

Proper 14a: 8/13/17
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*After he dismissed the crowds,
Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. Amen.*

Last Sunday I preached on the importance of having a regular period of intentional quiet time. Stopping the outer-noise of our busy-ness, our gadgets long enough to break our routines, go into a deeper place, and spend a few blessed moments *doing absolutely nothing*. Nothing. Except breathing and being. Just clear the decks of our lives long enough to see the world more clearly, and sense God's presence with us in the tumult. We even practiced a few moments of quiet here together.

That appeared to strike something of a chord last week. Little did we know how much more urgent it would become this week in the face of yesterday's KKK/white supremacy/neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, VA.

Now more than ever we need to see the world and our place in it, clearly. Now more than ever our country needs us to be very clear -- not only in our condemnation of racism, anti-Semitism, and violence, but in the way we go about condemning it.

We cannot stay quiet. But the irony is that we must steep ourselves in prayerful quiet in order to speak out faithfully.

Look at today's gospel. Jesus dismisses the crowd in order to go to the mountain alone for peace and quiet and prayer. Jesus prays *before* the storm hits. Before the disciples call to him for help. Before he walks on the sea. Jesus takes his quiet calm with him into the center of the storm.

And that's what we're to be about too.
Letting the consistency of our quiet meditation add up
so it'll be there when we need it most.

After all, what was Peter's problem when he
climbed out of the boat that stormy night?
Instead of focusing on Jesus, he became distracted by the storm . . .
and began to sink.

We need dedicated quiet time in order to focus on Jesus.
How else will we see that he's there in the storm with us?
How else will we keep from sinking?
How else will we keep others from going under?

Surely, we're not to cower in fear or sit back comfortably,
but stand up *against* bullies and bigotry
and *for* peace and radical hospitality.
But how?

Well, if you saw coverage of yesterday's chaos,
you know we don't want to be those who throw bottles,
but who cast up prayers – including for those whose ideas we find repugnant.
We need to express our deeply held beliefs without alienating others,
but in order to convince and convert them.
We need to resist the urge to retaliate, even as we seek justice.

However much righteous anger we feel,
we never spout vitriol,
but always show love,
recognizing God's love even for those whose ideas and actions we abhor.

And for God's sake, we've got to actually *do* something,
timely and tangible.

That might mean increasing the good you do to spread God's love
in your corner of the world as a counterbalance to the evil.
It might mean sending money to help on the ground.

(Among other things, I think I'll send a donation to the Hillel Jewish Student Organization at UVA, as a sign of solidarity against the neo-Nazi's.)

Or, like the folks who gathered in St. Paul's Church, Charlottesville to sing and pray before going out to march, sometimes we need to put our bodies on the line.

And, yes, we need to come to terms with the true cost of the privileges we take for granted.

Figuring out the best way to do any of this isn't easy.
Working through our fears to do it anyway is even harder.

We need consistent quiet time with Jesus to help us face life's inevitable storms --
--whether a medical diagnosis, a broken relationship, or a horrific event like yesterday that makes you wonder if you know your own country.

We need to be ready for anything.
And we get ready like Jesus did –
dismissing life's demands long enough
for a few moments of prayerful quiet, every day.
My goodness, if scripture shows how much Jesus needed this
how dare we presume to get by with less?

So once again I say, let's give it a try here and how.
Those of you here last week will recognize my kitchen timer
which I set to help protect my quiet time.
For now we'll do just a couple moments,
but I'd love to see you try longer at home –
a full five minutes, then up to ten or fifteen or more.
And if your mind wanders (as it will)
remind yourself that you have a finite period of time
so you might as well make the most of it.

If you already do something like this, well then enjoy these bonus minutes.

So get comfortable, maybe put your palms up, on your lap or by your side,
in a position of openness or receptivity.

Sometimes just breathing deeply and appreciating every breath is enough.
Sometimes you might recite a mantra,
a simple phrase or word gently repeated.

For today I suggest we use what Jesus said to Peter out on the water:

“Take heart; It is I. Do not be afraid.”

Can we say it out-loud together now? *“Take heart; It is I. Do not be afraid.”*

[Two-three minutes of quiet time ended by timer.]

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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