

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JUNE 7, 2020
“BRAVING THE WILDERNESS”

The Litany
Based on John 13:34

*The Glory of God is revealed in Jesus Christ.
As Christ is seen in us, let God’s glory be displayed all around.*

They’ll know we are Christians by our love.

Christ gives us a new command: “In the same way I loved you, you love one another”.

They’ll know we are Christians by our love.

*Everyone will recognize that you are my disciples
when they see the love you have for each other.*

They’ll know we are Christians by our love.

By our love may the Glory of God through Jesus Christ be seen. Amen.

Song of Focus
New Life within God’s Call
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. Simon Peter, James, and John, on the shore of Galilee,
repairing nets torn by that day’s great haul,
heard the voice of their Master, saying, “Come and follow me
“to new joy, new hope, new life within God’s call.”

A call to leave your fishing boats, casting nets of a new kind,
bringing people to God’s family far and near;
breaking down dividing walls to leave the past behind
into a future in true faith that casts out fear.

2. Three years passed; Peter stood before the multitude,
saying, “God’s promise is to you, your children, to all.
receive God’s Holy Spirit given freely to each of you
with new joy, new hope, new life within God’s call.

A call to God’s forgiving love and a life of a new kind.
Repent and join God’s family far and near;
breaking down dividing walls to leave the past behind
into a future in the faith that casts out fear.

Coda

A call to witness love and peace for all of humankind

'til justice flows like water far and near;
turning from all prejudice that leaves some folks behind
and bring a future in true faith that casts out fear.

Come to God's future, living in faith that casts out fear.

The Scripture

Acts 2:37-42

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The Message

Braving the Wilderness: Casting New Nets

Mark Briley

Synopsis: Fishing was no longer the business. If you've ever given up all you've ever known, something you were really good at, for some new venture you believe in but uncertain of how to accomplish the vision, you know how Peter must have felt. He would lead the disciples in casting nets of a new kind, a word of promise that was not to be a sales pitch but a word of repentance, forgiveness, and new life. Braving the wilderness includes tackling new things, operating with new methods, sticking your neck out in new ways to share the vision.



"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said, "Repent."

That's the opening verse of our Scripture passage for today. Did you catch it? "Now when they heard **this**..." it begins. What is "**this**"? What was it they heard? They had just heard Peter preach a sermon. And the last words he used prior to this response was, "You killed Jesus on a cross." Well that stings, doesn't it? Not the best way to get folks to come back to church the following week. (*insert wide-eyed-emoji*). And, "Is that really what you want to lead with, Briley?" I don't know. I don't know a lot these days it seems, but that's the headline of this Scripture passage today; one selected a couple of months ago to be shared this morning.

What's interesting to me is the response of the people to this news that they crucified Jesus. Their response wasn't, "Un uh! Did not!" They were not likely the ones who cracked the whip or drove the nails, but they were part of the culture that created these sorts of realities in the world. They seem to accept that. They humbly ask, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Peter says, "Repent." The word, repent, originally meant something was an *afterthought*. Often, a second thought shows that the first thought was wrong; and so, the word came to mean, "A change of mind." "On second thought." But... true repentance allows a change of mind to create a change of action. It's why Peter follows the call to "Repent" with "be baptized, be cleansed of your sins, and receive the Holy Spirit." And what follows that? Our theme verse for today, "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away..."

Whew. All right. Take ownership of our part in the whole thing. Get our minds right about it. Make a turn and get engaged for the promise is for those beyond me, beyond even my children... but to even all of those who are far way. What do you need to own today? Of all that is happening in the world around us, this great upheaval... what do you need to own? Owning that thing on your heart this morning is part of braving the wilderness. We've got to cast some new nets if we're going to move forward well.

I wish I didn't know George Floyd's name. I don't mean that to be rude. I'm not saying I wish I didn't know him. I don't have any reason to believe had our paths crossed that we wouldn't have been friends. I just know that I know his name, because he was suffocated on a paved Minneapolis street by the weight-bearing knee of a white police officer. You know his name, too. And it's important to say his name. It's honoring to say a person's name. Naming people, events, places, and even demons, was of biblical value. If you could name it, you could begin to understand. There was power in the naming. In naming George, perhaps we can begin to understand as well. And if we've preferred to avoid it, we know that doesn't last long either. For George Floyd has come to the doorsteps of our own city. Right down the road on the very street our church also sits, the intersection of Broadway and Providence – shut down at night with crowds gathered. "Say his name!" someone shouts and the gathered crowd shouts back,

“George Floyd.” These are our streets, home to our businesses, crowds including our own who are crying out, “*Can this really be who we are?*” “*Do we still live in a world that elevates one race over another, one gender over another, one status over another?*” And there are fires and riots and curfews and looting and tear gas and presidential Bible raising and ... oh, right... a pandemic.

Wearing a face mask with George Floyd’s image on it, his brother, Terrence Floyd, dropped to his knees at the storefront where his brother was killed. It’s been turned into a memorial covered with flowers and signs. He knelt silently and others joined him. Terrence asked for any violent and destructive response to the murder of his brother to stop as, “*That’s not what my brother would want,*” he said. But we know a black man quietly taking a knee in protest has been equally ridiculed, if not more so, in these last few years. “*So, what are we to do?*” That was the question Peter was asked that day following his sermon. “*What are we to do?*” And perhaps his response is also for us. “*Repent.*”

“*What for?*” some will say. “*I didn’t do this.*” “*I’m not racist.*” “*I have a black friend on Face Book.*” I know. But maybe... when we don’t understand... it is our place to lean in and listen more closely. If we’re not willing to listen to the experience of another then we’re choosing to be living only out of our assumptions of others and we know what that usually makes out of us. But lean in right now. What is the cry? What is that cry asking us to do? One of the most courageous things to say in an uncomfortable conversation is “*Tell me more.*” “*Help me understand your experience.*”

This is the advice of Brene Brown who wrote the book “*Braving the Wilderness*” whose title is the focus of our current sermon series. In her chapter entitled, “*People are hard to hate close up. Move in,*” she shares of her love for relatives who are police officers and how almost all of her pro bono work is with the military and public servants like the police. She knows many who are serving with good and just hearts. You know them, too. You’ve seen them taking a knee with demonstrators, hugging protestors, taking off their armor to walk in solidarity. And they detest the same actions that killed George. One of my friends who serves faithfully for the Highway Patrol is working to redeem with integrity his oath “*to protect and serve.*”

We give thanks for those officers. Brene speaks into the common argument, however, that “*All Lives Matter*” should be the chant of humanity. She says, “*No. Because the humanity wasn’t stripped from all lives the way it was stripped from the lives of black citizens. In order for slavery to work,*” she says, “*in order for us to buy, sell, beat, and trade people like animals, Americans had to completely dehumanize slaves. And whether we directly participated in that or were simply a member of a culture that at one time normalized that behavior, it shaped us. We can’t undo that level of dehumanizing in one or two generations.*” She says, “*I believe Black Lives Matter is a movement to re-humanize black citizens. All lives matter, but not all lives need to be*

pulled back into moral inclusion. Not all people were subjected to the psychological process of demonizing and being made less than human so we could justify the inhumane practice of slavery.”¹

And where was Jesus on this matter? Nearly every story in the Gospel where Jesus is named or quoted, includes his lifting up of the one dehumanized – the person with leprosy, the guy from Samaria – the wrong side of town, the woman caught in adultery, the minority, the outsider, the one sheep of the 99 separated from the herd.

That question still hangs in the air: “*So what are we to do?*” Peter says, “*Repent.*” Get a second thought about these things we’ve decided we already have figured out. Maybe we get dressed up! I mentioned weeks ago how dress-shirt sales have stayed high while nobody seems to be selling any dress pants these days. ZOOM meetings may require a business casual look, but pajama bottoms are more than passable. One of our church leaders was first on a ZOOM meeting we were having the other night and he commented on my shirt and I commented on his: “*I like that shirt!*” “*Yep,*” he said, “*but I guess you’ll never know if I’m in my boxers or not.*” We laughed. Attire has been in flux these pandemic days.



My friend, Laurence Anthony, who shared in our Installation service at Broadway last Fall, is launching *Late Night in Harlem* – a variety talk show that will cover everything from the serious to the sensible to the silly. He released an intro piece last week speaking to all that’s happening in the world right now. He was shooting the bit from his New York City apartment but dressed impeccably in a beautiful suit, the way you’ll most usually see him dressed. He laughs at himself saying, “*It’s COVID, Laurence, why are you wearing a suit? Nobody’s going anywhere?*” The answer to his own question? “*You’re right. But when I was younger, and I looked up to those who inspired me, when they were ready to make change or make an impact or entertain or lead, they wore a suit. From MLK to Humphrey Bogart, from Malcolm X to Muhammed Ali, to Frank Sinatra to most importantly my grandpa. When it was time to get to work; when it was time to do something, sometimes a suit was necessary.*” Laurence goes on to say that “*You don’t have to wear a suit to make impact or make a change of course.*”²

¹ Brene Brown. “*Braving the Wilderness.*” Pg 77. Random House. New York. 2017.

² <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjN566jbBsyL74wOoTbbSIQ>

And he's right. But I hear him saying, if we want a different world... if you want to change something, succeed at something, bring about some new hope... we may have to do something that gets us focused on that need, that change, that success, that hope. On what do you need to get laser clarity so as to reach that goal? To not sit idly in confusion or desperation but to get out there and make a difference? Maybe it's part of your greater health – How do you get focused on getting in shape – mind, body, spirit... focused on bringing health to your home so that our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren know there is a promise for them, too.

That's Peter's word to the early folks motivated to join the movement. *"This promise is bigger than you,"* Peter preaches. It's for you... absolutely... but it's bigger than you. It's for your kids and grandkids and even those who are far away. It means these moments in life matter. Who in your household or your realm of influence needs to know this promise is for them, too? What is that promise? It's salvation... freedom... it's hope... unending love... it's hard work... justice... it's satisfying... it's beyond simply *"working for the weekend"* which we were once told was something everybody's doing. No, this promise is bigger than you and me. And who needs to know that promise right now? Who needs to know there's no exclusive rights to the promise? Who's crying out for that promise now?

Perhaps you saw the video, now gone viral... seen millions of times, of 12-year-old, African-American young man named, Keedron Bryant, who offered a piercing cry-of-a-song this past week. His mother, Johnetta Bryant, actually wrote the lyrics. In an interview she said, *"In light of everything that is going on, when I heard Mr. Floyd call out for his mom, as a black mother that really hit me in a deep way, and I began to pray, and so I said, 'God, this world needs help like never before. So, I went into meditation because I needed understanding, I needed strength, because I needed to be able to give my son some wisdom that will help him live and be confident in this world. I knew it could only come from God.'"*

So she penned these lyrics, sent Keedron into his own time of devotion saying, *"I want you to pray on these words, allow God to speak to you so you can speak to and encourage yourself and others."* He came back down after his own time of devotion and said, *"Mom, I'm ready."* This is what he offered.³ **[Editor's Note: Stop reading here and click [HERE](#) and open the hyperlink to see the video. Pause after 49 seconds.]** This promise is for Keedron and all who are far away.

Now, here I stand, a 41-year-old, straight, white, privileged, man. What do I know? I don't. I don't know the pain and heartache and fear that so many people of color know all too well. I don't have the experience of one inter-racial couple who both happen to

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHaGXwOz8xE>



be runners; Ashlee Aouad who is white and her husband, Emmanuel Kwame Aouad who is black. When they run together, Ashlee always runs behind Emmanuel, because she doesn't want people to think this white woman is being chased by a black man.⁴

I always run behind Carrie – but that's because I'm slow as molasses.

She and I have never once thought anyone would think I was chasing her to do her harm.

There's much I don't know. I know when my sister had a black boyfriend in high school that several people came to my dad's office at the church where he pastored, asking how he and my mom could let her date, "*One of those guys.*" I may be judged on my appearance or character or being a Royals fan... but never have I had to count my skin color as the first strike against me. Is the promise for me? You bet. But if I'm satisfied to let it end with me, Jesus says, "*Ah, Mark, you missed it. You didn't really see me after all.*"

I don't have all the answers to this needed healing, of course. If any of us did, it would be done already, right? But when we see glimpses of the promise fully scattered and shared, we need to build on those moments. A lingering snapshot from last summer's



General Assembly of the Christian Church (*Disciples of Christ*) for me came at the closing worship service on Wednesday. The Rev. Dr. William Barber II, who you see often on the news these days, preached an other-worldly message about how those rejected by the world today, like Jesus was, ultimately become cornerstones – building blocks of the Church. He led this

passionate altar call at the end of his message, calling people of every diversity and beauty and struggle and identity and rejection to run up those steps from wherever they were seated in this huge arena and stand with him. My, oh my, here they come... one after another... every color and stripe and flavor that you could imagine... free in Christ, built up by the Spirit, treasured as a building block to the future... flooding the stage. Before any of us realized, my son, Dane, eleven-years-old at the time, has taken off from the near back of the arena, running with all his might to join Dr. Barber and the transformative Gospel moment on the stage.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3168021029884668&set=a.494118023941662>



Here he is on the far left... caught up in the wonder of it all. Now he may not know the depths of what this moment held for the future of the Church and the very gospel of Jesus Christ, but I knew (*through the tears of his mother and some of my own*) that one day, I'll give that picture to him saying, "Son, you're one of the building blocks of the

church of Jesus Christ... you stand with and on the shoulders of giants... the likes of Dr. Barber, and the likes of each and every person who took a moment to care, taught a class, offered a word of support, prayed a prayer, prepared communion, held a hand on the CROP Walk, sang a song." This is how we build the church, my friends.

Dane was among the baptized at Broadway last Sunday. This promise is for him. But it's for all those folks who rushed the altar that evening and even the ones who didn't. It's for the law enforcement officers, who are trying their best to bring the title of officer the heart and courage it deserves in protecting and serving all citizens. That promise is for George Floyd and his little girl. It's for the crowds gathered at Providence and Broadway every evening since he died. That promise is for all the saints upon whose shoulders we now stand, who opened their Bibles and read those words, "*As I have loved you, you should love one another.*" That promise is for you and me and for all. And what do we want to say we did with such a promise?

I think we'll want it said of us that we gave our all to make good on that promise of God... so that when we look our grandchildren in the eyes, should we be afforded such an opportunity, we can say, "*We stood for that promise. We fought for that promise. We sacrificed for that promise.*" Oh, that we all, beloved of God, may be living proof of this beautiful promise for one... for all.