

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • AUGUST 25, 2019**  
**“BONDING TO BECOME MORE”**

**Litany**

Based on Psalm 71

We take refuge in you, O Lord.

**Deliver us through your righteousness. Hear us and save us.**

Rescue all those abused by the intentions of the wicked, the unjust, and cruel.

**We have leaned upon you from our births; our praise is continually of you.**

Let us pray:

**To whom else shall we turn, Lord of our lives?**

**We place our lives in your tender care. Amen.**

**The Scripture**

Matthew 6:25-33

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

**The Message**

***What Are You Wearing?***

**Terry Overfelt**

One day naked Truth walked into the village. The citizens were shocked and disgusted and could not bear to look upon the naked Truth. They dodged into their homes, closing their doors, and shuttering their windows. Truth stood alone in the square. Parable saw this and felt sorry for naked Truth and gave him her own coat. Once truth

was wrapped in the cover of Parable's coat, people began to open their doors, unlatch their shutters, and venture out of the shelter of their homes. Now, wrapped in the storied coat of Parable, people were willing to see the naked Truth.

### *Pilgrimage*

We had a chance to see the naked truth, as we sought the stories on the Civil Rights Pilgrimage to the deep south. Twenty-four of us went-including our "very engaged" (Paul Koch) MOEx driver Kevin and my dear friend Lillie from Fifth Street Christian. The diverse ethnicity of our group blessed us and enriched our perspective. Before we left, Lillie asked if I was nervous to make this trip? So, since she posed the question, whenever I felt a bit nervous, I would look for her perspective and consider our Lillie.

The definition of pilgrim is "one who journeys to a sacred place for religious reasons." Two of our sacred guides explained the mystery of a pilgrimage to be unpredictable and spiritually charged. They asked us to try not control our feelings but to surrender in honesty and openness to how the Holy Spirit would be moving in us. The gifts of the pilgrimage would unfold for each in our own time. That's why it is difficult to fully relay such an experience to another person. My husband Jeff's eyes glazed over after about the fifth mention of the word "Selma." Pilgrimage is a highly individualistic and interior journey. Yet, there are some gleanings to be spoken to us in this day, and know many more are yet unspoken, to which Jeff says, "Oh goodie."

Will you pray with me?

*God unseen and ever near, may the stories of our hearts, the words of my mouth and our sacred sharing, be pleasing to you in the building of the kingdom in this day. Amen.*

I want to tell you of three stops that taught us what to wear on a pilgrimage.

### *Memphis*

The National Civil Rights Museum was built on the site to include the solemn slope to the second-story hotel room and balcony where the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in 1968. Exhibits witnessed to the civil rights era from the late 1940s to 1968. Protests, boycotts, lawsuits, marches, and speeches were the non-violent way to counter the savagery and hate that wanted to provoke the physical fight. Violent action would justify the brutality that ensued most often under the cloak of darkness worn by the villainous foe. We solemnly walked into the stories of protestors, who would not offer an eye for an eye but rather the radical response to love your enemy who calls you three-fifths of a human being.

This week's news marked the 1619, 400-year anniversary of the arrival of the first slaves to Virginia. For two-and-a-half centuries we would build our country on the backs of slave labor. As Paul Koch, our regional minister said, "Every emotion from sadness, anger, frustration, dismay and joy was tapped."

In the same moments we simultaneously framed hurt and hope. We could see the naked truth being told in the stories of people. Maya Angelo's words are emblazoned on the walls of one museum built on the site of a slave warehouse:

*History, despite its wrenching pain,  
cannot be unlived, but if faced  
with courage, need not be lived again.*

When a young, white family, on their own civil rights pilgrimage, approached our black bus driver after dinner one night, the son asked him how he felt seeing all of this. Like Jesus, who often met a question with a question, he asked the child, "How do you feel?" The boy answered, "Sad and mad." Kevin responded, "I feel the same way as you do."

In Memphis we wore hurt and hope and continued to seek the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.

### *Selma*

We climbed the courthouse steps in Selma. We drank from the undesignated water fountain outside the voter registration office. We moved through the streets from Browns Chapel and crossed the Edmund Pettis Bridge.

We crossed under this name on the buttress that edified a confederate brigadier general, the grand dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan, and the state senator. The Bridge was named in 1940 as a mocking tribute to the suppression of the black majority citizenry of Selma of whom only 2% were registered voters due to discriminatory policy, and Jim Crow laws that codified, and legalized racial segregation. The march across that bridge was attempted three times. The first was called Bloody Sunday, as state troopers and local enforcement attacked the crowd with clubs and tear gas. Mounted police chased the retreating marchers and continued to beat them. Television coverage triggered national outrage. When black leader John Lewis was beaten, his companions wanted to get their limited guns. He said that if he was not willing to shed blood in retaliation for his own injuries, then they did not have the right to do so.

This week from Father Richard Rohr's meditation:

*Jesus lived and proclaimed this universal ethic of nonviolence: a paradigm of the fullness of life putting love into action, returning good for evil, rejecting violence and killing, and nurturing a just, peaceful, sustainable, and reconciled world. It springs from his foundational understanding of God and of the nonviolent life that God calls us to live: to make peace with one another; to resist the violence and injustice that threaten or destroy this peace; and to foster*

*a world where the fullness of peace is the birthright of all. Jesus showed us how to live this way of faithful nonviolence, even in the midst of violence and oppression, by calling us to love our enemies, to not kill, to put down the sword, and to respond actively to the cry of the poor.*

The second march was two days later when Martin Luther King led 2,000 people and hundreds of clergies, who answered his last-minute call to come. On the bridge, Martin Luther King knelt in discerning prayer and turned the group back. President Lyndon B. Johnson sanctioned the march, addressing Congress with the lyric, "We shall overcome." That night in Selma, a white, Universalist Unitarian minister from Boston, James Reeb, was beaten and killed by angry whites. Federalized Guardsmen and the FBI protected the third nationally-sanctioned march. Singing: "Ain't gonna let no body turn me around," they walked the 54-miles over five days to the capital city of Montgomery to demand voter rights that would ensure something other than an all-white police force, politicians, judges, and jurors.

I stopped on the bridge and put my ear up against the support. It was boxed steel plate. In the hollow, I could hear the casual vehicles. "Can anyone cross this bridge without a sigh of prayer that at once holds hate and hope?" Debby asked. My cupping ear heard the creaking of steel shifting and the twisting bolts, and I listened because we were safe on the other side of this stark-naked truth. Weren't we, Lillie? I imagined hearing the footsteps and the songs that carried people out of Selma, demanding their voices be heard. I could not help but recreate the anguished cries of the beaten-back. I pitied the horses, saddled, to ride over people; expressionless in their strong-armed obedience at the whip and bit. Are their nostrils flared in hate and hope for it to be over? Was their neigh a whinnying cry over the injustice of dragging them into this brutality? I looked for bloodstained pavement that has been resurfaced over 50-some years. And I gag on the word, "resurfaced."

Why have we come to Golgotha; the scene of the crime? Why heave it up again? Because we must replace the words, "The End" of these stories from Truth with "The Empathy" and feeling the love for our neighbor, seek God's righteousness. In Selma, we wore Empathy.

*Montgomery*

Here I am a sinner, envious for the toil-free lilies and sow-less birds. I am a spinner and a worrier, and it will not add days. It will convincingly cost me some. So, I will say my mea culpa, acknowledging my own errors, even sin. I will worry over what to wear... even to church.

On Sunday, as we worshipped in the welcome of Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. Before the service began, we toured through the museum and gift shop in the lower level. We arrived for worship along with 124 women dressed from head to toe in red finery. Black Ladies in Red, a Movement for Women's Empowerment (hat). They

were on their own pilgrimage from the state of California. They filled the entire left side. As we sang, "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," they took us to church!

Church-Sunday best was worn because they would not be working. Church - unhurried where they would stay long hours, because this was the place of real community when the outside world was against them. Church - where they would praise God whose love, benevolence, and sacred provision was never withheld.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Black worship is a social experience where people from all walks of life affirm their unity and oneness in God. It is experienced as a response to the Holy Spirit's call to the believer to cast off his or her coat of cares and enter the divine presence, singing songs of hope" (*Ministry Magazine* archive "2002 African American worship-its heritage, character and quality").

I'm thinking...this is it! This is what God clothes us in. This praising is what saved the spirit of the people. They put on garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness from the holds of the slave ship or the jail cell or the lynching noose. This praise is what we wore in Montgomery.

I apologize for the brevity of these true stories that have so much more due. Come and share lunch and learn with us after worship on October 6. Join us on the Columbia Pilgrimage on Sunday afternoon, September 22. I encourage each of us to move intentionally through the annals of Civil Rights History and wear one more thing, perspective. Bring what is inside of you and bear personal witness. As we walked the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, we recognized the 4,400 known victims of public lynching. We solemnly moved through vertical, rosewood-colored columns hanging from the rafters with the state, county, known names and dates of those who were murdered. One marker says, "Will Brown was lynched in 1919 in Omaha, Nebraska by a riotous white mob of up to 15,000 people." In the center of this monument is a grassy garden.

When we stood there, we could see the ark of the surrounding columns. While I was thinking how very terrible it is that these many died in the hands of the hateful. What were we thinking to believe this was okay? Our driver, Kevin, was thinking something else. He saw himself standing on the grassy hill, and the columns became witnesses that had come to his own lynching. Perspective: our unique attire...this and is the garment we each wear inside out.

For today, the Gospel of Matthew is talking about the clothing of our spirits that comes from seeking God's kingdom and righteousness from the inside out.

What are you wearing?