

*Let It Go, Let It Be, Let It Come—The Spirit Moves  
...toward Unity  
Ephesians 4:1-6*

I heard someone say once that the Spirit of God is like liquefied lava moving below the surface of the earth, underneath the surface of our lives. That the Spirit never stops moving, no matter how solid those surfaces become, how hardened they get, however frozen we might get in our fixed positions and opinions. And that once in a very great while, something shifts. The tectonic plates that cover the earth get dislodged. They move enough for one to crash into the other. Their collision breaks off pieces at the edges. Suddenly some space opens up between the solid plates; just enough for the Spirit to find the opening it has been waiting for. Like a geyser, the Spirit shoots through that fissure, and does something new. Something that it had no room to do before. Something we can see. Something that changes us.

We have lived through such a moment this last week. Tell your children and your grandchildren. Remind yourself and one another that this is a moment not to forget, a moment that will shape us, as a country, as people of faith, as humanity. This is a moment when I feel the awesome responsibility of speaking a word to you, a word that you will hear right through, a word that doesn't get in the way, so that you can hear the voice of God. I stand here this morning humbled by the privilege of speaking, hopeful that God's Spirit is moving in this place and in you.

This week we have watched people whose lives will be forever scarred by murder find the grace to forgive their loved ones' killer. We saw a church that said, "We will not let this change who we are. We will *still* open our doors to whoever comes in; we will welcome the stranger; we will not be afraid." They did not promise to avenge their deaths; they did not declare a "war on white terror". And they did not give up the campaign that black people have been in for centuries now in this country, for equality, dignity, respect. To not be hated or feared for the color of their skin. To be acknowledged for their full humanity. Those people in Charleston simply said, with their presence, their worship, their grief, "Love wins."

And indeed love will win. No doubt because of the graceful witness and citizenship of African Americans in response to these terrible killings, other people have been moved to action. This week, after holding on for 150 years to a symbol of division and conflict, leaders—*Republicans!*—in the South said: Take down the Confederate flag. Enough. Enough of holding on to a piece of history that inspires pride, but also hatred. It is time to raise on our state buildings just one flag, to remind ourselves that we are one people.

The events in South Carolina in these last ten days have been enough to move us, to shake us out of our numbness, to remind us that there is still work to be done to make this country a place where *all* people can live whole and safe lives.

But the Spirit was not done moving. Once the Spirit is released from our hard-as-rock barricades, it keeps moving. It blows through our even-just-slightly-softened hearts to accomplish the work that God has been imagining all along. And so, in this week, the Supreme Court of this land saw and spoke for another group of people who also have been seeking

equality, dignity respect. To not be hated or feared for who they are. For the acknowledgement of their full humanity. This week the Supreme Court decision said that *every* person in this country is included in the laws that encourage us to make lifetime commitments to one another—to marry—no matter what the gender of the person we love.

Love wins. It has won in this instance because of the long, steady insistence of gay and lesbian couples that they love each other with the same quality of faithfulness and hope for stability that characterize every good marriage. Love has won because of the persistence of people like my friends Scott and Bill, who have gotten married to each other three times over the 35 years they have been together. They have taken every opportunity their church and the law offered them, and they waited—hoping that eventually their commitment to one another would be fully recognized, fully honored.

Our Bishop, Warner Brown, wrote Thursday in a letter to all Methodists in the California Nevada Conference, “The heart of our call to ministry is to be pastor to the community we serve. May we continue to be a people of prayer, and hope, as we work toward a day of equality and inclusion for all people created in the image of God.” And then Bishop Brown quoted Alice Stokes Paul, who was an activist for women’s rights. She said, “I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality.”

I believe—deep down, with every ounce of my spirit and with everything I know about what Jesus came to show us—that this moment has moved us closer to being the inclusive, loving, generous kingdom of God. And yet, I know that we are not all of one mind on the wisdom of the Court’s decision. I know that people of faith in one God can have genuinely different understandings of what God blesses and what God condemns. The Supreme Court’s decision is not a law that binds churches or directs your faith. It will almost certainly not change your mind...because no law, no commandment, can re-shape hearts. We have seen that demonstrated over and over again in just the last year, as we have watched the remnants of a racism that has long been outlawed in this country.

Whatever the law prescribes, some will continue to fear, and sometimes to act hatefully toward people who are different from themselves. The differences among us will not go away. They’re not supposed to go away. God did not create us to be all the same. It is not uniformity that creates unity. What makes us one people, united in the intention to be a loving and faithful people, is a focus on something that is bigger and more truthful than even our own feelings or our fears. Let us be bound together by our sense of wonder that God’s Spirit is moving among us in ways we recognize and in ways we can’t possibly know. From today’s reading out of Ephesians, in the words of *The Message*:

*“Pour yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences. You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”*

[We watched a clip of President Obama's eulogy at the funeral of Clementa Pinckney, as he led the congregation in *Amazing Grace*, and then we too sang *Amazing Grace*.]

Love wins...it is indeed an amazing grace. Amen