

CCUM SERMON – May 1, 2016

Pastor Lindsey Kerr

*"Practicing Resurrection: Weaving Together Disturbance and Peace"*

I was going to be helpful. Were you ever going to be helpful? Of course you were – you're like me. I'm like you. That's why you're able to hear me talk about this. I was going to be helpful. It was September 2007, and I was on my way to Mindanao, Philippines. And I was prepared. I had *Essential Tagalog* in my new backpack, along with a printed-out PDF of the human rights I was going to defend. I'd gone through three weeks of training in New York, and been inoculated for things I hadn't previously known existed.

And I showed up. And I was wrong. What is the opposite of helpful? In market terms – I was not an asset by a liability. And month after month – I kept waiting for the time that it would all come together. There were glimpses of my helpfulness. I could carry a chair across the room, or open a door. But most of the time I wondered, "What am I doing here?" I'm not proud of those years. Most of the time I was sick, and tired, and short. The little work that I was able to do came from a place of being frustrated with my boredom. Nothing says "solidarity" like, "I'm doing this, and I'm annoyed."

#### *Intention matters*

Paul is annoyed. Paul frees the slave girl because he is "very much annoyed". Brilliant. I think this is the beginning of the phrase "Jesus – Save me from your Followers". Because even if Paul is fundamentally doing the right thing. Even if Paul is showing up for justice – even if he is seeking to circumvent this evil arrangement that is somewhere between slavery and prostitution – he does so out of annoyance.

The intention behind an action – the root of an action – matters to us, yes? We're virtue ethicists, but never mind the fancy words because we know it in our hearts. Doesn't it feel different when someone acts from love, rather than mere obligation? Can't you tell when someone does something along side you, rather than looking down on you?

Really, this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus in his life may have helped a lot of people, but lots of people have helped people. The unique piece of our Christian story is that through the story of Jesus – through the divine presence of Christ – we have hope that the LORD hears the cry of the suffering, because the LORD has been among them all along. That Christ liberates not just from within a community, but from the cross. That Jesus does not just come to help, but to give himself entirely. That he does not seek to change the world from on high, but through his own transformation, he begets a fundamental shift in our very being.

#### *Disturbance and peace*

Originally, when I was looking at this text, and considering the theme of "Disturbance and Peace" I was imaging the outward disturbance. We must be willing to trouble the water. We have to be brave enough to disrupt the status quo. Societal change only comes if we are willing to sacrifice peace and quiet for peace and justice.

Even at the beginning of the two weeks, that sermon was working – because I was thinking about this groundswell of 6000 farmers who marched on Kidapawan and shut down the national highway. All for the sake of rice, because as they say in Visiyan – not Tagalog – *Bigas ni kinabuhi*. Rice is life. For the sake of life itself, the people will disturb the peace.

#### *Groundswell of the heart*

And if I hadn't gone to Mindanao, I would have preached that sermon. But I am without those words. Because so much has changed in nine years. And if I had gone back to the Philippines singularly focused

on my expectations, I might have missed it. I might have failed to notice how my body remembered how to get into a jeepney, and how my lips remembered the words that mattered: Love, water, peace, friend, mosquito.

My lips remembered. And I don't know if all of that made me more or less helpful, but I know that when I did the work of traveling into the provinces to interview, witness, record, and write (18-hours a day or work for five of the most intense days of my life) I did that work not from a place of annoyance. But of humility and even joy.

### *Inner transformation for global change*

It not Paul's liberating of the slave girl that makes it into song. Paul's defining moment is the second part of the reading. His own enslavement – his own imprisonment – is that which radically transforms him. Because when he forgets his own agenda, he is able to remember only Christ. And it is while he is praising God – not while he is trying to fix things – that the doors fly open.

Beloved, I don't want us to stop trying to help people. I don't want us to stop trying to change the world. Those are the things I love most about this community. But while I was away, in a week that went on for a month in which I finally marked the radical change that happened for me over nine years, I could not help but want that for us. For each of us as individuals. And for us as a community.

And I really don't just want to talk about it. I wonder if we could do it: Get really intentional about discovering our own selves and seeking to be transformed. As that radical ex-convict Paul writes: *Do not to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then, you will be to live into the will and desire of God.* Which is justice, kindness, and compassion.

In the coming weeks, there will be some opportunities to learn about what's happening in Mindanao, and how we as a congregation might be a part. I'd encourage you to take those opportunities – mostly, because those people are my friends. And also, those opportunities are among hundreds, thousands of ways we can do work for justice in the world.

And none of that work will change anything if we are not willing to do the bold things: To open very selves to the change we seek. Beloved, I ask you to be open to this with me. I testify that it is good work, and that it is the work of becoming God's people. And I ask you to do more than be open, but to help me. In the coming days and week, please reach out to me, and tell me just how we can be more intention in growing in our faith, and opening our own hearts to change.

It was my privilege to travel to Mindanao, and it is just as much a privilege to serve with you. I give thanks to go for the opportunity before us, and for each one of you.