



What do we mean by Beloved Community?

SESSION TWO

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This talk can be accompanied by this powerpoint presentation, created by the Revs. Marcus Halley and Susan Daughtry. You're welcome to use it in your faith community! Find more at www.creatingbelovedcommunity.org

That's what we mean when we talk about the Beloved Community, a community of people so filled with hope in the Kingdom of God that they just begin walking in that general direction.

It's ours to build. It's ours to nurture. And if we are going partner with God's mission of reconciliation, this is what it looks enough.

If it is ours, how do we do it? How do we build this Beloved Community.

We build the Beloved Community through Practice. If we want love in the world, we have to build loving communities. If we want justice in the world, we have to build just communities. If we want reconciliation, we have to build reconciling communities. If we want mercy, joy, and peace, we should get serious about building merciful, joyful, and peaceful communities.

In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, adrienne maree brown suggests that to think about justice, joy, peace, and compassion at every level of our lives – internal and interpersonal to systemic and institutional. “When we speak of systemic change,” she says, “we need to be fractal. Fractals – a way to speak to the patterns we see – move from the micro to the macro level. We must create patterns that cycle upwards. We are microsystems.”¹ Later she says that it isn't good enough simply to have vision for the kind of world we want to see, we have to model it internally.²

¹ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, pg. 59.

² Ibid., p. 61.

In other words: if we have to practice the world we want into being.

This has happened throughout history:

1. The earliest Christian communities were outposts of the Beloved Community. They gathered people of different classes and spheres of influence into the Body of Christ, letting them know that in order to be a part of the Church, you had to give up violence and privilege.
2. When the part of the world that was once part of the Roman Empire was descending into chaos and violence, St. Benedict of Nursia gathered a Beloved Community and gave them a Rule of Life that called people from across the world to follow the Way of Jesus.
3. Monastic communities across time have done this work, holding space for the Beloved Community in the face of a world spinning wildly out of control, including Constance and her Companion in Memphis, women of God who stayed behind to care for the sick when the rest of the city fled the Yellow Fever epidemic.
4. In the mid 1900s, awash in a culture of white supremacy and racism, another Beloved Community challenged the soul of this country. Women and men of various racial and ethnic identities stood arm-in-arm and demanded justice and freedom for “all.”

Throughout history, different people and communities joined in becoming the Beloved Community by being open to compassion, justice, and nonviolence. What sets these communities apart? What connects them to this movement that this world has tried it's best to kill but somehow still keeps on living?

Jesus. The Son of the Living God.

According to Dr. King, it is possible to be part of the Beloved Community and not have faith in the Lord Jesus; but, there is something unique about the ways that followers of Jesus engage the Beloved Community.

A few weeks ago, when I was preaching at Saint John's Episcopal Church – Linden Hills, I shared with that community that Christians are folks who have been touched by Jesus. We are people who have been granted a “foretaste” of glory divine. We are people who have seen the reality of the Resurrection in our lives and, when we look at the world around us and we see the prevalence of death, we know that this is not the whole story. Like those women who made their mournful journey to that tomb on Sunday morning and discovered life where any reasonable person would expect to find death, we know that that there is something to this Messiah, to this Christ, to this Jesus. We know that there is something relentless about life. Try as we might, and Lord knows we have tried, we cannot stop the relentless, abundant, all-consuming life of God.

We regularly experience the dissonance of living in a world of death while holding on to the hope and the reality of life. Paul writes to the Church at Philippi:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.³

We are free to live in God's Kingdom because we have already died in Christ. Whatever was separating us from the fullness of the love of God has died and we are free to be bearers of that love into the world.

We do what we do because we have one foot in this world and one foot in the Kingdom of God.

We feed the hungry and house the homeless because we have one foot in the Kingdom of God and in the Kingdom of God there are many mansions and a feast of rich foods for all peoples.

We stand up and fight alongside immigrants and refugees because we have one foot in the Kingdom of God and in the Kingdom of God "there is no East or West... South or North, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth."

We show up with our neighbors who mourn and grieve because we have one foot in the Kingdom of God and in the Kingdom of God, God will "wipe away every tear from their eyes."

We pray and we sing praises to God because we have one foot in the Kingdom of God and in the Kingdom of God all of Creation stands around the throne of God singing "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty."

We serve, we minister, we witness, we walk, we advocate, we build, we dismantle, we share, we invite, we do what we do because we have one foot in this world and one in the Kingdom of God and the dissonance is unbearable.

We are the Beloved Community. We are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. We are those who have been touched by Jesus Christ and who cannot help but touch the world.

When we

- TURN from sin to new life in Jesus,

³ Philippians 3:20

- LEARN the ways of Jesus,
- WORSHIP God in community with other followers of Jesus,
- PRAY on a regular basis, orienting our lives around the ongoing presence of Jesus,
- BLESS others the way Jesus did and continues to do through us,
- GO across boundaries and borders bearing the Good News,
- REST in the goodness of Jesus Christ

we are practicing Beloved Community.

This is not merely a program to revive the church. This is not a seven-step process to get more members, more pledgers, or more money for the capital campaign.

This is what it means to follow Jesus.