

YES WE CAN -- BARACK OBAMA & DR. KING Sunday

January 18, 2009

Jeremiah 29: 11

“ I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, “ plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.”

Hebrews 6: 19

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

1 Timothy 2: 1-3

“ I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone---for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior,”

I must confess to being nearly speechless regarding the election of Barack Obama. I know that this is impossible, especially for a preacher, but I find it deeply moving. I grew up in the deep Appalachian mountains and had a southern twang until I lost the last of it on purpose in college...unless my brother from Mississippi calls and then I sound like I just walked "out of the holler down from the crick bank over the branch and pulled up a rock'n chair next to the fa'r". (I would occasionally have to translate conversations between my mother and Susan when we first married!).

We grew up in what could only be called a racist environment. Which seemed strange to me as I grew old enough to think it through for two reasons...first these were Christian people...and second, there were no black people to speak of in the mountains!

But something had happened to my father. He had left the farm before finishing high school. He had joined the Army and got an all expense paid trip to Korea. President Truman had integrated the Armed forces, which was just fine with my dad. He soon discovered that everyone's blood was just as red, and a lot of guys lost a lot of it. that experience, I think, changed him forever. When he came back, he returned to the south but we was different. He began working for the TVA, which was also integrated. We lived on a farm for while with our only neighbors a native American family, our best friends. My grandparents couldn't understand it.

We moved a lot. He worked construction in large power plants. We went to school in Murphysboro, Tenn when it was first integrated and there was a fuss. We rode the bus to school and I was in first grade I think. This school as unusual because it was k-12. I was always outgoing...can you guess! And I made friends with a high school boy sitting on the front seat of the school bus. His name was James too. He

played football. I wanted to see the crowds, and he let me sit on his lap. He walked me to the school from the bus. We sat together ever day.

During our next visit to my grandparents they were concerned about our going to school with all “those children”. My parents said not to worry, I had made a friend...my grandparents said “of course he would, he would talk to a wooden Indian!”

Yes, my mother said. He’s a fine young man. A high school boy. His name is James too. “what a fine young man, a Christian boy, yes I am sure.” He let Jim sit on his lap and walked him to the class, “what a fine mother he must have...Christian people! I bet they are Baptist” ...my grandmother’s highest compliment!

Oh, and Momma, he’s black. You had to be there. I guess growing up in that environment, I am touched by his election in some small way like those who knew prejudice to a much greater degree. I doubted this day would come in my lifetime, and I rejoice to see it here.

It was not long after that we moved to California.

There is ignorance and prejudice everywhere...and we can see it here in California. But it is less pervasive and accepted here that it was there then.

It is amazing what you can get used to, isn’t it? You probably know the old saying about how to boil a frog alive? If you drop a frog into boiling water it gets burned and hops out of the water. But if you put it into room temperature water and slowly raise the temperature it gets used to it and will be boiled alive.

That is often the way it is for us and our compromises with evil. The people in my story, taken individually, weren’t terrible, totally evil people for the most part. Most were mothers, fathers, Grandparents, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters...most were church going.

They were my people, my family whom I otherwise loved. But they were terribly, horribly wrong.

And I believe they knew it in their hearts. They really didn't know any black people, really. Their fear is one of ignorance and was scape-goating. They had turned these into the "others" who were to blame for their life's ills.

This is a common tactic. Folks unite not around a common purpose or ideal, but around a common enemy. We need someone to hate or blame...a common enemy unifies us. What a tragic and terrible and evil ploy...it is empty and devoid of true power and strength and any lasting sustainability.

This is what impresses me about Barack Obama. His rhetoric is not about dividing the country, but about uniting us. And his theme is one of hope. He seeks to use hope to unite us as a people to move us toward a common goal.

And if anything can do it, hope can. Wherever there is great adversity, or great challenge, we have choice...and that choice is really about what is in our heart, our head and in our hands.

In our heart...what do we love?

What do we care about? What are our core beliefs? What causes us to keep going? To get up in the morning when things are bleak or things are difficult or we hurt? Why do we still strive and struggle when things are difficult?

Yesterday Barack Obama spoke in Baltimore about the love of our Nation and challenged us and Americans to strive together to work to make America better...to take up the cause of freedom and liberty and to create a more perfect union. He makes clear that there is work to be done, and that we must work together, but that the work is noble and

honored and true...that it is bigger than him or you or me... he is calling us back to the beginning, back to basics, back to what America is all about. Back to what we love about this country.

This question is not only about our country, it is also about us individually. About the challenges we face as individuals, when things get hard. In my case, my faith calls me forward. The verse I read from Hebrews “we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure”. I also keep going because of God’s call in my life, he has called me to serve and that call pulls me yet, even disabled.

What is in your head...what are you thinking...

The Bible says that as a person thinks...so is he.

The real question is what do you think the future will be? If you have written a future that is full of doom and gloom, stay in bed. But if you are optimistic, get up and get ready. It’s coming. Sure, there are variables you can’t control and work you will have to do. But the question of direction is really important. Which way are you looking.

I remember when I first came here as pastor in 1991. I was sent to an Urban Pastor’s conference in Portland by the Bishop. The first night the question asked really floored me. When WAS your church’s hay day? When it got to by my turn I was the year 2000. Remember, it was 1991. It got a laugh, and I knew I was in the wrong room. I had not come to preside over a church burial, but by God’s grace a resurrection. I believed then and still believe today that the best years of this church are head of it.

What is your future looking like Jeremiah 29: 11

“ I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, “ plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future.”

The clip I showed from Dr. King was important. He said that the time he would choose to live in all of time would be 30 or 40 years in the future...because he saw a movement beginning in his day...that it was growing dark then, but that meant you could see the stars and that

people were responding and banding together and he expected great things to be accomplished. And look at where we have come.

And finally, what is in your hands...

Are they empty? Or are they full? Take the hand of your neighbor. Look at them. Rich or poor, young or old, straight or gay, black or white, Hispanic or Asian, pacific islander or native American or anything in-between...we are one in Jesus Christ...

And working together we can accomplish so much more than we can working alone. Let us lift up holy hands together in prayer as the scripture calls us to so we may live peacefully....

Let us pray for our future President, Barack Obama....

And His family....

And all our elected leaders....in the Senate

House of Representatives

State of California

County Board of Supervisors

Mayor Chuck Reed

Sam Liccardo, City Councilman

Rest of City Council