

Sermon, Ordination and Commissioning
Brian Lennstrom and Circle
June 19, 2018

....and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself.

Today is June 19th, which is a simply a day I could find on my calendar to be here, to do this, ordain Brian Lennstrom to the priesthood, and commission Diane, June, and Brian as new members of the circle here. There was really no magic to it other than that: Brian and I frantically trying to find a date.

It's just happened to be June 19th. But June 19th, especially in the part of the world I came here from has another significance too. It is called Juneteenth. And It is quite important in the African-American history, and all of our history, and quite more prevalent and present in Texas especially.

Juneteenth is an official holiday or recognized day of remembrance in 45 states. Washington is one of them.

Juneteenth, also known as Juneteenth Independence Day or Freedom Day, commemorates the June 19, 1865, announcement of the abolition of slavery in State of Texas and more generally the emancipation of enslaved African-Americans throughout the former Confederacy of the southern United States.

Texas was not a battleground in the civil war and so many escaped to Texas to miss the war and to continue farming and brought with them their slaves. Juneteenth is seen as the final emancipation, it is the place where word of the end of the civil war took the longest to get to.

Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston Texas on June 18, 1865. It had been months earlier, April 9th that Robert E Lee and the Confederate army had surrendered. But that word had not yet reached Texas.. So, on June 19th, General Granger stood on the balcony of the

Ashton Villa, in Galveston and read General Order #3, which emancipated all slaves still slaves in Texas.

It read, in part, “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor.”

You might be asking, why is he telling us all of this? What does it have to do with why we are gathered here? Well, that is a good question, and perhaps the connections I am making will be lost on you, but primarily I bring it up to make sure we don’t forget it. a reminder you might say, that anything we gather to do in this space, no matter what it might be, is always surrounded by some pretty important matters out in the world.

Second, I think there is a history beyond this day and the reality that proclamations and ordinations and commissionings, with words, and celebration, mean nothing until the reality described in the words becomes real.

When General Granger walked off that balcony, every slave in the state of Texas was not suddenly issued a time card, given a living wage, secure from abuse in the workforce, given good safety conditions, and certainly did they not suddenly see the end of all discrimination.

No, the truth was still a long time off, and many people’s parts, a downright denial and obstruction by others that it was to be a truth at all. some have said emancipation is still merely a dream, not a reality. to this day.

All of those things I mentioned have taken years, indeed centuries after that day in Galveston, to try to make a reality. But it was a step, and an important one, and that is one of the connections I want to make with what we do here tonight.

Now back to number 1 on my list of connections to Juneteeth and this day, being surrounded by some pretty important matters in our world, while we gather here tonight.

We are a long way from our other border, the one to the south, where we see ourselves living out a reality, I believe, as people of faith, we must question.

Being a people and a country of laws is one thing, and I would walk that line with you a long way, but how we enforce them is fundamental to the soul of our collective life, as a country and as a people. We have divisions in this country on so many things, we have divisions in our church on so many things, we are a divided people. Our divisions economically are growing wider, not closer.

We are becoming a more isolated people, the most connected generation ever, and yet the most alone, more suicides than we have ever been able to record, amongst the richest people on the planet.

There is a lot going on out there, surrounding our positive, hopeful, faithful words and enactments in here. We can't forget we do what we do in here, for that, out there. To be part of it, to help change it, to walk as people of faith in the midst of it. That is our call not just from tonight and not just for these three people added to the leadership circle, and not just for all those in that circle, but for each and everyone one of us, who have been baptized from those waters, that is our call, to take this faith, out to that suffering world, and to do something, about it.

Actually, I would argue, if this, what we do tonight, is not about that, I am not sure it is for anything.

The Kingdom Jesus envisioned was not an individual reward for you and me if we got all the "i"s dotted and all the "t"s crossed in our life, even though that has been the prevalent, and I would say, bad theology. No, what Jesus envisioned was a changed world, a changed reality, here.

Our churches were to reflect the society, the Kingdom, the world we hoped for all of God's Children, which as our Presiding Bishop so well reminded us, is ALL people, ALL, not a chosen few, not some, not those that look like us, think like us, believe like us, ALL people.

Even those who cross borders out of fear for their lives, not out of selfishness or greed, which is quite frankly the underlying belief by so many who support this policy. When in reality it is our selfishness and greed which wants to deny them entry. Even them, on both sides, for ALL people. That is who Jesus came and died for, and opened up his Kingdom to.

Tonight, we do not commission Diane, June, and Brian to take on a higher role, a more important one, to take all the burden or bear more of it, but instead to a different role, that will help us all bear the burden together, bear the burden of the people together, so we will not have to bear it all by ourselves.

That is the faith life in community. And notice, nowhere, does it say there will be no more burden. That is as clear as it gets. That will be there. We will be in a struggle between fear, and scarcity, and selfishness, and greed, and, joy, abundance, sacrifice, generosity, and love.

Tonight we commission and ordain three for different roles, but we share the burden of the journey, together. None of us are off the hook. We have all signed on and up for the Kingdom of God, and it is our call, together, to help bring it. To share the burden of that, and even with all evidence to the contrary, walk courageously toward the Kingdom Jesus dreamed of.

That is what we push, nudge, gently pull just a bit closer, tonight. It is not THE step, it is one step, and we all, called by our God, walk on tomorrow in the work given us to do. For there is much yet to do.

My sisters and brothers I have said these words to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.