

Sunday, February 9, 2014
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “Building the Beloved Community”

This week I came upon a church mission statement that had a definition of worship that I hadn't seen before.

In part it said:

“Worship” meaning literally ‘to shape that which is of worth,’ is the center of our congregational life. We gather together to shape meaning, to know reality and to nourish hope.”

For me, worship has always been defined in a more traditional way: as paying homage to, showing reverence for; a ceremonious gathering where we tend to our relationship with God.

I realized that I was thinking of worship as a time when we gather to honor what we already know, while this new definition was promoting a more active approach to our relationship with God.

This new definition, “to shape what is of worth” calls for a fluid, active type of faith.

It demands that we examine our lives and determine what is of worth.

To shape meaning, to know reality and to nourish hope communally takes an enormous amount of effort.

To do this well we have to pay close attention to what we believe and how we live that out.

This is indeed the work of the church.

We gather to be reminded of what is important, to reflect on our values and our priorities and to empower one another to carry those values out into the world – to build God's kingdom.

This, however, will be different for each and every one of us.

Each person's reality, each person's hope, is going to be dependent on their own experiences.

What we do in a worship setting, is remember and reflect how God has interacted with us throughout time.

Scripture attests to the varied ways that God has come into people's lives and created meaning and worth.

Today's presentation has given us an opportunity to glimpse into the lives of these young men, to be reminded of the importance of listening and honoring each person's story.

We have also been reminded of the words of two of the prophets of our lifetime.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pete Seeger were both individuals who were unafraid to speak truth to power.

They chose different venues, but their call for peace and justice was the same.

They each used the gifts that God had given them to draw attention to the importance of building the beloved community.

They were both masters at shaping meaning and creating hope.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was and is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth.

He presented the vision of a Beloved Community where poverty, hunger and homelessness would not be tolerated because international standards of human decency would not allow it.

Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice would be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.

Dr. King shaped meaning out of mutual respect for one another and was courageous in defining reality while he nourished hope with his vision.

He truly believed that in The Beloved Community international disputes would be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power.

Love and trust could triumph over fear and hatred.

Peace with justice would prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict.

Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience.

But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence.

No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence.

And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

The core value of the quest for Dr. King's Beloved Community was 'agape love' which he described as "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all," an "overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative"... "the love of God operating in the human heart."

He said that "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both..."

Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community.”

Dr. King’s vision resounds with his Christian faith.

His words are Jesus’ words.

His beliefs are Jesus’ beliefs.

We set time aside to honor Dr. King each year for the same reasons that we set time aside to worship God each week.

We need to be reminded of what is important in our lives, what has meaning, what has worth.

When you come to worship, come with an open heart and an open mind.

Come to be molded and remolded into a disciple of Christ.

Madeleine L'Engle rightly proclaimed "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

My friends, we are that light.

Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine