How do we encounter the Other? Can we adapt and bridge in this time of challenging political division and change? What happens when a Chaplain encounters something different, strange or challenging?

Program

PRELUDE “Simple Gifts” arr. Aaron Copland (1900-1990) Hymn #16 “Tis a Gift to Be Simple” Lisi Youngberg, soprano, Ricklen Nobis, piano
Congregation

WELCOME Paula Eichbauer and Mac Lund

OPENING WORDS Rev. John Cooper

***OPENING SONG #318 “We Would Be One”

*** CHALICE LIGHTING Liz Martin

We light this chalice for the warmth of love, for the light of truth, and for the energy of action.

WHY I'M HERE Stephen Carter

STORY FOR ALL AGES

CHILDREN’S BENEDICTION

(Sung) Go now in peace, Go now in peace, May the spirit of Love surround you, Everywhere, everywhere you may go

EMBRACING MEDITATION Rev. John Cooper

HYMN #123 “Spirit of Life”

OFFERING WORDS Paula Eichbauer - We are this church; we are its hands, its heart, its voice. Together we share the wealth of this community, and sustain it with our gifts.

Our visitors are our guests. Please feel no obligation to contribute to the offering.

Our worship service offering split recipient for January and February is the Oceti Sakowin Camp, a unified encampment of Water Protectors (Announcement has more info)

OFFERTORY “You’ll Never Walk Alone” Rodgers and Hammerstein (“Carousel” – 1945) Lisi Youngberg, Ricklen Nobis

RESPONSIVE READING #584 “A Network of Mutuality” Denna Wright (INCORRECT Judith Mahr)


***CLOSING SONG #407 “We’re Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table”

BENEDICTION Rev. John Cooper

POSTLUDE “Imagine” John Lennon (1940-1980) Lisi Youngberg, Ricklen Nobis

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS Rev. John Cooper

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE
Encountering Change: A Chaplain’s Perspective
Rev. John D. Cooper

Sermon
Welcome. My name is Reverend John Cooper

I am a long-time member of this community
And I work as a hospital chaplain at the Huntsman Cancer Hospital
Up on the University of Utah campus
This congregation, my home, has been kind enough
To endorse my work at the Huntsman as an affiliated ministry
And to invite me, on occasion, like today, to share what I have learned in that ministry

Well, we have had quite a week haven’t we people?
I find it hard not to feel hopeless after a week like this, do you?
Is anyone struggling not to feel hopeless? I know I am…
Have you seen this immigration order? Can you believe this?
Legal residents of the US, holding permanent visas
Stopped and detained at airports while trying to get home based only upon
Their nationality and potential (not even verified) belief system?
That is such a clear violation of civil and human rights.
It is hard not to be terrified and lose hope in the face of such insensitive, badly informed and poorly planned move by our leadership.

I tell you this though.
We cannot despair - We cannot let go - And we cannot give up.
We have to be engaged. We have to speak up.
And something else that I think we need to do
We have to learn to engage with our fellow citizens who voted for this government
I know, I know that seems impossible

Encountering Change: A Chaplain’s Perspective, SVUUS, Jan 29, 2017
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John D. Cooper
But I think we have to do it, because even if he did not win the popular vote
This guy, who thinks it’s ok to ban people from coming home
Because of where they were born
Won enough of the vote that we have to learn to listen to and engage one another in new ways

One of the things that I was taught as a chaplain
Was to engage the Other, the Stranger
As a sacred guest

There is a story I like to tell at hospital orientation
There’s this guy, hanging out under a tree in the desert
He’s older, retired, his wife is at home, and he was under the tree
And these strangers walked up.
He could smell them first, because they have been walking for so many days
After he smelled them, he heard their feet on the sands
And when they arrive he said to them
Oh man, you guys have to come to my house
You look exhausted…and you smell…well…
We’ll get you cleaned up, wash your feet, get you good food
When he got back to his house, his wife and he washed their feet
Killed the best of their livestock, and made a great feast
And the next morning, rested, fed, refreshed and clean
The travelers said to the couple
We will bless you. You will have a child.
The woman laughed, because I said they were older, she was 90 at the time
But it came to pass. The strangers said that they would be blessed with a child
Who wound found nations.
That story is from Genesis. It’s the story of Sarah and Abraham
It is the story of the origin for all Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
That is how I was taught to engage strangers as a chaplain
To try and bless them, welcome them, listen to them
And I think if we are going to mend our country
We have to learn to listen to our fellow citizens who voted for this man
Because there is something going on there that I know I do not understand!
And in the face of that misunderstanding, that unimaginable stranger
I struggle to find hope.

Now when I was in Seminary, at Iliff School of Theology
I had an opportunity to attend a small class group with the Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding
Dr. Harding was an associate of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr
And drafted some of his most famous speeches

Rev. Dr. Harding came to class that day to talk about
Systems of colonization, marginalization, exploitation and empire
Ideas that I think connect to what is happening right now
Colonization is the process by which a more privileged people
Marginalizes and exploits a less privileged people to maintain their privilege
Class conversation was about the expansion of the Christian church among native Americans
But we could also look at America’s foreign policy and economics today
For example, we move into middle eastern society
Which has less financial, social and political resources than our own
Partner with a few people to withdraw the crude oil we need
Help elevate our partners above the other local people
Leverage our partners to help keep the system in place to get the cheapest crude oil
Help create tiers of privilege we can exploit to keep control
It’s the same economic system that built the empires of Egypt and Rome
To help keep the system in place, over many years you have to distract the marginalized
With what the Romans used to call “Bread and Circuses”
Spread controversial stories, feed the people with base bread, entertain them with circuses
Sound at all familiar?

We were all talking about this age-old economic system of exploitation and empire
The Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding and my fellow students
Talking about how all of us contribute to it and benefit from it
How embedded into our world it is, but how it also violates human rights
The farther you get from the center of privilege, the fewer rights you have
For example, one marginalized layer in the system today is the working class
The ones who are going to be further marginalized by looser restrictions on health insurance
And one of the tricks of the system is that you get the less marginalized
To oppress the more marginalized
For example, you might get healthy blue collar workers
To advocate for less restrictions on health insurance
Because you convince them that the “sick people” are taking advantage of them
When really, it’s the wealthiest people at the center of privilege
Taking advantage of everyone
Sound familiar?

During this conversation, I made a comment. Not a question. More of a statement. I said that in the face of over 4000 years of uninterrupted oppression and exploitation, I felt a certain hopelessness. Through such systems of empire, I felt a certain hopelessness. I mean how could we hope to change thousands of years of cultural inheritance?

This wizened old civil rights leader paused and looked at me. And I will never, ever forget what he said. Not just for the words he spoke. But because of the gravitas, and the power, with which he said them. He said to me: “John, I do not believe that we have the luxury of hopelessness.”

When I heard those words I realized I was talking about hopelessness. To a man who was born in Harlem in the early 1930’s. He went to public school in New York, as a black man in the 1940’s. Who went on to become one of the movers and shakers of the civil rights movement. That man who said to me “John, I do not believe the luxury of hopelessness” had so many more reasons to feel hopeless than I would ever know.

I have heard that sentence incessantly for the past week. Here, I will repeat it for you again. “John, I do not believe that WE have the LUXURY of hopelessness”
I tell you that although the Rev. Dr. Vincent Harding died later that year, in 2014
He has haunted me throughout this recent election and presidential transition
I heard his voice yesterday morning while reading the news
“John, I do not believe we have the luxury of hopelessness.”

When I sat down to write this sermon, opened the news
And I saw that Donald Trump had issued an executive order
An order
To close our borders to people solely based on their race, culture and birthplace.

In case you are unaware of this order:
It bans people from seven Muslim-majority nations: Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Iraq from crossing our border for the next 90 days
It makes exceptions for diplomats and members of international organizations
But it makes no exception for humanitarian purposes
The order requires the Department of Homeland Security to review other countries that maybe should be banned as well
It suspends the US refugee program for the next four months, suspending admission of all refugees for while Trump’s secretary reviews procedures, breaking our commitments to refugees already in the program.
The order bans all Syrian refugees indefinitely
It calls for new immigration screening procedures
Trump also called for religious testing, and established priority for Christian refugees
After reading carefully, I have a simple, but passionate response to this order
As a nation, as a people, we cannot bankrupt our goodness to try to buy our safety.
And I believe that this order, which breaks commitments to vulnerable refugees
And has detained people who held legal and permanent visas
Bankrupts our goodness to try to buy our safety.

I admit, that when I face an administration that could even imagine
That such an order would be morally, ethically and politically viable
That I feel a certain hopelessness
But I hear that voice before I can even get to that point
“John, I do not believe we have the luxury of hopelessness.”
And I realize that I must stay engaged
That I really do not have the luxury of being hopeless
And when I realize that I wonder
How do I engage with people who thought this leadership
Was going to be ok for us?
As a Chaplain, I am supposed to be good at welcoming the Stranger
But this is a Stranger that I struggle to know how to welcome

Trying to escape hopelessness, this week, I tried to turn to someone wiser than me.
Someone who walked longer, worked harder,
Welcomed more strangers than I can even imagine

Did you know that when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was in the Birmingham Jail
He developed the unusual practice of dialoguing with his white jailers?
Yes he did. His white jailers would come by
To explain why segregation was right and intermarriage wrong.
To tell him why he should not resist, not march, why he should not organize.
When his white jailers did that, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King would engage with them
He talked about it in his famous sermon, “The Drum Major Instinct”
Which he gave on February 4, 1968
King said that when he was in jail, he would always try to do a little converting:
“...the white wardens and all enjoyed coming around the cell to talk about the race problem.
And they were showing us where we were so wrong demonstrating. And they were showing us where segregation was so right. And they were showing us where intermarriage was so wrong. So I would get to preaching, and we would get to talking—calmly, because they wanted to talk about it. And then we got down one day to the point—that was the second or third day—to talk about where they lived, and how much they were earning.”
You hear that?
They were talking.
King was in dialogue with his white jailers
Not just preaching to them
He said he would get to preaching, but then he said
“We would get to talking,” he went on to say:
“And when those brothers told me what they were earning, I said, "Now, you know what? You ought to be marching with us. [laughter] You're just as poor as Negroes." And I said, "You are put in the position of supporting your oppressor, because through prejudice and blindness, you fail to see that the same forces that oppress Negroes in American society oppress poor white people. (Yes) And all you are living on is the satisfaction of your skin being white, and the drum major instinct of thinking that you are somebody big because you are white. And you're so poor you can't send your children to school. You ought to be out here marching with every one of us every time we have a march."
What I noticed listening to and reading his sermon, The Drum Major Instinct
Was that King found common ground with his white jailers
When he listened to them; that was when he learned about the common economic ground they shared.

Now King’s sermon, the Drum Major Instinct
Is based on scripture, like much of his work as a preacher
The scripture the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 10, verses 35 to 45

The Request of James and John

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

38 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

39 “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”


King’s point about this Drum Major Instinct is that all of us have it
We all have this urge, this impulse to be a little out in front of others
Have a little more than them, be a little bit better than them

I think that Donald Trump is like, a poster boy or something, for this Drum Major Instinct

King goes on to say, and this is relevant to what I see going on this week:

“And not only does this thing go into the racial struggle, it goes into the struggle between nations. And I would submit to you this morning that what is wrong in the world today is that the nations of the world are engaged in a bitter, colossal contest for supremacy. And if something doesn't happen to stop this trend, I'm sorely afraid that we won't be here to talk about Jesus Christ and about God and about brotherhood too many more years.”

Yes

I think we could say something similar about our latest immigration policy

Our latest immigration policy puts “Us” ahead of “Them”

It does not welcome the Stranger the way all Abrahamic faiths command

I want to encourage you to read this immigration policy directly.

Both the New York Times and CNN have published the full text

You can go to the sacred oracle at Google and type “Full Text of Trump’s Immigration”

And it will show you the full text of the executive order

I tell you that reading it, I did not find the arguments in the policy adequate

To justify closing our borders categorically to people because of their identity

Reading it is what made me recognize, that it bankrupts our goodness

To try to buy our safety.
And to me, it clearly seemed to say, following that Drum Major Instinct
“But we should be first.”
I encourage you to read it for yourself.

And do you know what Rev. King said about his government in the Drum Major Instinct?
“...we are drifting there because nations are caught up with the drum major instinct. "I must be first." "I must be supreme." "Our nation must rule the world." (Preach it) And I am sad to say that the nation in which we live is the supreme culprit. And I’m going to continue to say it to America, because I love this country too much to see the drift that it has taken.”

“God didn’t call America to do what she’s doing in the world now. God didn’t call America to engage in a senseless, unjust war as the war in Vietnam. And we are criminals in that war. We’ve committed more war crimes almost than any nation in the world, and I’m going to continue to say it. And we won't stop it because of our pride and our arrogance as a nation.”


That was nearly 50 years ago
But I think it deeply appropriate to what we face today.

So where do we go from here?
How do we get from this despair to hope?

Do you know how King found hope in his sermon?
He went back to the scripture.
He returned to the last few lines of the passage 10 Mark, 42 to 45

42 “Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever
wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”


In that phrase, Jesus redefines what it means to be great
Did you know that Jesus was so subversive, that he redefined things?
He was. Jesus was an activist.
If he were alive today.
I do not believe that Jesus would support this immigration order.

When they ask him “Hey teacher, how do we get to be great and powerful?”
Jesus said to his disciples, “You learn to serve others. The greatest among you will be the servant of all.”

King preached that Jesus did not just turn the world around on that statement
He turned one of our most fundamental instincts into a tool for goodness

That Drum Major Instinct, that desire to be first.
Yes, hold onto that. Keep that desire to be first Jesus said. Keep it strong
But be first in service, in generosity, be first in taking care of others.

And now I find that maybe I have a way of encountering the other that I can handle
I can be curious, very curious. And I can ask.
The way King asked his white jailers about their home, their income.

I can ask how we can be a Christian nation
When we pervert this Christin understanding of the Drum Major Instinct
From being great in service, to being great in protecting ourselves

I admit I am curious about how we make America great again
By closing our borders to refugees, to women and children
Who desperately need our service
When right there in scripture, pointed out by the leader of a civil rights movement
Of whom we are so proud of we made his birthday a national holiday
Right there,
It says that the way we become great is by serving those among us who are most in need.
How does this policy embody that definition of greatness?
Because I just can’t see how that works.
And I know, that since people have voted for this, have endorsed it
Somebody out there sees something I don’t.
I am intensely, passionately even deadly curious about that.

Ironically King ends his sermon talking about his own eulogy
It was only about a month later that he was shot, on April 4, 1968
I think that his call remains a call we need to hear today
King said that he wanted people to say that he tried to give his life serving others
That he tried to love people
That he tried to be right on the war question
That he tried to feed the hungry, clothe those who are naked
And That he tried to love and serve humanity.
King said, “Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. (Amen) Say that I was a drum major for peace. (Yes) I was a drum major for...
righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. *(Yes)* I won’t have any money to leave behind. I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. *(Amen)* And that’s all I want to say.”


Wow, I want people to say those things about me too
Don’t you?
Because if you do
Then I do not believe we have the luxury of hopelessness
And I do not believe we have the privilege of disengaging
I do not believe we get to close our ears
To those Americans who voted for this regime

I think that like King, we need to learn to engage our jailers
We need to figure out where we share common ground
Because I know that right now, I don’t know where that ground is
And that is on me. I have mocked them, made fun of them, dismissed them
I have not behaved like the chaplain that I want to be
And welcomed them in as blessed Strangers, to hear what they see
To understand where they are.

You know that King never abandoned his principles inviting his jailers to tell him
What things were like for them, he found a way to engage in polite disagreement
And I am feeling called to figure out how to do that too
Now, I want to close by sharing two things with you.

First, is that while I was writing about struggling not to lose hope
I saw a publication by the ACLU that it had gone to a court
To prevent the deportation of detainees impacted by the new executive immigration order
And the court had stayed the deportation
Maybe, just maybe, that can offer you a glimmer of hope
The hope that when rights are threatened, even by the executive branch, our court system can work to protect those rights

The second closing thought is this
And I promise to you I have no idea what this means
But I offer that burning curiosity
I shared the link to King’s Drum Major Instinct sermon on Facebook this week
And to my amazement, the first people to like my link
Were the Trump supporters
That I have been arguing with
All week
“John, I do not believe we have the luxury of hopelessness.”
Thank you.

Benediction
Do we have the letter box?
Because we have a new practice in this congregation.
Letter writing
So, if you want a way to engage
Encountering Change: A Chaplain’s Perspective
Rev. John D. Cooper

Somewhere around here, there are pens and paper
And you can write Donald Trump. Do you know his address? I think its like 1600 Pennsylvania avenue or something.
Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

You can write a letter today asking for a repeal of this immigration policy.
You can also write an email at https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact
Of course, the Trump White House has shut down the citizen’s comment phone line
So you can’t call that – but do suggest maybe you send a Twitter or Facebook message

Or, perhaps if you are feeling Christlike, and subversive, and wanna turn something on its hear
Then I understand that the people who did the Bearnie Sanders campaign
Have started a website https://whitehouseinc.org/ that will connect you with reservation lines at Trump’s businesses, the ones that he’s being investigated for not divesting from. Their argument is that if Trump’s not fully divesting from his businesses, then it is reasonable to talk to his employees about public policy. I don’t know if I agree, but I leave that to you. Just, please, be civil to anyone who answers, they have to wrok one of Trump’s businesses.
But seriously no matter how you reach out – be polite and respectful. Make Dr. King proud. It has the benefit of making you more likely to be heard.

Now people of peace, go forth in action today.
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Websites Used in Research
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Harding
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/an-open-letter-to-my-friends-who-voted-for-trump_us_58231ad6e4b0102262411f09