

Sermon Date: January 10, 2021
Sermon Title: “God’s Victory Over Violence”
Biblical Passage: Matthew 11: 7-15

Passage Summary & Background

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’ ^[a]

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, ^[b] and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Pastor Warnock chose to “shine the sermon spotlight” on verse 12, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, ^[b] and violent people have been raiding it.” The good news is the Kingdom of Heaven is here. The bad news is it suffers violence. The violent are trying to take the Kingdom by force, trying to take what God intends for all of God’s children by force. That’s the irony, the tension, the paradox of this text and in our world.

Sermon Points

When John the Baptist came on the scene, there was the feeling that God was up to something; a time of transition, a time of inflection, a turning point. It was not an ordinary time and John was no ordinary man. He was a truth telling trouble maker, a penetrating prophet with a knack for getting under the skin of those in power.

Over the last year into the early days of this New Year, people recognize **God is up to something**. As we have lived this past year we have to recognize, it has been a time of transition. Our experience with sickness exploding by the COVID-19 pandemic, our political struggles, and our fights for truth and justice have brought us to a new emergence. Like weeds shaken in the wind we’ve emerged to confront a battle.

The Bible teaches us John the Baptist provided a light unto the path of righteousness promoting the Kingdom of God and his son, Jesus Christ. John's truth telling convicted the powerful and subsequently threaten his own life. Telling the truth can get you in trouble, but there can be no transformation without truth. We cannot change until we confront or are confronted by the sickness of our own situation.

Similar to the days of John we have to come to a turning point, we must confront ourselves and the events around us. John was a kind of spiritual doctor who mastered the art of diagnosis. He revealed certain truths so that those he encountered could be set free. John was trying to speak truth to power on behalf of the God who loves us into freedom and frees us into loving. Therefore, we must embrace "the truth" so that it can set us free.

God's dream for the world is that all of us experience freedom, that all of God's children will be fed, educated and have access to an abundant life. But the violent are trying to take the Kingdom by force. The recent victory of two new Democratic Senators (the first African American pastor and a young Jewish man, the son of an immigrant) in the state of Georgia is a glimpse of God's vision, a glimpse of God's glory. The old order is slipping away and sometimes it responds violently and desperately.

The insurrection at the United States Capital, along with the proliferation of hate groups across our nation and the world is evidence that the old order is fighting back. But recognize that we didn't see in that moment, the emergence of violence – it was already there because there is more than one way to be violent

Ways in Which the Violence is Still/Already Here:

1. Violence of Prejudice & Fear: your words can be violent, the difference between the way the insurrectionists were handled with kid gloves but the peaceful BLM protestors were met with brute force. We are all we've got so we have to resist this type of violence
2. Poverty: the minimum wage in 2020 had less buying power then it did in 1968, a failure to recognize in God's world there's enough for all of God's children. There is no poverty of possibility; there is a poverty of moral imagination.
3. Violence of Our Politics: demonizing the folk who don't share your point of view, politics of personal destruction

Violence in this world is real but violence does not have the last word.

Yes, God is up to something!

Reflection Questions

1. Describe what does a free person looks like?
2. Share a time when you experienced any of the 3 types of violence above
3. Why is truth required on order to have transformation?
4. What are the building blocks of our common humanity?
5. What are you willing to do to stand by truth?