Cooke. THAT'S the change women found when they entered the tomb where our Lord Jesus was supposed to be lying dead. When a young man vows that Jesus is not dead but is alive with plans to meet up with them they are no longer mourners with dashed dreams. Hope has come alive, just as Jesus promised. He is risen. Nothing can ever be the same.

Change has come, and change is gonna come. That's for sure and as certain as night turns to day. Will it be a long time coming, or overnight or somehow, somewhere in between? We're in change and we're changing this very moment. Just as we think spotlights on police shootings of unarmed black men will cause a stop to this horror, another black man, Jacob Blake, is paralyzed because a police officer shot him in the back 7 times. The problems we face loom large and are populated with senseless tragedy. We're tempted to descend into futility. Listen to the lyrics from 50's song. "It is better to light just one little candle than to stumble in the dark." Bobby Kennedy put it this way, "Few of us will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can change a small part of it." We are, he says, "tiny ripples of hope." Let me remind you that you are one of the ripples, and even more, you are living water. That's what Jesus has made you. You are gentle dew in this dry and weary land of ours. The living water you share in the form of a smile, a kind word, a commitment to courage makes a greater difference than any of us can imagine. Such is

who we are in the employ of our great God! Change is all around us. With the courage and conviction Moses, the courage and conviction of the women who told a strange and bountiful story of the resurrection of our Lord, the courage and conviction of Sam Cooke to sing from his heart, with that kind of courage and conviction, what story will you share? What song will you sing? Fear not to light the candle, to sing the song, to let living water ripple out from YOUR soul. For God's sake, keep hope alive!

BENEDICTION:

Gentle people, fear not to light the candle,
to sing your song,
to let the kind of love Jesus loves with flow freely from your heart.
Keep hope alive!