

Sermon *Metanoia and the Community of Believers*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 4.19.26

Acts 2:14a,36-41
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35
Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17

On Easter Sunday I talked to you about the unseen realm and how the unseen realm occasionally pops up in the seen realm where we get to experience it. Last week I talked to you about St. Peter. Many of you came up to me and said you liked what I said about St. Peter and why I call him my favorite of all apostles. So today I'm going to combine a little bit of St. Peter with the unseen realm and I am going to do something I have never done, and that is to attempt to talk about the phrase *this perverse generation*. I have never talked about it. It takes a little bit of theological heavy lifting. You're really smart and I appreciate how well you listen and respond and so, are we ready to give this a shot?

I'm going to hold off on this perverse generation because I have to build a little bit to get to where we are with it. So, St. Peter, he was there at the Pentecost. This is 50 days after the great Passover. The spirit comes down on that day, and flames appear on the foreheads of all the apostles. They can hear each other in various languages but understand as if it is their own language. Everyone in attendance is freaked out. Then, Peter stands up with a loud voice and declares what I summarized as the foundations of the church: love, forgiveness, and redemption. Peter said, "I was unlovable and Jesus loves me. I was unforgivable because of all the things I did. I have been forgiven. I was unredeemable because of the things I did and I have been redeemed. If God does that for me, God will clearly do that for you." That this is what he is passing along to them.

Today we heard the concluding part of Peter's speech. He said: You have seen the signs and wonders of Christ. You have seen who Jesus is. There is no doubt that these things occurred. And, you also handed him over to be crucified. And with that, the crowd got noticeably upset and they said, "Brothers, what must we do?" Notice it's not directed directly to Peter. It's to all the apostles – brothers what must we do!? Peter said to them *metanoia*.

Now if you're reading along in the bulletin you won't see the word *metanoia* – you will see *change your hearts and lives*. The reason why I'm throwing in *metanoia* is that this whole story was written down by Luke the gospel writer. Luke is a convert. He followed Paul so he wasn't at the Pentecost. He wasn't there to see this. But what he's telling you are things that he has been told by Peter and by the rest. So he has written this down in the language of Greek. And so the word that Luke used that came out of Peter's mouth was *metanoia*. Now if this sounds familiar, I've preached on *metanoia* before back when we were in the gospel of Mark. Here's a summary: Meta means beyond and noia is how our mind works – like our mind and our heart. *Metanoia* is above and beyond your heart/mind; in other words, get out of your own hearts and get out of your mind, get out of your thought process, think something new, think bigger, think beyond! That is what Peter is telling him (when they asked, "Brothers, what should we do?"). He

answered: Brothers, *metanoia*, change your hearts. Change your minds. Get out of your old thinking.

Now, the hard part for humans is that our brains are designed to do the opposite. So much goes on in our lives, we are bombarded with so much information, our minds create thinking patterns for speed and simplicity. We then get stuck in a rut of thinking (that's the bad side). What Jesus (after his baptism and 40-day temptation, Jesus came out of the wilderness and said, "Metanoia" the Kingdom of God is here) and what Peter is saying is get out of your old thought process.

There's one more thing I need to say about metanoia. It's an action verb. The tense is one that we do not have in English. It's called the aorist tense. It is a tense that indicates something that happened in the past it is currently happening and it will happen in the future. In English we say as it was, is now, and ever shall be good. So metanoia is that tense – a change you made in your heart and mind in the past, is with you today and will be with you in the future. Another way to think of it is metanoia every day... like "Give us this day our daily bread". Peter is saying don't let your mind go back to the old ways of thinking; get metanoia; keep going, keep processing on this keep thinking about it because that's where the new life is and that's where our faith all comes from. It is with that metanoia that we learn about love; to love one another and our neighbor as ourselves. Metanoia is where we learn forgiveness. It is where we learn redemption. It is in the metanoia – constantly renewing our minds.

Now, I have come up with a new way to describe the aorist tense. How many of you have a 401k? Someone, at some point, told you about a 401k and you made a decision: you started to invest money and you have you invested and now it's still growing and will grow. A 401k is like an aorist tense because something that happened in the past is still producing this day and will produce onward and onward. Some of you thankfully give to the mission ministry of all angels through your 401k. So that thing that happened in the past is blessing us in this church today, right now, and will continue to be a blessing in the future. So that is an aorist tense.

Now, let's talk about the phrase "perverse generation". Luke wrote this: "With many other words, Peter testified them and encouraged them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'" *Be saved*. The Greek word translated "saved" is *sozo*. It is an amazing word and it is an aorist tense. It is really hard for us in English to understand *sozo*. One of my favorite Greek to English dictionaries gives me the antonym of each word to help the English speaker understand the meaning of the Greek word. The antonym, or the opposite, of *sozo* is *destruction*. Destruction. So whatever the opposite of destruction is what "be saved" means. There are some English translations use this phrase, "Be saved from destruction of this perverse generation." It's a way of trying to combine this word with the antonym to give us a better understanding.

I'd like to give you a 21st century way of looking at "Be saved from this perverse generation". I've taken a good look at what Peter wrote to the Church. I read what he's saying in this way: all of humanity is on a conveyer belt headed towards destruction. We can't help ourselves. We seem to always, in every generation, to head towards destruction. But that's not the end of the story. What Peter and Jesus are saying is this: "Be saved [*sozo*], come with us. Get off of that conveyer belt that's heading towards destruction and head into love and forgiveness and redemption."

The last piece to look at is the “perverse generation”. Peter wrote, "Since you call upon a father who judges all people according to their actions without favoritism, you should conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your dwelling in a strange land." This is where strange land, perverse generation point us to. The perverse generation is the way that the world generates and works and moves over time. There are a multiplicity of systems that are happening on this earth. One of them is the kingdom of God. One of them is the kingdom of the earth. There are systems above which we would call heaven. There are systems below which we call hell. And then we are in this permeable, vulnerable, beautiful layer right in the middle of where heaven and things from down below affect the way that our kingdom works, which affects the way that the generations/systems work within it. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, he's talking about the kingdom that's coming down. When we say the Lord's prayer, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* means that there is a heavenly system that works on our plane of existence which means there are other systems too. The system from below is the perverse side of the generation/system. That perverse side is the one that sets people against each other. It is the opposite of forgiveness. It is the opposite of redemption. It is the opposite (if there is one) of love. And that that system, that perverse system, was running in the world then and is running in the world right now. That system is like a foreign land to the Kingdom of God. Those that have experienced God's kingdom – love, forgiveness and redemption – suddenly see the world/systems/generation for what it is. Without changing anything, the system has humanity heading towards destruction. But, do not lose heart, there is a way out.

Jesus and Peter are saying for us: be saved (sozo) from that destructive system. Open your heart. Open your mind. Open your mind to the loving of God and of your neighbor. Open your mind to that we are all created as one, as the Lord is one. Open your mind and your heart to see each other as all fallen and all redeemed, just as Peter had fallen and was redeemed.

Yesterday, Saturday, I had a glimpse of life off the conveyer belt of destruction. I participated in metanoia. I have seen the other realm. I have seen how good it is when brothers and sisters get along together in faith and in love. About twenty people from All Angels, with about twenty people from Temple Beth Israel and others from the Longboat Chapel, Christ Church Presbyterian and St. Armands Lutheran, gathered at 8:30 to pick up garbage on Longboat Key. At 9:30 we had breakfast together then at 10 we had an interfaith worship service. (I'll invite those who participated to stand up). You are witnesses of these things. You have seen how we on this island can gather together in love and in peace. And despite our differences, despite our radically different views of religion and the world, we can participate together where it is most important – social action (clean up) and worship of the One God.

As a result of the actions of our group and the other groups that were gathered, we picked up 140 pounds of garbage. That is garbage that would have gone into the bay or into the Gulf. That is garbage that causes troubles for our turtles and other sea life. At one point when we were picking up garbage, Fr. Fred said to me, "I'm not sure about the spirituality of picking up cigarette butts." But that garbage leaks into our ecosystem. Instead, we can gather together and clean up our island. Along those same lines, we opened our hearts and our minds for our neighbors and for those of other religious traditions. Just like the prophets of old and the psalms say, we all streamed to the Temple for refreshment and worship, singing songs of praise and gathering for fellowship and joy. We were witnesses of those things. We streamed into the temple. We shared a

meal together and then we talked about four documents that have shaped American life in celebration of America's 250th anniversary. We talked about the Declaration of Independence. We talked about the poem that is on the Statue of Liberty. We talked about the poem which has turned into a song, America the Beautiful. And then we took a look at Frederick Douglas's words in 1852 of what it is like to be a slave while America celebrates independence. We did it as a community. We did it as recognizing how far, thanks be to God, we have come. And God's not done with this yet. We have more to do. We have more to go. But we recognize this in our shared and our common values of people worshiping one Lord, of people worshiping and recognizing that community is safer where we are connected and where we know each other. and where community is best expressed by picking up garbage and then sharing breakfast together and then worshipping together.

We worshiped in the language of Aramaic, which I love. That's the language that Jesus spoke. We use that language to talk about those who are in mourning and those who need peace. We sang a song in Hebrew which talks about how beautiful it is when brothers and sisters get along. We sang America the Beautiful. We sang This Land is My Land, This Land is Your Land. We are witnesses of these things.

There is a perverse generation that runs through every generation that has ever existed on the face of this planet. That generation sets us against each other; it says that one group is better than the other; one group can look down upon the other; and sometimes, one group can make some even slaves of the other. It is a perverse generation. And yet, there's another system on this world that says we are loved, we are equal, we are one; that there are certain inalienable rights, instituted by God, that says all are created equal. We saw a glimpse of it yesterday. We saw the kingdom of heaven around us. We participated in metanoia.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.