



Sunday, September 27, 2020

Installation of Rev. Tyler Connoley as our Conference Minister!

Sermon: You are Enough

Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel

Conference Minister, Missouri Mid-South Conference

Clackamas United Church of Christ

This Sunday we celebrated the installation of our Conference Minister here in the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ! The Rev. Tyler Connoley was officially installed! He is a wonderful leader who happens to be an openly gay man. That's right! In the United Church of Christ an openly LGBTQIA person can attain the highest leadership roles in our denomination. Thanks be to God! *Pastor Adam*

Sermon:

Greetings Central Pacific Conference! My name is Ginny Brown Daniel, and I am the conference minister for the Missouri Mid-South conference. On behalf of all of the UCC churches in Arkansas, Memphis, Tennessee, and Missouri, I bring you greetings and deep love in our ministry together.

It is a pleasure to worship with you and celebrate your ministry with the Reverend Tyler Connoley. I had the honor of ministering with Tyler for two years in the Missouri Mid-South Conference. What I observed, learned and experienced immediately is that Tyler is truly called to conference ministry. The marrow of his being is called to support and empower the local church. He knows how to minister through traditional committees, through churches that have long heritage and burgeoning ministries just starting. He knows how to minister with ministers of all persuasions and ilk. He knows how to minister with a community, those that know and



*The Rev. Ginny Brown Daniel, UCC
Conference Minister for the
Missouri Mid-South Conference*

love the United Church of Christ and those that know nothing of our heritage or our corner of the religious sphere.

Tyler leads with a hybrid ability to offer theological, prophetic, relational, administrative and visionary leadership. You are one lucky conference. In our time of ministry in the Missouri Mid-South conference, I observed and experienced this firsthand. Tyler's intuitive ways of opening space for the divine to nudge, to comfort, to inspire, to create health and wholeness among the body of Christ and the expression of the United Church of Christ. And so I say, in a prayerful spirit, you are one lucky conference. Let us pray.

Oh, spirit of the living God be with us in this space, that is holy ground, as it is a virtual from many different places. Still our bodies, perhaps for the first time this week that our pulse may find its rhythm with your pulse. Open our minds to hear sacred stories in the context and spirit of this celebration of ministry and inspire our spirits indeed, to follow the way of Jesus Christ. It is in your love that we pray, Amen.

Central Pacific Conference: What a year you have had so far with your Conference Minister. It certainly wasn't what you expected, I imagine, when you voted and called Tyler to be your Conference Minister this time last year. Who would have imagined that as you began your ministry together, your churches would be thrust into a once-in-a-century pandemic. And in the span of a few days in March, you had to change everything immediately about how you worshiped, how you fellowshiped, how you served as the church. And you did it.

Who would have imagined that once you found your rhythm of Zoom and Facebook live and online giving, that the racist murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmed Arbery would force your churches to figure out how to protest in the midst of the deadly pandemics of white supremacy and COVID-19. And you did it.

Who would have imagined that what began as peaceful protests each night in the streets of Portland would demand that our clergy and members stand on the watch post between the anger, righteous anger from centuries of oppression and discrimination to the federal administration and white nationalists, trying to bully citizens in Portland into silence, but you were there and you did it.

And then when, in what I can only imagine was the moment of pure exhaustion from the trauma of living through two deadly pandemics, the wild fires set a blaze through the towns and your rural communities of Oregon and Southern Idaho and Southern Washington, endangering homes churches, and the conference Camp Adams, and requiring everyone of you to advocate for environmental justice, with your most vulnerable neighbors. And you did it.

And then as the rains emerged this past week, and we thought: "Oh, a moment of respite," we learned of the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, and you once again have had to summon your energy and your strength in order to advocate on behalf of all of your neighbors who are in danger in this critical moment, and you are doing it.

You, Central Pacific Conference, have walked through the blazing valley of the shadow of death. And here you are, not quite the way any of us would imagine your conference ministry to begin, but here you are, and you are doing it on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ.

I want to thank you for your Christ-like spirit in these past six months. In many ways, Jesus' instructions to the disciples, as he sent them out into unknown towns, must have felt like your mission and your purpose through the journey of these two deadly pandemics. Heal the sick. Or as you have placed on your website, "foster stronger connections" ... check.

Raise the dead. Or from your mission and purpose, "nurture spiritual growth" ... check.

Cleanse those with skin disease. Or from your mission and purpose "amplify our prophetic voice"... check.

And throw out the demons. Or from your mission and purpose, "be an anti-racist conference." And I sure hope that we can throw those demons out and check that off soon.



*The Rev. Tyler Connoley, UCC Conference
Minister for the Central Pacific Conference*

Your very purpose as a conference has been the foundation of who and whose you are in the midst of these pandemics in 2020. But what now? How will you journey together as the Central Pacific Conference and as Conference Minister? The radical nature of Jesus' words that we often miss in what comes next is not only what the disciples are to do traveling from town to town, but how they are to make the journey. Jesus says travel as itinerants, ones without the safety net, ones without the family or the friends or the benefit or the privilege. Travel as outsiders.

I believe Jesus told the disciples and all of us to travel as outsiders because it pierces our privilege and requires our complete dependence on our neighbor and the hospitality of others. I've seen your Conference Minister embody traveling as an itinerant, not only in his physical travels and where and how he grew up and went to college and began his ministry, but in his cognitive and spiritual travels as well.

I watched in our ministry together how Tyler committed to read only nonwhite, biblical commentaries, as he prepared his sermons and went to preach in our local churches. This enabled him as an itinerant to receive the hospitality of wisdom from his brown and black siblings. Jesus knew this would be the case as he offered the traveling rules for our outsider disciples: travel lightly. Don't burden yourself with what you think you may need. Seek help from others when those needs arise. And when you enter into a new town or city, find someone who is worthy and stay there until you go on your way. And when you are welcomed into someone's home, bring them Shalom... Peace. If the house is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

Jesus' instructions to his disciples are indeed radical because it is the complete opposite of what we expect. And maybe what we would say if we were in Jesus' shoes. Like those of you who have hiked the trails of your conference, you know, that it requires at least a minimal backpack of necessities in traveling from that capacity: water, nourishment, as well as good hiking boots and a walking stick. But Jesus forbids those amenities. Even the Gospel of Mark's version allows for adequate shoes and a walking stick for the disciples. But the Gospel of Matthew will have none of that, stipulating that none of those things are given to the itinerant, and they shouldn't be given to the disciples, instead give peace. Give peace, which is already deep within who and whose you are.

You, Central Pacific Conference, know about this peace from which Jesus speaks. This peace, this Shalom is the foundation of your anti-racist, open and affirming immigrant-welcoming, just peace and earth justice conference. Who-woo! You know that in your own towns, this kind of peace, in all of those expressions of your commitment of embodying the peace of Jesus Christ, will not always be received as worthy. And so here Jesus' words in this moment ... my translation, my paraphrase ... would be that Jesus says: don't stress out. If your peace, your Shalom, your open and affirming spirit, your anti-racist commitment, your immigrant-welcoming, just-peace, earth-justice presence is not welcomed and received, for that peace that you give will be returned to you.

I know this about your Conference Minister as well. It takes a very strong and mature person to be able to give that peace. And when that peace is not received, when it is scoffed or sometimes harmed, it takes a mature person to let that go and not to bottle it up and rage inside. When Tyler and I ministered together, there were times when we were asked to enter space in conflict. Sometimes that was inner conflict within the church. Sometimes that was conflict with the conference, what the church might see as, and understand as, the conflict. Sometimes that conflict was with the United Church of Christ. And we were invited into that space. And what I saw and appreciate about Tyler is that in every one of those places, even and especially, when he knew going into that space, that the peace that he offered would not be welcomed, would not be received. He gave it fully.

Tyler's very body, mind, and soul exudes the peace that Jesus describes in this itinerant traveling journey. And in those moments when quote, "the house wasn't worthy" as the



Tyler with Friends from
Interfaith Conference

gospel writer describes, Tyler would always ground himself in this peace. This Shalom. That his call by God is rooted in something far bigger than one church, one conflict, one community, or even one conference and denomination. It is rooted in Shalom. The very essence of God's love.

But what about you Central Pacific Conference? How is God calling you to serve and to travel in this moment, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic and 400 years into the pandemic of white supremacy? How is God calling you as an itinerate traveler to serve, to love, to minister and to bring peace? I would like to tell you that now that you have your Conference Minister, now that you have your purpose of what to do as a conference, now that you have identified yourself and all of these expressions of peace, the essence of your being is going to be okay, and everything is going to be smooth sailing, but you know, it's not.

Like the disciples as Jesus sent them out, as itinerants following the way of Jesus, is messy and chaotic and dangerous. And I think those would be my words to you, Central Pacific Conference, and Tyler ... following the ways

of Jesus in your ministry, through these pandemics and beyond, traveling as itinerants along the way of Jesus, offering peace, it is going to be messy. It is going to be chaotic and it is going to be dangerous. But it is also going to be enough, because you will have Jesus, the Christ who embodied all that you needed before you and God, your creator, who has already equipped you with all that you need, as enough.

In my own itinerate journey, midway through these deadly pandemics, I recently sought the hospitality of a poet named Ada Limon. Ms. Limon is a gen-Xer of Mexican descent and in 2018, Ms. Limon published a collection of poems entitled, *The Carrying*. Her poems describe the contradictory joys and burdens we all carry, which she describes as follows, "I wanted to point to the human capacity to carry many things at once."

I want to offer one of these poems as a companion with you, as you continue your ministry as the Central Pacific Conference and Conference Minister, the Reverend Tyler Connoley. This poem is entitled "A New National Anthem."

A New Anthem

The truth is, I've never cared for the National Anthem. If you think about it, it's not a good song. Too high for most of us with "the rockets red glare" and then there are the bombs. (Always, always, there is war and bombs.)

Once, I sang it at homecoming and threw even the tenacious high school band off key. But the song didn't mean anything, just a call to the field, something to get through before the pummeling of youth.

And what of the stanzas we never sing, the third that mentions "no refuge could save the hireling and the slave"? Perhaps, the truth is, every song of this country has an unsung third stanza, something brutal snaking underneath us as we blindly sing the high notes with a beer sloshing in the stands hoping our team wins.

Don't get me wrong, I do like the flag, how it undulates in the wind like water, elemental, and best when it's humbled, brought to its knees, clung to by someone who has lost everything, when it's not a weapon, when it flickers, when it folds up so perfectly you can keep it until it's needed, until you can love it again.

Until the song in your mouth feels like sustenance, a song where the notes are sung by even the ageless woods, the short-grass plains, the Red River Gorge, the fistful of land left unpoisoned.

That song that's our birthright, that's sung in silence when it's too hard to go on, that sounds like someone's rough fingers weaving into another's, that sounds like a match being lit in an endless cave, the song that says my bones are your bones, and your bones are my bones, and isn't that enough?

My siblings of the Central Pacific Conference, Jesus has called you on this journey. As itinerate siblings, what you have is enough. So go and serve and minister and be messy and be chaotic and be dangerous. And know that as you give the peace, the Shalom in the midst of these pandemics for our nation in this critical moment, you are enough this day and forevermore, Amen.

