

“Flourishing”

*Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
I Samuel 15:34-16:13 / Mark 4:26-34*

The Rev. Emily Krause Corzine
Associate Minister

June 17, 2018

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

Prayer for Illumination: Holy God, silence in us any voice by your own. May your Holy Spirit illumine these words and the scriptures and may our eyes be opened. Grant us courage for the living of our days. Amen.

Love Trumps Hate. Every Time.

At noon this past Friday, two hundred men, women and children (clergy and lay leaders) stood in the hot sun in front of Omar Elkhattab Mosque on along Riverview Drive here in Columbus. Our Muslim brothers and sisters came for the celebration of Eid, the end of the Holy Season of Ramadan. We gather from many faith traditions, to proclaim that we unite with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Faith and Public Life gathers us, because an Anti-Muslim, Anti-Gay, Anti-Abortion group from outside of Columbus planned a protest outside of the Mosque.

Working together with the leadership of the mosque, we gave silent and peaceful witness along the north side of the street while thirty men, women and children in red t-shirts and hats shouted verse after verse from scripture which supported their “Christian” views. Our witness on Friday assured those coming to celebrate Eid, could do so without the harassment of a group that messaged hate. We stood to say, “We are One Columbus.” One unifying message of God’s love and embrace

of all God's people. The overpowering message that hate has no place here.

For the better part of an hour, we stood opposed to the rhetoric, and the vitriol. Their voices got louder and louder. Our resolve got stronger. We shared God's love for our neighbors right here in Columbus. The hate group? They gave up and went on their way. They were probably met by others who shared the same message when they showed up on the corner of Third and Gay Streets for the LGBTQ Dance Party Friday afternoon.

Love Trumps Hate. Every Time.

The Hebrew Scripture this morning that Peter/Lynn read a few moments ago reminds us of God's support of the last and the forgotten, the weak and the vulnerable. In 1 Samuel, God rejects powerful king, Saul. God sends Samuel out to find a man named Jesse and anoint Israel's next king. God does not select the first son of Jesse, or the 2nd or the 7th, but God selects the youngest who was tending to the sheep in the field. The youngest son, David, looks like nobody important at all, so unimportant that his dad even overlooks him. David is anointed King. God's surprising choice is for the last and forgotten to be king.

In the Gospel reading from Mark 4, God's surprising choice suggests that the kingdom of God to be like a little mustard seed. The smallest of seeds grows up and becomes the mightiest of all shrubs. God's surprising choice here tends to favor the weak and overlooked.¹

There is no time like the present to call upon our faith to guide us in ways of courage and witness. In recent weeks, we've gained more knowledge of those who come to the United States in search of asylum, safety and peace. They are mothers and fathers. They are families with young children. They are unaccompanied minors. They journey to escape violence and abuse. They come to America's borders, with the hope of freedom and new life.

Instead of immigrants to the United States being welcomed with compassion and assistance along our country's borders, they are met with this administration's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy. This separates family members from one another placing them in holding facilities. This week, perhaps like many of you, I was paralyzed and sickened with the news stories and images that appeared with border patrol agents separating children from their parents.

¹ I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Brennan Breed, Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, for his Facebook post and reference to an article he wrote about "Love the Alien as Yourself": Trump's Refugee Ban and the Bible. www.Huffpost.com, January 31, 2018.

The unfolding crisis of immigrant families in The United States of America demands our full attention. As people of faith, we are witnessing a violation of human rights. This is precisely the kind of moral crisis that our faith can and must address.

Time and time again in scripture we hear the call to choose welcome, and for God's love that prevails over evil.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, God promises to be the defender of defenseless.

“Do not oppress an undocumented person; you know the heart of the undocumented, for you yourself are undocumented” (Exodus 23:9).

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord Your God” (Leviticus 19: 33-34; 24:22).

In the New Testament welcoming the vulnerable is welcoming Jesus himself. Not only is Jesus a descendent of a foreign refugee (Mt 1:5); he himself was a refugee in Egypt (Mt 2: 13-12). God is present especially for the vulnerable, including the needy stranger, and when you refuse them, you are refusing Jesus himself” (Matthew 25: 37-40, Hebrews 13:2).

This week, the United Church of Christ continued its overwhelming support of immigrants and refugees.

The national leadership of the United Church of Christ also issued a passionate pastoral letter urging congregations to act now by calling our representatives.

Here is church's letter.

“Friends, we again we stand at the brink of a moral precipice in our society and the question before us is will we choose to act in covenant with God on behalf of God's people or will we sacrifice our soul. The United Church of Christ has long been a supporter of migrant families seeking refuge within our borders from intolerable and unsafe living conditions in their homelands. As people of God committed to the sacredness of all creation and the sanctity of every life we are compelled to heed the cries of families now being violently torn apart at our borders for political expediency and profitability. Such violent acts are unnecessarily punitive and place at risk the physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and developmental stability of hundreds of families who now find themselves separated, caged, and commodified in a strange land.

All of our sacred texts, no matter the faith, identify the disregard of the humanity of the vulnerable as sin.

And God hears the cries of God's people. The plight of black and brown migrant families whose children are ripped from their care cannot be the policy of a civilized land. We've been here before. Our nation's history bears witness to a legacy of lost love. We separated the children of Native people from their families. We separated the children of enslaved people from their families. We separated the children of Japanese people from their families. Many of these families were never made whole again. This legacy of white supremacist ideology is idolatrous and leaves an indelible mark of evil that can only be redeemed by a conscious act of spiritual repentance and repair.

We must resist the evil of dehumanization enacted upon the vulnerable among us. The UCC condemns the dismantling of families, the criminalization of the quest for freedom, and the caging of those whose only crime is to seek shelter from harm. How we treat those who seek shelter in our midst is a direct reflection of how we treat God.”²

² www.ucc.org

It is appalling that this the way this Administration carries out their policies. It lacks empathy and a moral compass to treat children and families this way. It certainly is void of Christian values. It is not Christian to rip immigrant children away from the safety and security of family and detain children in redecorated shelters, or a converted big-box store housing 1500 preteen and teenage boy.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund, Senior Minister at First Congregational Church in Indianapolis wrote, “What about the emotional and psychological well-being of these children? Without access to parental or familial relationships, their growth is being harmed. Separating children from families without providing appropriate emotional and psychological attachments is a form of psychological and developmental torture.”³

Children, the most vulnerable among us, are in need of nurture and care. These children deserving of bedtime stories and hugs and smiles, need to be reunited with their families. The basic foundational building blocks of trust has been shattered by our nation’s hands. The disruptive effects of what physicians call “toxic stress” on their brains will be devastating.

³ Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund, First Congregational Church, Indianapolis, Facebook Post 6/16/2018.

America-this is us. And it is terrifying. Today we raise awareness for refugee justice. This Wednesday, June 20, is World Refugee Day. Please call your representatives in Congress. Call on them to keep families together. Make that an act of worship this week. The UCC letter is already on our Facebook page.

This is the time to uphold the biblical mandate for love, a preferential option for the poor, and lift our moral courage and speak out against these atrocities. The Apostle Paul wrote to the persecuted church in Rome, and in it he does speak about the law (Romans 13:1), but also speaks of the higher scriptural command, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10).

Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me ... for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16).

May we live in a world where we choose welcome and where the stranger has a place and where the unifying message is of God's love and embrace for all of God's children. Every last one of them.

Love trumps hate. Every time!

Amen.

Copyright 2018, First Congregational Church, UCC