

I desire a better country.

Yes, I desire a heavenly one. But, right now, I want heaven on earth.

Right now. Here.

Right now! I want a country that doesn't make it possible to kill its children.

Right now! I want a country that upholds the inspiration of the Declaration of Independence. We hold these truths to be self-evident... (that we) are endowed by our Creator certain inalienable rights. That among these are LIFE, LIBERTY, and the PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. (not verbatim)

And, right now, I'm exhausted at the prospect of the work that needs to be done to right this ship.

The audience of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews was exhausted too. He addressed this sermon (it's not really a letter) to a group of people who had had it!

They had been discriminated against, bullied, treated as less-than-human by their non-Christian neighbors. “The Preacher,” as he is described by Professor Thomas Long, knew he needed to deliver something to his flock to keep them engaged, or else they were going to walk.

So what does The Preacher do to the Hebrews do? He doesn’t wow them with a group dynamics exercise. He doesn’t switch up the worship service. He doesn’t call a congregational meeting. Nope. None of that.

He preaches Christ crucified, died, and risen. He preaches the hope that faithful Christians can count on.

What an amazing, even revolutionary, concept. We are asking why we are where we are and what are we doing in this handbasket. This is when we need to be reminded that we have and can trust the promises of God for peace, justice, mercy, and salvation.

Therefore, if you assumed at the beginning that this was going to be a sermon about how to be politically active about a certain issue, you are mistaken. This is a sermon about how we need a step back into something theologically conservative. Yes. I said it. Conservative.

Friends, we need to be Christians: People who are committed to following the teachings of Jesus. We need to be people who alternate prayer, meditation, and beauty with tending the sick, comforting the bereaved, and speaking for those who have no voice.

While I was with Bishop Budde Tuesday morning in front of Senator McConnell's office, one of my colleagues noted that African-American author Frederick Douglass wrote "I prayed to God for freedom for years. Then it occurred to me that I had been given feet."

We've all been given theological feet. As your chief spiritual director, I urgently bid you to walk as Christian people like you have never walked before.

It is time to lay down name-calling. It is time to stop reacting to hate with more hate. I am tired of hearing and listening to people wishing death and destruction on the people with whom they disagree. I'm sick of those ugly voices creeping into my own brain. If I'm sick of it, imagine how sick God is of it.

I desire a better country. Doing my part includes voting and writing letters and being educated about the issues. Most of all, it means being the Christian I purport to be.

A better country requires that those of us who identify as Christian people need to retreat, repent, and then actively live out those promises we made to each other and God in baptism. This requires courage, hope, and faith. For we will undoubtedly become strangers and foreigners to the powers and principalities, just like the Hebrews did. Just like Jesus did.

Following the Way of Jesus is countercultural. It does not see meaning in the accumulation of possessions. It sees meaning in our relationship with God through our relationship with Jesus. It sees meaning in the relationships required of us with our fellow travelers.

Those along the way with us are cisgender, queer, native peoples, immigrant peoples, white/blue/pink collar workers, disabled and abled, and every shade of flesh. Diversity is the hallmark of our God. We must learn to see Christ in all persons. For we have no hope of respecting their human dignity if we don't acknowledge their internal divinity.

Following the Way of Jesus requires us to loosen our hold on those labels the world uses to define us (and we use to define each other). The only label necessary is that we are ALL beloved children of God. Yep. Even that person.

If there is anything I believe right now, it's that our world needs the love of Jesus.

I believe that we need to use our feet, our hands, our voices to make that love known. We must become messengers of the government of God. That means calling out our leaders when they violate human dignity. It means actively seeking the face of Christ in those with whom we vehemently disagree.

Most of all, it requires us to confront hate with love.

I desire a better country.

Don't you?

## Consulted resources

Thomas Long, Hebrews/Interpretation series

John C. Shelley, Religion Professor at Furman University in South Carolina, Feasting on the Word, pg. 330

Marion Soards, NT Professor at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary in Kentucky , Feasting on the Word pg. 331, 333