

Welcome – Service of Remembrance (June 15, 2016)

Good evening. My name is Ned Allyn Parker and I have the great honor of being one of the pastors here. I welcome you to Seattle First Baptist Church on behalf of our entire community.

Welcome is something we take seriously in this church – especially in this sanctuary. We are a Welcoming and Affirming American Baptist Church – which means our LGBTQ siblings are welcome into full inclusion in our life, in our membership, and in our leadership here.

Welcome is something we take seriously.

By welcoming you, we recognize that you are arriving with your grief; you are arriving with your anger... you might be arriving feeling completely unsure about what's happening in your head or your heart at this moment – just that the whole world is unsettled and unsettling. By taking welcome seriously, we recognize that for the next hour this sanctuary becomes a sacred container for all of that grief, all of that anger, all of that uncertainty. So this sacred space is your sacred space.

Because welcoming ***is*** something we take seriously. I invite you to take it seriously, too.

It is the tradition of this community to begin services by welcoming one another with a sign of peace. So take it seriously, and share some peace with each other this evening by greeting those around you.

[People greet each other]

Confession

In the 23rd chapter of Matthew, we find Jesus addressing the religious leaders of his time.

Beginning with verse 13, in the Inclusive Bible, Jesus says, *“Woe to you religious scholars, you frauds! You shut the doors of heaven’s kingdom in people’s faces, neither entering yourselves, nor allowing others to enter who want to.*

“Woe to you religious scholars, you frauds! You go on with prayer for show, all the while devouring the only security that widows have – their houses; you therefore will be given the greater punishment!

“Woe to you, religious scholars: You condemn the dance clubs – the only true sanctuaries our children have because you stand at the steps of your own houses of worship and declare, ‘We must love the sinner and hate the sin.’

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem – you murder the prophets, and you stone those sent to you! Oh how often I have yearned to gather you together, like a hen gathering her chicks under her wings! But you would have none of it. Therefore, your house is being left to you – abandoned.

“Oh America, America – tears and blood run in a confluence of rivers through your streets.

When will you learn?

The people are crying out.

Right now.

The people are crying out. They have names and faces. They are beautiful and beloved. And they

cry for help.

Can you hear them?

My God.

My God. My God, their cry is deafening.

And so, too, is the silence that follows their cries.

“I tell you,” Jesus says, “you will not see me again until you are able to say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God.”

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We have been here before. We’ve lifted thoughts and prayers, which have eventually gone silent. We’ve lit candles, which have eventually burned out. We’ve exposed our hearts, but eventually hid behind the scar tissue within. Nothing seems to change. Everything stays the same; the only things made new are the names on the lists we create to remember those who have been slain.

At what point will we raise the alarm that our mourning has become commonplace?

We know that Jesus mourned; he wept. We also know Jesus spoke up, called people out, held authorities accountable, and took action. This doesn’t mean he loved any less – it means he recognized love as an action verb. Sometimes loving your neighbor means speaking up despite your own discomfort.

Unable to allow mourning to become common – to come and go without question – we recognize this moment as something new. This is, what we call in the church, a kairos moment.

A holy time of change. It has to be.

We confess we haven't done more before now. We confess that our prayers for change and our spoken grief and our echoing hymns of hope have ended up clanging as hollow gongs - - when we fail to initiate changes that would insure we don't find ourselves in services like this again.

As I said at the opening of our service, *we* are a Welcoming and Affirming American Baptist Church. And as an American Baptist Church, we confess that we are part of a denomination that seemed unable or – perhaps more *heartbreakingly* – *unwilling* to use the words queer, gay, lesbian, transgender, or the term “LGBTQ community” or even to give identity to the Latino/Latina population, when releasing the recent public statement about the massacre in Orlando. This is unacceptable.

We confess... in order to be attentive to those places in our lives where we fall short.

Confession is not enough, though confession reminds us that there are times we must hold ourselves accountable. Confession should compel us to respond to that which we must confess, or it's just morbid bragging.

This is a Kairos moment, a sacred moment in time when the love inherent in our faith compels us to respond in ways that actually make our world somehow better.

In the gospels Jesus calls out the religious leaders of his day. We hear his admonition as a call to action. He is an instigator, an initiator. He is emotional, and empathetic.

He recognizes the faces of neighbors and he acknowledges them. Action.

He recognizes friends and calls them by name. Action.

He recognizes injustice and he speaks up. Action.

He recognizes brokenness and he heals. Action.

He recognizes fear and he prays. Action.

He recognizes inequity and he overturns money tables in the temple. Action.

He sees one of his own disciples strike out with a sword to do violence and stays his hand saying, “ENOUGH!” Action.

He recognizes where love is absent and he fills the void left by that absence with his very life.
Action. Action Action.

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In the gospel narratives, he is gentle. He is angry.

Through his example, perhaps we might recognize that allowing ourselves to be **both** gentle **and** angry creates space within to love in justice-seeking ways...

...creates space and **inspiration** for action.

May it be so.