

Irony seems to be the order of the hour.

As I began to think about and prepare for today's talk, I was filled with hope.

Now I have to look very hard to find any hope at all.

There is still hope.

There is still a light at the end of the tunnel.

There is also an oncoming train.

So we have to prepare to protect ourselves before we are run down under its wheels.

I have begun to refer to this talk as a talk instead of a sermon because I wouldn't know where to begin to actually preach about our current situation.

For me, preaching is based in the good news of shared love across all kinds of boundaries.

Right now I'm seeing a lot more of shared intolerance and mutual contempt.

Those forces cannot last.

They are part of the oncoming train, and it will inevitably pass.

Those of us who are privileged with wealth or status, those who belong to one or another in-group will be alright.

We can find the niches long prepared for us so that we will not be crushed by the train when it passes.

Those who are less privileged, who belong to vulnerable or marginalized groups will have a harder time getting out of the way of the train.

They are far more likely to be crushed by its passing.

We can help.

We can all help each other.

Those words are my words of hope at this new beginning.

We can all help each other.

You see, we stand at the start of a new Western Christian liturgical year.

Today is the First Sunday in Advent, the season of preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

New beginnings and new years are often seen as times of hope and change.

The changes in our society do not look very good or very hopeful right now.

I'm not going to go into detail about the dark side.

News media that are trying to sell advertising are telling us all too much about it.

I want to look at the signs of hope that still stand and will continue to stand especially now.

There are many of us who want to see our civilization move forward, and we will not be silent or inactive.

The great social activist from the 60's and 70's, Angela Davis, is still around,  
and she provides us some good, basic guidance in helping each other.

She looks even more beautiful today than ever.

Her Afro is more like a crown now, in silver and gold colors.

At the age of 72 she is still strong, and her voice is clear.

She spoke just in the last week or so in Chicago about our society's current situation.

She said,

"How do we begin to recover from this shock?

By experiencing and building and rebuilding and consolidating community.

Community is the answer."

In the first place, shock is an apt description of my feelings right now.

I know many of us are feeling that way.

Just about the last thing we expected was to find our country in the situation it is in at this point in time.

Clearly, we have work to do.

Our first step in the work ahead is to find hope and then to share it.

Hope is reliable because it is uncertain.

We say, "I hope so," because we are not sure that we will find the things we hope for.

Yet, nothing in life is more essential to survival.

You have heard it said, "Where there is life, there is hope."

I prefer to say, "Where there is hope, there is life."

People are coming together in new and creative ways, and that is a sign of hope.

Vulnerable people are being protected, and I'm hoping and trusting that we will see a lot more of that.

Yes, bullying is on the rise.

The act of standing up to bullies is also on the rise.

Standing between the bullies and the most vulnerable of their victims is also becoming more common.

I'm sure you have heard that one of the policy proposals that may be enacted soon

is the registration of all Muslims in the United States.

I'm hearing two versions of this:

One is the careful tracking of visiting Muslims, especially from countries where violence is being encouraged.

That would be nothing new.

It's already happening.

The other version is a requirement of the registration of all Muslims, whether they are U.S. citizens or not, and that would be something very new and different.

Japanese Americans were placed in "Internment Camps" during World War II.

In other places in those same difficult times,  
similar camps were called "Concentration Camps".

The camps that held Japanese Americans were not the only concentration camps run by the U.S. government in those days.

One of the members of the church I served in Houston told me about her father.

He was born in Germany, as was she.

He was assigned to and held in a concentration camp in the United States.

He contracted a disease in the camp, and he subsequently died of that disease.

The idea of isolating, registering and otherwise mistreating vulnerable populations is not unknown in the United States.

The precedent has been set as has been recently pointed out in public discussions that were widely reported.

On the other hand, there are many of us who object to such behavior and who will refuse to be a party to it.

We are not without recourse.

The story is told of Danish resistance during World War II.

An order came down from the German occupying forces.

On a given day, all Danish Jews were to begin wearing the now infamous yellow stars of David.

That morning, King Christian of Denmark appeared in public wearing a yellow star of David.

By that evening, almost every Danish citizen wore a similar yellow star of David.

The efforts to deport and eventually murder the Jews of Denmark were thus thwarted and impeded, to say the least.

A similar effort is already underway on behalf of American Muslims even now.

There are deep divisions in our society.

Many people will not participate in such an act of resistance.

There will still be plenty of us who will register as Muslims regardless of our own heritage or faith.

It will not be possible to isolate a vulnerable few.

There will be a resistance to extremist tactics in many areas of our society's life.

The resistance will be costly, but it will not be possible to stop, threaten or incarcerate all of us.

Mahatma Gandhi referred to the kind of resistance of which I am speaking

as the non-violent non-cooperation with evil.

In the recent bad old days of parts of South America,

political dissidents were "disappeared".

Prior to those difficult times, disappear was not a transitive verb.

People who disappeared simply did so with or without help.

Then it became something that was done to them, and disappear became a transitive verb:

The General disappeared those people because they were opposed to the President's work.

The mother's of those who had been disappeared began a movement of their own.

They would not be silenced.

They appeared in the public squares of cities all over their countries.

They held up signs with pictures and names of their children who had been disappeared.

Ultimately they prevailed.

The evil could no longer work in silence.

The people of their countries would no longer tolerate or normalize the oppression of all those who disagreed.

The mothers and their allies also developed another powerful tool of resistance:

They accompanied the people who were in danger from government thugs.

They would appear at the homes of people in danger and walk with them wherever they needed to go.

They would ride with them on public transportation and in private vehicles.

It became impossible to round up and disappear all of them, and they brought down the oppressive governments.

It's hard to believe that we may soon be facing the need for this kind of resistance in our own homeland,  
but we have to believe that it is possible.

In a very real sense, the need for resistance to evil is already upon us.

Vulnerable people are already being targeted by bullies.

Our resistance can be as simple as telling the vulnerable among us that we stand with them.

Tell them in person.

Call them on the phone.

We all know many of them, even in our own families and circles of friends.

Tell them on social media.

Just say, "I stand with you," or, "If you are afraid to go out, I will go with you."

It will mean a lot, I assure you.

People who work in behavioral therapy are not surprised by the appearance of so much formerly unacceptable words and actions.

A familiar phenomenon is an extinction burst.

Just before a bad behavior is wiped out in a person's life, it will assert itself as never before.

You want to quit smoking?

Suddenly you may find yourself smoking a LOT more than you ever did before just before you quit completely.

The same thing happens in societies.

Just before racism, misogyny and homophobia die their ugly death, they are asserting themselves more openly than ever.

I hope deeply that these forms of evil thoughts, words and actions will soon die out for the most part.

The dark side knows that its end is near in our culture, and so it is fighting back ferociously.

I want to share this hope with all of you.

Now, just maybe, the irony of our time will be that the darkest hour really is just before dawn.

I hope so.

I will think so.

I will say so.

I will work to make it so... until it is so.

We can come together to do this.

We have much to give thanks for, especially for each other.

There is hope, great hope for us all.

Now maybe, just maybe, my talk has become an actual sermon,

good news that comes from and to a community of shared love across all kinds of boundaries.

Amen!

So mote it be!

Blessed Be!

**SO LET IT BE!**