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THE PROPHET

VOICES OF BU SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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Pay Attention Now!

November 30,

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“
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart. ”

Howard Thurman

The African American Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University from 1953-1965 was The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman. He wrote the poem “I Will Light Candles This Christmas.” Here is an excerpt:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,*

*When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.*

I went to bed early on Tuesday night and woke up to a stark reality on Wednesday morning. A reality in which I was called out of my comfortable and smug place. That place where I had no words for my students or parishioners. That place where all I had to offer was myself in a ministry of presence, my hugs, and my tears. A place where old school lyrics of the Gap Band and The Temptations have new meaning:

*Say oops upside your head say oops upside your head
Say oops upside your head say oops upside your head
Pay attention now*

And

*People movin' out, people movin' in.
Why, because of the color of their skin.
Run, run, run, but you sho' can't hide
An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
Vote for me and I'll set you free
Rap on, brother, rap on.
Segregation, determination, demonstration, integration, aggravation, humiliation, obligation to our
nation
Ball of confusion!*

I take that back, I wasn't called out of my comfortable place. I was ripped out of my comfortable place of smugness. If I was really, really honest in the core of my being I had gone back to the understanding of my God as a child. You know that God – the one who you treat as “Genie God” or “Santa Claus God.” The God that gives you that one thing that you wanted. That one thing – toy, job, partner – that you wanted. After all, it looked like there was a really good chance that I was going to get what I wanted. We are always disappointed by Genie and Santa Claus God.

What I got reflected back to me was the God of love and compassion. Let me correct this: I didn't say I was happy about this. But, Genie/Santa Claus God allows me to be in a space of smugness – entitlement – that the work of God's hands in the world can sorta be done on my time (or to use a Massachusetts expression yea, yea, yea).

What I heard instead was that the struggle is real. I cannot take for granted that the gains for civil rights for everyone are an indefinite given. That people who I do and don't know are deeply hurt and wounded in ways I cannot begin to imagine and I don't get to be so “uppity” and self-righteous that I can ignore them because they don't think and behave like me. Yes! Racism is real, homophobia is real, and the disdain for the other is real. This is not the first time for this kind of rodeo. All I have to do is read scripture and talk to my elders. You want a dose of reality? Call an African American woman over the age of 80. My mother will be happy to talk to any of you.

God has not abandoned the world. God has not abandoned the people of the United States. God is still

with us, giving each of us the opportunity to bear witness to God's reign which is now and will be for all eternity. God's reign has no end. God is not Democrat, Republican, Independent or a member of the Green Party. God will not crumble with time or succumb to the elements like the great pyramids or coliseums and no other human being will ever be able to take it away.

Jesus himself said that:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[a] and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your God. God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your God is perfect." *Matthew 5:43-48*

We do know, however, that we are not to live our lives in fear and despair waiting for the end but we are to live, live, in constant hope and with endurance, all the while building up the Reign of God.

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

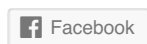
To bring peace among others,

To make music in the heart.

Pay attention now. Amen

*The Rev. Dr. Karen Coleman is the new Episcopal Chaplain at BU. She is also rector of St. James Episcopal Church in Somerville. Her passion is social, economic and food justice. Her blog *Chow and Faith* explores the Theology of Food.*

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