

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

This Holy Week I have been unable to get out of my mind the words sung with ominous warning in Jesus Christ, Superstar: “He is dangerous. He is dangerous.”

Did you know that “dangerous” derives from a Latin word which means “**to have dominion?**” Those who dominated in Jerusalem knew that the One who came in the name of the Lord to save the people was dangerous. He threatened their rule. And the gospels testify that Jesus was also clear that the choices he was making were dangerous. At stake were **Who** would have dominion over the hearts and minds of the people and **Whose rule** would ultimately sway history and heal creation.

All week I have been pondering whether “dangerous” is how we in the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ might be described.

- Perhaps this is because last week when people of the Abrahamic faiths gathered 800 strong at the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition’s “Day on the Hill” and met one-on-one with legislative leaders, I experienced what happens when Christians, Jews and Muslims give voice to the ways in which their faith convictions shape their lives and urge governance with compassion and social justice. It is dangerous.
- Perhaps this is because the sermon I heard last Sunday emphasized Jesus’ prayer, “not my will, but Thine” and his decision not to head back to the relative safety and familiarity of Galilee, but to turn faithfully toward Jerusalem. That was dangerous.
- Perhaps this is because I am a faithful reader of John Thomas’s blogⁱ which recently focused on “This Jesus, Called Back to Duty.” Quoting from Bill Moyer’s stirring speech at the 50th Anniversary General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

This new struggle for a just world – it’s not a partisan affair. . . . But to see whose side God is on just go to the record. It’s the widow and the orphan, the stranger and the poor who are blessed in the eyes of God. It is kindness and mercy that prove the power of faith, and it is justice that measures the worth of the state, not empire. Kings are held accountable for how the poor fare under their reign; presidents, too. Prophets speak to the gap between rich and poor as a reason for God’s judgment. Poverty and justice are religious issues, and Jesus moves among the disinherited. . . . This is the Jesus who drove the money changers out of the temple of Jerusalem, and it is this Jesus called back to duty who will drive the money changers out of the temples of democracy. This is dangerous.

- And perhaps this is because last Saturday I stumbled upon a biography of William Sloane Coffin Jr. and now more than half-way through the book I have been nightly steeped in his energy, conviction and “holy impatience.” Coffin was clear that “Jesus did not direct His voice exclusively to the heart of every person, but challenged the unjust people who were governing the society in which He lived, which, of course, was why He was crucified.”ⁱⁱ He was dangerous.

In his classic book on Resurrection, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, proclaims that:

The Church is not the assembly of the disciples as a 'continuation' of Jesus, but the continuing group of those engaged in dialogue with Jesus, those compelled to renew again and again their confrontation with a person who judges and calls and recreates. The Church may be Christ's 'Body,' the place of his presence; but it is entered precisely by the ritual encounter with his death and resurrection, by the 'turning around' which stops us struggling to interpret his story in the light of ours and presses us to interpret ourselves in the light of the Easter event.ⁱⁱⁱ

This, too, is dangerous. For, as Williams asserts, "our response to [the incredible] grace [of God in and through the Resurrection] becomes inseparable from the mission to share it." If you doubt that the world is hungering for this good news, you need only open the morning paper or turn on the evening news. Bill Coffin was right, I think: "Christianity has not been tried and failed; it has very rarely ever been tried."

What better time to do so than the Easter season? May we confess with our lives Who has saved us and profess with our lives Who has dominion? May we live faithfully and dangerously in Christ's name! Blessed Easter! Amen.

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ⁱ Rev. John Thomas is the former General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, and is now Senior Advisor to the President at Chicago Theological Seminary.

ⁱⁱ Warren Goldstein, William Sloane Coffin: A Holy Impatience, p., 141.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rowan Williams, Resurrection, p. 76.