

Keep Calm and Carry On
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Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church
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Some of us have heard the phrase “keep calm and carry on.” It has become a common slogan in the last few years. It was a trend for a while where everything was added to the keep calm and... phrases. I searched Google for some examples. Some of my favorites were Keep Calm and ... eat bacon, call your mom, read a book, eat chocolate, play ball, sing, smile. The phrase that was common this past Tuesday was keep calm and vote. It seems that all around us, in the midst of our own culture we see and hear that we need to keep calm and carry on. What’s fascinating to me is that this slogan tells us to keep calm and then act. Some actions are easier than others but all of them require some action regardless. As I thought about keeping calm and carrying on I found myself applying this to my faith. Does my faith, my belief, my life as a Christian require me to keep calm and carry on?

In the gospel lesson today we heard a story from the gospel of Luke that warns us of destruction, of conflict or war, of plagues, and the end times. This scripture may tell us that we need to focus ourselves and prepare for the end of the world in which Jesus speaks. We can spend time thinking about how we may re-order our lives, get things in order, or we could spend time worrying about how to figure out the impending calendar—when this is all going to happen. I however, would like for us to think about these warning signs differently. I would like for us to think of them as an invitation to keep calm and carry on. Could these words tell us and invite us into a life of faith and hope now? Could the current times of trial help us to deepen and sharpen our appreciation for the present moment in which we live; The very present moment that has been graciously given to us as a gift by God.

Many scholars believe that we can view this particular passage differently. There are three reasons why scholars believe that we should

think about this as an invitation and not a warning. The first is that in this text Jesus seems to speak against taking his words as a timetable. There is nothing that indicates an exact time. In fact, Jesus warns that lots of people will be telling us that the end times are coming. Jesus tells us not to listen to them, to not fear, to keep calm. There are several other examples in scripture where Jesus says, “no one knows the day or the hour.” This tells us to think about this warning differently. The second reason is that Jesus tells believers not to be alarmed but Jesus also tells believers not to plan for these days. Instead Jesus invites believers into a living and active faith, which allows us to live as faithful followers to be equipped with skills necessary to endure. And finally, these scholars believe that there is almost no question that Luke is responding to the crises of the early Christian communities and addressing the words of Jesus to assure them in their hour of doubt and need.

Now, I don't think it's hard for us as Christians, as a church, and even as people to see that times of trial and conflict are currently happening. We are living in the midst of chaos. We are living in a time of divide. We are living in a time when hate overcomes love. We watch and read the news and are told consistently that bad things are happening. A time when conflict impacts our everyday lives, a time when we have lost friends because we disagree, a time when we as our individual selves are divided, a time when families are divided. We have seen several events just in the last year where hate has won. Where brother has fought against brother, where families have become divided. What's important for us to remember is that in the midst of this chaos, amongst the division, we are living because God has given us another day to live; to live into the conflict, to embrace it, and fight the fight that's worth fighting. None of these things are easy, and they take time, and energy, and patience. Everyday is a gift from God; A precious gift that is given to us so that we can meet God. God will not fail to hold us

in the midst of trial. God will not fail to work and will work for the good of all creation. God never fails to be God. God will not fail.¹

Let's for a second just think about the community in which we live. If we think about the violence that has happened in our neighboring city of Milwaukee, we can easily see how conflict has been present. It has been shown on our news outlets for as long as I can remember. It has been present in the neighborhoods in which some of us live. It's not hard for us to see how hate has won. How families have become divided. How brother has fought against brother and sister against sister. As a church are we called to keep calm and carry on? Should we just allow hate to keep happening? Maybe, just maybe we could be called to action. You might ask, but what can I do? I hear this question almost weekly in youth group. I am confident that it's not just the youth who are asking, but that their parents and grandparents are asking the question as well. If I'm wrong, I HOPE that they may begin to consider asking the question. I don't always have the best answer for the youth, but my answer is always this... love.

Now it may seem like this is an easy answer to a tough question. But my friends, it's sometimes hard to love. It's sometimes hard to put us aside and focus on others. It's hard to love those who look different than us, that think different than us, that act different than us. I myself am guilty of this as well. Loving is not always easy. But here at Tosa Avenue we strive to love. It's even a part of our mission statement as a church. Gathering as friends, growing in faith and Sharing God's love. We work as a community to share God's love. We do this with the sandwich service project, the St. Bens meal program, the hat and mitten tree, the muffin baking, habitat for humanity, and many other ways. We as a community strive to love ALL of God's people— All of God's creation.

Loving is difficult, especially in times of dismay and times of tragedy. It's easier to ask the question, "Where was or is God." The

¹ Luti, Mary. "United Church of Christ." *ucc.org*. United Church of Christ, 9 Nov. 2016. Web. 9 Nov. 2016. <http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_steadfast>.

answer my friends, is that God never leaves us. God never fails to work. God never stops loving us. I was able to spend a few days in Nashville this past October listening to Diana Butler Bass, who is an author and religion researcher. She challenged us as a group of Christian educators and as individuals to see God in the everyday. To see God in children, maybe even our own children. To see God in creation, in the trees, the water, the clouds and the sky. To see God even when we put our blinders on, because we just have to get through the day. She even challenged us to see God outside of the church, to validate that God is in the world, outside the walls of the church building. See church in our very own communities. This is hard; it challenges us to put ourselves out of our comfort zones, outside of our boxes. It's also hard to see God in world around us unless we are consistently made aware that we are surrounded by God's creation. How often so we pause to simply look around and say, "thanks." The world is a beautiful place-broken and divided but beautiful. People are beautiful.. God is still creating. God is still working. We have to pause, look around embrace the moment we are in. Once we begin to appreciate each moment for it's full value, we begin to love. To love creation, to love people, to love ourselves.

Maybe we are called to keep calm and love.

Now, we all know that the election was this past week and we have a new president-elect. And I don't think we can overlook this. Pastors are always told not to preach politics and I can assure you that I am NOT about to do that. But what I want to say is; regardless of who you voted for, and regardless of who won, we have work to do. We have work as a church and we have work as Christians. The work of justice and equality was work for us a Christians long before the presidential election of 2016. This is not new work this is continued work. We all woke up on Wednesday in a world with a new president elect. Some of you might be overjoyed and hopeful. Others of you might be scared of what this means for you, your family, and our country. But this time is really no different than any other. There is still hatred, violence, and division in the world. But there is also God's love. There are also tables wide enough for all God's people to be fed, by generous feasts and amazing

grace. And there is still the beloved community we are called to be and build. Now is the time to remember we certainly do belong to one another. We also belong to God. And God will not fail.² We as a community are called to do something. You might be thinking, but what can I do? Again, I don't always have the best answer but the answer I have for you is love. Loving those who need to feel loved, loving those who have no voice, loving those who are living on the margins, loving those who are lost, loving those who look different, loving those who think different. Loving those who are not like us. Does our slogan of keep calm and carry on apply to this? I believe it does—keep calm and love.

If we think of this passage as an invitation it challenges us to take the big moments in our lives good or bad and take them and use them as an invitation to act—to do, as John Wesley has told us “all the good we can.” Anytime we come to moments of division in our lives, to places where we don't agree, to places where society has created winners and losers, where we are tempted to not listen to each other's pain, that we are called to build, not to tear down, to come together in order to build the kind of world that Jesus called us to-- one where all God's people are able to live lives of abundance... rich or poor, old or young, immigrant or native, republican or democrat. Keep calm and do all the good we can, keep calm and love.

My mom has this what I call famous phrase. It's probably only famous in the Stumpner household but I believe it has some value. My mom constantly reminds me to “be proactive and not reactive.” When something happens in my life that I don't care for, when trials are in front of me, when things happen that I don't like, I admit that I call my mom. She kindly listens to me rant then takes a deep breath and simply says, “Natalie, proactive, not reactive.” I know what she means, and it provides me with a sense of calmness. It challenges me to think of the

² Luti, Mary. “United Church of Christ.” *ucc.org*. United Church of Christ, 9 Nov. 2016. Web. 9 Nov. 2016. <http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_steadfast>.

situation in a new way, to set aside my anger and my frustration to see the whole picture. It helps me to better understand how to make change happen. I can't tell you how many times I have applied this to everyday situations. I know that there are things that I can change and things that I can't. But how will I know if I only simply react? When we face troubles and we see inequality, and we see injustice, it's easy to react. It's easy to be angry; it's easy to be frustrated, it's easy to hate. Reacting in a way in which doesn't help build the kingdom of God isn't helpful for anyone. Being proactive and acting in ways that lead to equality and justice are what we as Christians are called to do. Everyday we are called to live into the present moment, which has been gifted to us by God. By a God who never leaves us, who embraces us in the chaos and gives us hope- A God who blesses us with each new day, with new creation each day. Live into the chaos, into the trials and love. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Put aside those things that divide us. And love. We as Christians are called to love not hate. To love those we disagree with. To love those who are marginalized. To love those who feel they cannot be loved. To love those who are scared. To love those who celebrate. To love those who mourn. To love the least, the last and the lost. Keep calm and love—even when it's hard.

Amen.