

HOSEA 6:1-6

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us. He has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us and on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.

What shall I do with you, O Israel? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

I CORINTHIANS 5:6-8

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

BRIDGE BUILDERS

Hosea 6:1-6 I Corinthians 5:6-8

How in the world did we ever get ourselves into such a mess? In a recent poll, a full 80% of the American people agreed that our country is out of control. That's as close to a consensus among us on any subject you could possibly solicit opinions on. The spark that initially ignited the conflagration was the pandemic which caught most of the unsuspecting world by surprise. Only those we call "epidemiologists", were able to shrug their shoulders and say,

“I told you so.” They saw it coming.

Any pandemic, of course, will be devastating in its effect upon civilization. No country on the entire globe can escape massive infections. And the economic chaos it leaves in its wake punishes certain segments of populations much more than others—primarily those in which poverty and overcrowding are rampant and whose members are more likely to expose themselves in order to work to feed their families and who lack adequate health insurance which has led to a multitude of underlying health issues making them even more vulnerable to the virus’s devastation.

Statistics bear this out. But what should also be obvious to us is that the pandemic has thrown off the covers we have carefully used to hide from ourselves the factors underlying the inequalities which have led to this imbalance. Consider the parallel with a scene from the once popular movie, “Raiders of the Lost Ark”, starring Harrison Ford, when the top was removed from the discovered ark freeing the evil spirits trapped within it. There was no containing their power any longer. And now we have been exposed to our own shortcomings; namely white racism, greed, abject neglect of our neighbors and far too many episodes of police brutality. These are systemic problems that have been institutionalized in our society making them extremely difficult to alter.

Our scriptures for this morning reveal that these are not problems unique to our twenty-first century world. There are some interesting parallels between our current struggles and those Hosea speaks to in his own era, some 2100 years ago. His main concern was with Israel’s half-hearted relationship to God. While it was a largely prosperous time, dangers lurked on the horizon with the rise of the mighty Assyrian empire. There was a sort of pandemic, if you will, on the horizon and it was being ignored. The people had grown lazy in their worship and were risking God’s judgment. And their attitude seemed to be that if they got into trouble, they could quickly repent and God would consent to save them.

But God had grown frustrated with them: *What shall I do with you, O Israel? What*

shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early...I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. In other words, what God sought from them was faithfulness, not a once in awhile when it is convenient type of devotion or when they needed a quick fix. *Steadfast love and the knowledge of God* require constancy, persistence and right action. And I think we all understand that these are the essential ingredients of the spiritual life.

In our brief passage from Paul's letter to Corinth, we hear the same plea. Paul urges them to cleanse their hearts and to embrace the sacrifice that Christ has made on their behalf. This leaves no room for the errors of the past to be continually repeated. As he asks them, *Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?* Hasn't this been what the protests over the murders of George Floyd and numerous others have been about? The racism that began with the advent of slavery into our fledgling nation 400 years ago has leavened our entire culture with a poison, silently spreading like the pandemic. So Paul challenges them to *Clean out the old yeast of malice and evil that you may be a new batch, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

The sentiment expressed by Paul is similar to our old axiom that one bad apple rots the whole bushel. And haven't we seen a glaring example of this in the appalling violence we have all witnessed by a few policemen who are certainly not representative of all cops. However, what the actions of men like Derek Chauvin have brought to light is the culture embedded in police departments. The racism and lack of accountability for unwarranted violent acts particularly against people of color has been institutionalized by police contracts with their guarantees of qualified immunity. Chauvin had at least 18 public complaints against him...and he still had a job?

I have to confess that I have been embarrassingly naive about the extent of this. Sure, we all know of the incidents which have gained national attention, but what I witnessed with the assaults against peaceful protestors and members of the press corp in city after city has

shocked me into a new level of consciousness about the dangers black Americans face in their daily lives from the very people who are sworn to serve and protect them.

This comes as no surprise to the Black community. I did not know that the history of local policing began during slavery when groups of white men were organized into Slave Patrols whose mission was to hunt down escaped slaves and brutally beat and sometimes lynch them if caught. They also assisted the wealthy plantation owners who requested help in controlling rebellious slaves. After all, slaves were regarded as property and the entire southern economy would have collapsed without their labor. They were dehumanized and brutalized before they even arrived here. They didn't have a chance!

This was the original yeast and thanks to the countless videos which document this same police behavior in real time, we have witnessed the underlying poison that has been fermented by this yeast. Fortunately, however, we can all see the polls which reveal that white America is finally beginning to understand what the Black community has been telling us forever. The yeast is bad and it has leavened the whole batch of dough.

This is not going to be an easy fix and it will take at least a couple of generations; that is, if those who are working for real change gain enough political power to actually produce more than cosmetic results. The Civil Rights movement of the 60's did lead to significant gains in racial equality, but that was over a half century ago and many, many more steps need to be taken. We shall see.

We know this is going to be a process. Black poet and activist Maya Angelou characterized it perfectly when she wrote: "Do the best you can until you know better. And when you know better, do better." We have a lot to learn and the more we learn, the more cognizant we will be of what we have dismissed because it has not been our experience. As a white male, I have never felt threatened by a policeman. I have received a couple of speeding tickets (justly deserved), but on other occasions I have been let off with a warning and I have never been asked to step out of the car so they could look around inside. But that is not the

Black experience.

Let us aspire to be part of the new batch which is not contaminated with the yeast of malice and evil, but relishes sincerity and truth. Spiritual author L.R. Knost writes, "Here's to the bridge-builders, the hand-holders, the light-bringers...Look for them in this present darkness. Light your candle with their flame. And then go. Build bridges. Hold hands. Bring light to a dark and desperate world." In the Spirit of Christ, let us join the Bridge Builders.

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