

Trinity Sunday
 June 7, 2020
 Sermon preached by The Rev. Kyle Wagner
 Rector, Christ Church, Dartmouth

“Changes”

In a minute I'll share some words with you which spoke to me back in 1998. I remember walking the halls of Three Oaks High School, headphones on, listening to music on my Walkman. This was the days of Napster, and online was just beginning. Yes, cassette tapes, not digital, existed back then. I feel old!

I think, like many young white men during the 1990s, I was captivated listening to rap music. It was a world that I did not know. Lyrics of violence, expression of pain because of poverty, inequality, police brutality, have long been captured in the spoken art of rap music. One may say argue, what about the violence, the misogyny? I think the gangster rap movement shared the world what some in society experienced while living in South Central, Compton, Watts, Los Angeles, New York, and America. These real, raw, lyrics and beats chronicled the story of people. Today, I'm not so concerned about that beat as much, but rather the lyrics to the songs. These words listened to again record the oppression and struggle of many. Therefore, I thank the many who have educated me in one way or another. The deep pain and honesty are palpable in the works of the Notorious BIG, Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Nas, and of course, Tupac.

I recognize that, as a society, we have a great deal to learn. I, too, require further education. I acknowledge that I speak from a privileged position. I grew up in rural Prince Edward Island, and my background was middle class. I'm a white, overweight Anglican priest. I have three degrees. I cannot relate to members of the black community on the matters of racism, for I have not experienced prejudice in such a way. What I can do is listen, witness, learn, ask for permission, act with compassion, and pray. After living in South Africa for some time, I witnessed the effects of Apartheid and the continued segregation of people because of their economic, political and racial status.

The following words come from deceased rapper Tupac Amaru Shakur, a prolific entertainer, social activist, artist, and in my opinion, a prophet. Shakur was not a perfect person, but I think his anger is once again reflected in the public protests in the United States. He shares this experience with many today.

Some pundits are talking about the violent nature of the protests. I say there is violence. I say, of course, violence is not the way, but who are we kidding? Are we surprised? Human beings are undoubtedly sinful, and we show our anger in many ways. Change often comes from pure emotion. Anger, frustration, rage, has many times been the catalyst for the world taking another direction.

Lately, I have noticed that violence is often the result of a lack of leadership. When people don't respect their leaders, when people don't see their CEO, their Pastor, their Prime Minister, or President as a uniting force, then what is the point? Where is the good in a society that we can model? When people are frustrated, we act out.

Some are saying that the phrase Black Lives Matter is not appropriate. Some are saying that All Lives Matter. I guess I say to this, “come on, this is obvious.” But right now, I’m not seeing any videos of a police officer with his or her foot on a man or woman who is white. I’ve not seen those images, but I do see the video of George Floyd and hundreds of others being treated in a way that is absolutely opposite to the teachings of the Gospel. So, until I see an image of a white man with his face to the pavement, until I hear the words of a white man crying out for his mother, I believe I can say, Black Lives Matter. I can say I stand with you, and I kneel with you. I can say I haven’t experienced what you have experienced, but I want to be a positive presence in any way I can.

So to the words of Tupac Shakur and his song “Changes”:

I see no changes, wake up in the morning and I ask myself
Is life worth living, should I blast myself?
I’m tired of bein’ poor and even worse I’m black
My stomach hurts, so I’m lookin’ for a purse to snatch

First ship ’em dope and let ’em deal the brothers
Give ’em guns, step back, watch ’em kill each other
It’s time to fight back that’s what Huey said
Two shots in the dark, now Huey’s dead
I got love for my brother but we can never go nowhere
Unless we share with each other
We gotta start makin’ changes
Learn to see me as a brother instead of two distant strangers

And that’s how it’s supposed to be

I see no changes, all I see is racist faces
Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races

Take the evil out the people they’ll be acting right
And only time we chill is when we kill each other
It takes skill to be real, time to heal each other
And although it seems heaven sent
We ain’t ready, to see a black President
It ain’t a secret don’t conceal the fact
The penitentiary’s packed, and it’s filled with blacks
But some things will never change

It’s time for us as a people to start makin’ some changes
Let’s change the way we eat, let’s change the way we live
And let’s change the way we treat each other
You see, the old way wasn’t working so it’s on us to do
What we gotta do, to survive
And still I see no changes, can’t a brother get a little peace?
There’s war in the streets and war in the Middle East.¹

¹Tupac Shakur. “Changes” from *Greatest Hits*. Released October 13, 1998. Amaru/Death Row/Interscope

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day in the church year that many clergy find themselves trying to explain the mystery of the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” So many analogies, of trying to “prove” theology, and doctrine. So many hours spent in an attempt not to preach heresy. Each year, approaching the tough subject in a new way.

As you might know, the word Trinity does not appear in the bible. Man established the doctrine of the Trinity, and I say, man, because it was men who got together and hammered out some of the details in the First Council of Nicaea in 325, and many gatherings after that.

Today I don’t want to get into formulas about faith, but I wish to recognize that the Trinity can express one’s faith. The Trinity can be at the heart of our faith. It manifests itself in our baptismal covenant, and it acknowledges that we are a part of a community that welcomes everyone in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This morning I recall the apostolic greeting in our 2nd Corinthians reading. Saint Paul talks about the true nature of humanity. He says that we need to get our crap in order, that we need to agree with one another, we need to live in peace, and we need to recognize God’s love. He writes:

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

For me, the Trinity allows for the expression of my faith. It highlights the mystery of religion, spirituality, and community. Because some days, our collective actions are a bit of a mystery. So how does the Trinity affect your faith?

Are you a Christian through your relationship with God, called Father or Mother? Or maybe through the Son, Jesus Christ? Or is it the movement and wisdom of the Holy Spirit? Or perhaps all three, as the theologians would like.

Today I give thanks to the Trinity, which allows me to reflect on my faith and my place in society. I give thanks for the movement of the Holy Spirit that is telling humanity, “Change, Change, Change.” I give thanks for the Son, Jesus Christ and his teachings of loving thy neighbour, and for his death on the cross, and His resurrection for a new life. I give thanks to God and the creator’s creation. I give thanks for the gift of free will, knowing that we can change. And this change comes from recognizing circumstance. From talking and listening, through education, and prayer, and any other manner in which people who are affected by racism deem important.

Today I rely on the Trinity not to provide me sustenance and substance from doctrine or theology, but I seek the Trinity because it is the action of the three in one that moves me. For real change comes not just from our words, but our actions. Today the Trinity is present, and I am therefore moved to say, “Black Lives Matter.” AMEN.