

St. Benedicts Presentation

January 14, 2018

One of today's readings, in 1st Samuel states "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." This passage talks about punishment. And in those times and in the books of the Old Testament much of the punishment came in the form of violence. Animal sacrifices, stoning, etc. These forms of punishment/violence seem to come as a consequence of failing to follow the instructions given from the Lord.

We call ourselves Christian's and the practice of our religious beliefs is clothed in a garment we call Christianity. I was raised in the Christian faith, a believer of the teachings of Christianity. So let me ask you, as I stand before you, a black woman, and openly gay do you ever ask yourself; how can this woman, whose ancestors, and yes whose elders were held in bondage as slaves believe in Christianity?

And if you have not asked that question, it may be time to do so, for you see, many ills have been done, many acts of violence as forms of punishment have been done to my culture under the cloak and guise of Christianity.

We talk openly about the atrocities that fell upon the Jew's, yet we, and by "we" I am talking about white America, want Black folks to "get over it, that was the past, this is now"; Well let's talk about what "Now" looks like.

First, let's talk about the slogan used to win the election: "Make America Great again" and the visible increase of the U.S. Flag being flown all over this country.

Did you know that many, if not all of the current and new hate groups fly the Stars and stripes now instead of or with the Stars and Bars? Is that what is meant by the slogan? Has that magnificent piece of cloth that many of my ancestors fought for, been relegated to a harbinger of hatred and fear?

Since January of 2017 we have witnessed through the media an increase in police violence against blacks, there has been an increase in overt racist acts, one of which I shared with you that happened at Avila Beach to me.

So let us go back a bit in history and let me share some of the incidents of racism that had a direct impact on me. *Brown V. Topeka Board of Education*. This was a legal case that was led by the NAACP and Thurgood Marshall to desegregate public schools in Topeka, Kansas. This individual case was grouped with similar cases in South Carolina, Virginia and Delaware under the title of *Brown V. Education* in 1954. On May 17, 1954 U.S. Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren issued a unanimous ruling that abolished state sanctioned segregations of public schools. States all across the U.S. drug their heals on integrating the schools and Topeka was no different. It was not fully implemented in Topeka until 4 years later, the year I started Kindergarten. I had the dubious honor of being the first and only black child to attend Parkdale Elementary School for several weeks, and then others trickled in. In those weeks, my mother walked me to school every day, and I thought it was GREAT. I was 5, what did I know? And the teacher kept me in her lap most of the time in the classroom and stood beside me at recess, often times picking me up and holding me. There were people standing around the chain-link fence hurling racial slurs and saying things like “God did not mean for niggers and white folks to mix”. And even though some of us tried to play together, others that had heard their parents talking often called me a nigger, and told others not to play with me. So, in the tone of the Bible and under the guise of Christianity, was this little kid being punished for her myelinated skin? When the other 4 black children showed up in my Kindergarten class, I was so happy. FINALLY I would be able to play with someone outside and not have to stay right by the teacher. You see, inside the classroom the teacher had more control and we all played together, but outside, with people hanging on the fence and yelling, and sometimes the police coming to move them along, she felt compelled to protect me, to protect us.

Fast forward to 1972. One of my best friends invited me to go to Texas with her and her family to their family reunion. I had never been to Texas so I said yes. We were heading to a tiny town called McClean. There were 5 of us, all women in my friends brand new Oldsmobile Cutlass. Her sister and three others, all women were behind us, and her cousin, a black male, with his white wife and biracial 18

month old daughter was the lead car. We were just outside of our destination on the highway and the whole caravan was pulled over by the local sheriff's officers. We rolled our windows down and waited for them to make their way to our car. They approached the lead car first, on the passenger side and asked the white woman if she was being kidnapped by the nigger driving the car. She told them no, that they were married, and that the baby in the back was theirs. As an officer approached our car, my friend said "Pat, please do not say a word, let me handle this, so at that point I did as she asked. When he shined the light in the car he asked, "Where did you nigger gals get such a pretty car and where are you going?" Well, I bristled at that, but I looked at my friend and she was looking at me through the rear view mirror shaking her head no, so again I said nothing. They checked all the other cars and thought we were free to go but then the officer returned and told us to follow them the Sheriff's office. The "office" was a trailer out in the middle of a field in the middle of nowhere. We were told that we were going to be cited for following to close and it was going to be \$500 cash or we would go to jail. I was very angry, and did not have sense enough to assess the situation. But again, before the police officer came back to our car, my friend begged me to "just be quiet". As she looked in her purse, she became visibly frightened, she did not have enough money. All she had credit cards and they wanted cash. No one else had more than \$20-30 on them, except me. I actually had \$500 in cash on me because I did not own a credit card. I told my friend I had it and would pay it, but that it was not fair. She then pointed out where we were, that we were all women and all black. She told me that it was not unusual for black women to just "disappear" in that neck of the woods after a traffic stop. So I paid the fine, kept my mouth shut and choked back angry tears. Yet again the color of my skin and this time my gender played a role in being punished...Oh, and when we went into the tiny trailer to pay the fine, the Sheriff was holding a bible and reading from it. He told us that if he was not a good Christian man he would arrest us all.

There has been an increase of hate groups popping up some old, such as the KKK and White Aryan Resistance, and some new such as the III Percenters and the Oath Keepers (though this is just a resurgence of an older group). Please note that the newer ones are referred to as "American paramilitary patriot movements".

And an increase in their spewing of overt racist rhetoric in cities and communities across this nation.

All of these groups have a common thread that runs through them, that thread is Christianity, calling themselves Christian's and using ***their*** interpretation of the Bible to justify their cause, just as it was done during the African Slave trade, the Jim Crow Era and the Civil Rights Movement Era.

Because of this, I often find myself uneasy with people calling themselves "Christian's", yet dressing in militia/military style clothing and flying the American Flag on their trucks and cars. This is NOT what I was taught that Christianity was meant to portray.

Jesus Christ broke bread with criminals, prostitutes, Lepers, as well as the apostles. He was not portrayed as prejudiced or racist. Dr. Martin Luther King stated in a sermon he gave on July 4th 1957 entitled "A religion of doing" that "Christ is more concerned about our attitudes towards racial prejudice and war than he is about our long processional. His is more concerned with how we treat our neighbors than how loud we sing his praises."

With that being said, let us in this congregation, in this community continue the model I have seen since I have been coming here; one where the term Christianity embodies the non-judgmental, non-punitive and non-violent way of interacting with others. Of reaching out doing and being the best we can be for ourselves, each other and our community.

As I look out into your faces, I see understanding and compassion. I see resolve to change things. My analogy that I wish to leave you with is this:

Rain Drops

Each of us is a raindrop and like raindrops we start off as individuals, yet as we fall into a bucket we are a collection and become one. Once poured out we spread ourselves and nourish the earth and one another. Let US be those raindrops collected in that bucket and pour ourselves into the community which we serve, to help meet needs and to help facilitate growth and change so that others that look like me feel like I do when I am surrounded by you safe, loved, and respected.