

**A Sermon by the Reverend Timothy A.R. Cole**  
**Trinity Sunday**  
**June 7, 2020**

Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
Matthew 28:16-20

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.”

These words by the Irish poet, W B Yeats have been quoted quite frequently in recent years (by President Barack Obama for one) and they have a particular resonance now in this time of crisis and conflict. The image of the falcon circling wider and wider and losing contact with the falconer is one that represents Yeats’ view of History. Yeats sees history as a succession of ages represented by gyres or vortexes that spin outward and outward like a tornado until they collapse in chaos. Out of that chaos a new age is born, and a new gyre or vortex begins. I do not think we are in a state of collapse today. Far from it. Yet we are in a dangerous place there is no doubt. Neither do I believe that the best actually lack all conviction. No, but it is certainly true that many of us struggle to make sense of and to know what to say in answer to the extreme utterances and actions all around us. As to the worst, well, it is possible to be passionate without being consumed by a passionate intensity as so many seem to be at the moment. We as Episcopalians, particularly, hold up the cool balm of reason as a balance to the turmoil of the heart and injured faith. This is a time for careful and well-reasoned as well as faithful words. Don’t get me wrong, if it were my child or family member that had been killed, I would be full of rage and passionate intensity. But for the rest of us, particularly if we are in positions of leadership in our various communities, any righteous anger has to be balanced by what we know could be the effect.

It seems, more and more, that we are living in truly challenging times. In the midst of a Pandemic, which has finally begun to be brought under control, we have the tragic and repulsive killing of George Floyd which reminds us all of the series of similar deaths in recent times like Breonna Taylor and Ahmad Aubrey.

As former President George W Bush said this week,

“It is time for America to examine our tragic failures – and as we do, we will also see some of our redeeming strengths. It remains a shocking failure that many African Americans, especially

young African American men, are harassed and threatened in their own country. It is a strength when protesters, protected by responsible law enforcement, march for a better future.”

A lesser, but still dangerous issue, is how the legitimate peaceful protests of those who want to seek change, have, at times, being hijacked by highly organized gangs, some of whom appear to be motivated by a desire to undo the very order of civil society, and some who simply see an opportunity to loot and steal a buck on the back of the protests. What I thought was both moving, and hopeful were the instances where protestors actually tried to stop the vandals and looters from doing what they were doing, because they did not want such things to distract from the reason they were there. The woman shouting at the agitators who were driving around handing out bricks to young men, for instance. I also remember seeing three women trying to protect three policemen who had been knocked down and beaten by the crowd. They formed a circle round them. That’s real courage.

Former President Barack Obama, said the other day, that despite the “genuine and legitimate frustration of the African American community,” “Let’s not excuse violence, or rationalize it, or participate in it.” George Floyd’s brother Terrence publicly said the same. “If you are angry, how do you think I feel? I’m not over here blowing up stuff, if I’m not over here messing up my community, what are you all doing?” he asked. “You’re doing nothing. That’s not going to bring my brother back at all.” That is the voice of peace and hope we all need to hear. Encouragingly, despite the unrest, it feels like the country is strongly united, both in abhorrence of the killing of George Floyd and in anger at the secondary issue of political violence and mindless vandalism. No one seeing that video of George Floyd’s death could be anything, but heart broken and disgusted and made to think seriously about urgent review of the Criminal Justice System to prevent such a thing happening again.

None of this is new of course, and some of you have lived through such times before here. I have not lived through them, and I am very hesitant to say anything about a context I only partially know. I have, however, served with the British Army in places like Northern Ireland and Bosnia where communities were deeply divided and where violence had almost completely replaced politics and debate as the means by which groups sought to achieve their ends. It is not a road any country wants to go down, believe me. Public order training with the plastic shields, base lines and snatch teams played a big part in preparations for Northern Ireland tours with the soldiers I served with. As I suspect is the case here, it was hard for both sides on those burning streets not to generalize the behavior of the few and apply it to the character of the many.

Today is Trinity Sunday when we celebrate the great doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It describes our best understanding of God drawn from human experience of him. We can never say exactly who God is or define his nature, because God is so much more than we are, or can ever fathom or see. Yet, we experience him in the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The God who created us, the God who died for us and the God whose presence we know in our prayers and the quiet moments of our souls. Not different gods but the one true God who meets us in these different ways, creator, redeemer and comforter.

In today’s Gospel Jesus gives the disciples the Great Commission.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

As well as being the marching orders of the Church, and one of Jesus’ more direct instructions, the Great Commission does two things. First, it makes the Church’s mission universal, that is to all. This means that all human beings may be disciples as much as those he first called. Secondly, it shows Jesus speaking explicitly about the Trinity. This is why only those baptized in the name of the Trinity are recognized as Christians by all the mainstream churches. Today, we also reflect that if Jesus talked about God in terms of the Trinity then so should we.

How are we to do this? How do we make disciples of all the nations? Well, by going and preaching and teaching, but perhaps first and foremost, we do so by following St Paul’s advice in this morning’s first lesson.

“Agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” Well that’s pretty tough for Episcopalians at the best of times, and also for all of us all at the moment. When have we ever all agreed completely with each other! Yet, I think this agreement is not actually about us all thinking the same. Rather, it is about agreeing to put our relationships above our opinions and to live at peace with each other. That is what I believe we are about here at Christ Church. We are all angry, no doubt. We are all unhappy, no doubt. Different groups have different views about what is happening and about the main actors on the stage, no doubt. Yet, we may all agree on one thing, and that is that we are all God’s children striving to do his will and we all kneel and receive the same grace at the same altar.

In my 20 years of military service, often in places where societies had gone much further down the current dangerous road that we are on, two things come to mind to me today.

Serving in places of danger where young men and women are being killed and maimed puts all differences and arguments into perspective, and makes you realize that the differences between us are far smaller than the many greater things that unite us. The same is doubtless true of human beings whenever they face a common enemy. The doctors, nurses and health professionals must feel that too in the face of the danger they confront. When you are depending on your buddy to have your back you definitely don’t care about any of many ways, you might be different from each other.

Secondly, as soldiers know, you have never lost until you have given up. If America could do what it has done in the last, almost 244 years, in peace and in war, then it can, for sure, make the changes that need to be made to ensure as much as humanly possible that no one is killed unjustly at the hands of uniformed representatives of the country and it’s sacred laws, ever again. Not that that will be an easy thing to do, but it is not beyond us all to do it, since we all (at least, all but the very few mad and bad) really want it.

As we celebrate the Trinity today, we call to the falcon of our country’s soul who yet can hear our voice. Things may be profoundly shaken but they have not yet fallen apart, and our center can still hold if the cool balm of reason and quiet faith is applied to the passionate intensity.

We also ponder on the words of the famous hymn, “St Patrick’s Breast Plate” that we sing every Trinity Sunday. This ancient Irish Hymn pictures a warrior binding on his armor, piece by piece and praying for Christ’s and God’s protection at every stage. Let us ask for that protection today for ourselves and for all the people of this country.

I bind unto myself today  
The Word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard.  
Against the demon snares of sin  
The vice that gives temptation force,  
The natural lusts that war within,  
The hostile men that mar my course;  
Or few or many, far or nigh,  
In every place and in all hours,  
Against their fierce hostility  
I bind to me these holy powers.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.