

01/18/09
Thompkins Hallman
sermon

VOICES OF CHANGE

Good Morning!

It's so good to be here. It has been a long time since I've had the opportunity to speak to you. I want to speak to you about change in terms of country, the Methodist Church, Fairhaven, and a few of my own experiences.

You've heard a lot about change recently but change is not a new word. We have been changing since the foundation of our country. Come take a journey with me.

The founding fathers in forming the constitution and Thomas Jefferson's Bill of Rights that said all men are created equal did not include slaves, indentured servitude, or women. Had the slavery issue been included the 13 states would never have ratified the Bill of Rights. It was a difficult task to meet that challenge. That issue was a change that would come much later. In fact it took many years. New states were admitted to the union as a free state, like Kansas or a slave state like Missouri. The Northwest Territory which would eventually become the states of Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin were to have no slavery or indentured servitude and therefore slavery would not spread into other western territories. At this point there became more free states than slave states. The Lincoln Douglas Debate clashed over the issue of slavery. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry was to bring about change but it didn't work. He was captured and hung. He warned that we would pay a bitter price and we did with the firing on Fort Sumpter and the beginning of the civil war. Brother against brother. Frederick Douglas persuaded Lincoln to draft blacks into the military so they would have a stake in its outcome. Douglas goes to the White House at the invitation of Lincoln. Lincoln said to his wife "I wonder where my friend Mr. Douglas is?" His wife was not very please that Lincoln had invited him. Later he saw him coming and said "Hear come my friend." What Mr. Lincoln did not know was that Frederick Douglas was not late but he had been asked to go to the back door when he arrived, but he refused. Change comes hard for some.

Julia Ward Howe was a voice for change. She wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic: "Mine Eyes Has Seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord,-----His Truth is Marching On." This was at her room in the Old Willard Hotel at 14th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW.

The 13th, 14th and 15th amendment brought change. In 1875 a black senator was elected from Mississippi. Passage of a civil right bill that allowed all well behaved citizens to go to any hotel, theatre, restaurant or any other place of public interest was declared invalid by the US Supreme in 1895. In 1896 the Plessy decision set up separate schools. A backward change! Black laws passed in the south that you could only vote if your grandfather had voted in the early 1900 under states rights was a further backward change. No civil rights laws would clear Congress for over 60 years.

The Gandhi Theory began in India with Mohandas Gandhi's struggle to free that country from British colonial rule. The protect included sit-ins, and direct demonstrations. It was successful. Change came to India when it gained its independence but further change came when it split in to two countries, India and Pakistan.

The Theory came to America by James Farmer who promised his father that he was going to end segregation. Did you see the movie "The Great Debaters?" It was centered around Wiley College in Texas and its debate with Princeton University but only briefly spoke of the Congress of Racial Equality.

James Farmer in August 1941, fresh out of theological school at Howard University had a job as race relations secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) an anti violent and anti war organization. He went to a meeting for them in Columbus, Ohio. While there he gave a speech and said, "The Blessed Community and the Family of Christ are rent asunder by the evil practice of apartheid in America, which will not end until the decent and the religious people of the land will it so. God willing, segregation will end when the good people withdraw their cooperation from it and stop, wittingly or unwittingly giving it their support. What I am proposing is that FOR because of our thorough going commitment to non-violence and brotherhood, take the lead in setting up a vehicle through which that non-cooperation with evil can be forced into a national movement."

He then summarized one memo of his experiences with White City and the struggle against restrictive covenants and residential segregation. FOR decided to sponsor the new organization and they authorized James Farmer on FOR time, to start a new organization along the lines he envisions in one city, Chicago. Back in Chicago in April 1942 the new organization was formed. James Farmer was elected chairman. A university student part Chinese and part Caucasian shouted, "I got it, lets call it CORE because it will be the center of things, the heart of the action. RE for Racial Equality and C for Committee. It eventually was changed to Congress of Racial Equality. It began at a small restaurant named Jack Spratt just outside the University of Chicago in May 1942 with a sit-in. I had the opportunity to meet this remarkable person in the 1950's. I also met his wife, Lula, who belonged to the New York CORE. If you want to know the complete story read his book: "Lay Bare the Heart."

I discovered CORE in 1948 when I was told about an interracial meeting two of my co-workers had attended the night before. It seemed so interesting that I decided to check in out. It was a small office at 1724 F Street, NW in Washington, DC. I started going to their meeting and listening to their discussion about Gandhi and the nonviolent theory. The focus was on Washington, DC, the Nation's Capital. At that time only Union Station, the Methodist Building next door to the US Supreme Court, and government cafeterias were open to people of color. The thought was, if we can end segregation in Washington, it would be easier to end it in other parts of the country. For the month of June people were recruited from other CORE groups to come here to assist our group in their projects. That first experience changed my life! Such friendship, hugs, kisses across racial and religious grounds was like nothing I had ever seen before.

Let me tell you of a few of my experiences: Lynn Kirk and I went on a trip to the CORE convention in Chicago. It had been a long time since I had been on a trip by train. We were the center of attention, mostly hostile, this Afro-American man and this blond woman sharing seats together. When the time came for dinner we saw the porters chating and we suspect they were trying to decide at what table to seat us. We shared a table with a Roman Catholic Priest. We told him we were going to a convention. He noticed the wedding band on Lynn's finger and asked if we were married. Lynn replied that we were not, to which he replied, "I thought he looked too young to be married." Lynn replied that I was older then she. Then he said, "you have to be careful today about the communist." Lynn and I spoke about it later. Any time you see black and white together, they must be communist. Those were the days of the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joe McCarthy that destroyed many American patriots. Our own Bishop Lord testified before this committee as to its assault on human rights and character assassination.

Let me tell you of one other experience. We had scheduled a picket at the Playhouse Theatre for the opening of Tales of Hoffman. We had informed all the Washington Newspaper. We were gathered at the home of one of the CORE members at 15th & Massachusetts Avcnue, NW a few blocks north of the theatre waiting for the time to start the march when we received a call from the Playhouse Theatre management. They begged us to call off the march as they would not like to have President Truman and the Diplomatic Corps cross a picket line. They promised us that they would have some news to tell us later that week. We discussed it, some objecting, others saying give them another chance. Finally, we decided to call it off. Two days later they called us to say that henceforth the theatre would be opened to all.

CORE had spread to many cities including New York, Cincinnati, Cleveland, St. Louis, Evanston, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Pasadena and Baltimore.

Mary Church Terrell was a voice for change. She was an educator who graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio. She came to D.C. and married Judge Terrell. She had been involved in many civil rights causes. The D.C. Government had passed Anti-discrimination Laws in 1872-1873 that all well behaved persons regardless of race or color could attend any restaurant, hotel, theatre or other places of public accommodation. In 1901 all D.C. laws were coded but these laws were left out. Thompson Todd an African-American broadcaster rediscovered them. Mrs. Terrell and two other citizens went to Thompson's Restaurant on 14th and F Street, NW and were refused service. They filed suit against the restaurant on behalf of the D.C. Government. Judge Myers ruled that even if the law had been legal that they no longer applied because of the long time lapse. An appeal was made to the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled that the D.C. Government had the legal right to pass them and that since they had not been repealed they were still in force. An unfortunate incident but a blessing in disguise. Otherwise I may have never had the chance for those experiences. The old Hecht Company Building at 7th & F Streets, NW was renovated and is now Terrell Square. It shows photos of some of her demonstrations.

In 1956 the Washington Interracial Workshop was disbanded.

The Methodist Church split over the slavery issue at a general conference when it was discovered that Southern bishops had slave the northern bishops were so outraged that the church split into the Northern Methodist and the Southern Methodist and did not unite again until 1939. A Central Jurisdiction was set up which included all the Afro-American congregations (separate but equal). Finally, in 1956 the Central Jurisdiction was abolished and a whole realignment was established. The Baltimore Conference and The Washington Conference were merged. McDonald Chapel and Hunting Hill Methodist Men and the Women's Society and been meeting together with Pleasant View for some time. Pleasant View had done a survey of our facilities and potential growth. The picture didn't look very bright. We had members holding several positions because the conference required it. At the time we were on a charge with Emory Grove a small African-American congregation on the east side of Gaithersburg. Wouldn't it make better sense to join with the other two Methodist Congregation right here in this community?

How did it happen? We wrote a letter to the Rev. Edward Carroll, the District Superintendent of the Washington West District and asked to be put on a charge with McDonald Chapel and Hunting Hill who were in negotiations for a merger. A secret ballot was taken during the pastoral of Rev. Douglas Harton. The majority of the people wanted to see this happen but it split families. We got no immediate response from the DS. After several contact he made the change. The next year Rev. Heslop became the minister. That was the year we transferred our membership to Fairhaven. I think it was 16 of us that September Sunday in 1968. Later others transferred their membership. It divided my own family. Change is never easy. Sometimes it is very difficult. How were we received at Fairhaven? Some welcomed us, some took a wait and see attitude. There were many good times. Fellowship at dinners; baseball, bowling of which I wasn't very good, like someone else we know, but the fellowship was good. I can remember going to Assateague Island with the youth on a camping trips with the Ridgley youth, Hellers, Davis', Joppys, Vernon Green, Rev. Jim Hunt and others. I remember the youth Rock Concerts at Faith UMC on Sunday evenings. Difficult times at the Administrative Board when I was chairman. This is the way we've always done it. Those were hectic meetings but I always allowed everyone the opportunity to speak. Here was the opportunity to use those techniques I developed in CORE. Listening to all voices, even those of opposition, disagreeing but not becoming disagreeable, patience, willing to compromise. Change is always difficult but change brings progress. I never had any doubts about our goal. As human beings we had more things in common than our differences.

Bishop John Wesley Lord came to Fairhaven in October 1967 and delivered a message in his call for change. Rev. Harry Taylor and Bishop Forrest Stith also were helpful to us.

I first saw Dr. King in person when he spoke at my sister, Roberta Hallman's graduation from Morgan University in Baltimore. He was a voice for change with the same Gandhi Theory.

Rosa Parks was a voice for change with Dr. King and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Who to choose as a dynamic speaker for the 1963 March on Washington was a source of concern. There was A. Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, James Farmer of CORE, Rev. Lowery of Southern Christian Leadership, Bayard Rustin, Whitney Young of the Urban League, Walter Reuther of the UAW, John Lewis of SNCC. The choice was Dr. King.

I was there on the north side of the Lincoln Memorial near 23rd & Constitution Avenue, NW. As far as you could see east toward the U.S. Capitol Building. A most peaceful demonstration. Everybody on their best behavior.

President Johnson brought change when he signed the Civil Rights Bill in 1964.

After MLK, Jr.'s death came change but not for the better. There were riots in many American cities including Washington.

The Poor Peoples Campaign brought change and awareness. I remember Fairhaven's participation especially Jerry Green and his father. The church was used for sleep over for some of the participants.

I remember the Million Men's March and was a part of it.

Change!

Jesus brought change. He came as a child born in a manger. He called the four fisherman: Simon, Andrew, James & John and said. "Come with me and I will make you fishers of men." He brought change to the woman at the well when he said I will give you living water. His short life of only 33 years changed the world. He healed the sick, cleansed the leper, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead. He gave himself for the sake of humankind. In him there is no north or south, east or west but we are one in Christ. We sing of him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is the God we serve.

Change can be difficult but change can bring progress and that is what I want to show. This is from whence we have come as a nation and as a church. I remember when I was a child and my mother singing a song to me. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, Red and Yellow, Black and White, they are precious in His sight, for he loves the little children of the world." When I went to church I did not see any red, yellow or white children. We did see the beginning of that however before she passed. Every Sunday morning at the children's moment, I look down from the choir or from the pew and I see this diversity. I am so proud and joyful. It's not about me! Look what we have done together. The Children's Choir, the Handbell Choir, the Gospel Choir the Sanctuary Choir, the UMW, the Sunday School, the Senior Citizens Luncheons, other Outreach programs, and organizational structures, and of course the Fairhaven Musical Theatre. Julia always says to us before the performance, "have fun, be happy." We are a happy group. Our diversity has become our strength. We are not the average church congregation. Most congregations are made of up a single ethnic group. Fairhaven is the love of my life. I speak of us at the annual conference. It reminds me of those days of CORE when groups gathered from all over the country or at the conventions in Chicago, Racine, Wisconsin, and Cincinnati, Ohio. The love, the hugs, the kisses, the fellowship. This is who we are! The dream I had for Fairhaven is a reality.

Dr. King's dream was that one day we will be judged by the contents of our character and not by the color of our skin. That day came on November 4th, 2008.

One more step toward that more perfect union our forefathers promised.

Change will come again. Our economy is in shambles; we have 1.2 trillion dollars of debt; people are losing their jobs; their 401K's; we are engaged in two wars, our infrastructure is falling apart. It may get worse before it gets better. Change will come with a new administration. It will come whether we are ready or not. Don't fear it, welcome it, be a part of it. Make it happen! We can do all things through God who strengthen us. Are we ready for change? If so, then join me now and say it loud and clear for all to hear those three words of affirmation, of optimism: Yes We Can! Yes We Can! Yes We Can! Hallelulah! Thanks Be To God! Amen.

Please stand and join in singing "Just as I am without one Plea." If you desire, come to the altar to pray. If there be one among you looking for a church home, come just as you are. Fairhaven will welcome you with open arms.

Benediction: The lord bless you and keep you, the Lord cause his face to shine upon and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace both now and forever. Amen.

MEMORIES OF CIVIL RIGHTS DAYS IN WASHINGTON, DC

January 14, 2008 I went to the movies at Union Station to see "The Great Debaters" recommended to me by my sisters. It brought back so many memories of those days in the 1950's when I was involved in Civil Rights with the Washington Interracial Workshop, an affiliate of the Congress of Racial Equality.

It was a most inspiring movie and I sit there and shed many a tear. Later that evening I search for any information I could find regarding those days and I want to share it with you.

Discovering CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)

I was working at Office of the Quartermaster General, Buzzard's Point in SW, DC in 1948. Two of my co-worker told me about an interracial meeting they had attended the night before. It seemed so interesting that I decided to check it out.

It was a small office at 1724 F Street, NW in DC.

Searching my records I found the following:

A Booklet, CORE Techniques and Restaurant Discrimination; Minutes of the National CORE Council meeting in Chicago which I attended as a delegate from Washington; a Nominations Committee meeting in which I was co-membership chairman; the CORE-lator published by the National Office; Annual Project Report of CORE Groups, June 1952; a Preliminary Draft of the CORE Organizational Manual; late flash to the CORE-lator—Win Coney Island Campaign in Cincinnati, Ohio; a card from one of the former members who had moved from Washington to New York dated March 15, 1959, and an article in the Washington Post in appreciation of James Farmer who died in October 2001 in Fredericksburg, VA at the age of 79.

Where do I begin to relate these many activities to you?

Lynn Kirk, the secretary of our group, and I on a trip to Chicago by train

We left from Washington's Union Station. This was in 1950. It was long trip from here to Chicago. I remember going through the Cumberland Mountains. It had been a long time since I had been on a trip by train. We were the center of attention, mostly hostile, this black man and blond woman sharing seats together. When the time came for dinner we saw the porters chating and we suspect they were trying to decide at what table to seat us. We shared a table with a Roman Catholic Priest. We told him we were going to a convention in Chicago. He noticed the wedding ban of Lynn's finger and asked if we were married. Lynn replied that we were not, to which he replied, "I thought he looked too young to be married ." Lynn replied that I was older then she. Then he said, "You have to be careful today about the communist." Lynn and I spoke about it later. Any time you see black and white together, they must be communist. Later we decided to sit in separate seats for our own safety.

We had scheduled a picket for the Playhouse Theatre when President Truman and the Diplomatic Corps went to see the opening of a movie, "Tales of Hoffman."

We had informed all the Washington newspapers that we would be there to picket. We were gathered at the home of Doe & Al Mindlin at 15th Street just above Massachusetts Avenue, NW waiting for the time to start the march when a call was received from the Playhouse Theatre. They begged us to call off the march as they would not like to see the President and the Diplomatic Corps have to cross a picket line. They promised that they would have some news to tell us later in the week.

We discussed it, some objecting, others saying give them another change. Finally, we decided to call it off. Two days later they called us to say that the next day the theatre would henceforth be opened to all.

Sunday afternoon pickets at Whelan Drugs Store at Connecticut Avenue & Rhode Island Avenue, NW, DC

I would go to Pleasant View Church for Sunday morning worship and then drive down town to Connecticut & Rhode Island Avenues, NW to join others at the sit-in. There was always the threat that we would be arrested by the Metropolitan Police but we were willing to take the chance. On one occasion management had one of the waiters wipe the counter with ammonia. One of the waiters quit in protest to the way we were being treated.

Dancing at a small night club in downtown D.C. at 11th & E Streets, NW.

Some of us had gone there to have a night of fun and dancing. Richard Tynes and his wife were dancing when the cops came in and arrested them. They filed a case in D.C. Court. At the trial when Richard testified that he was dancing with his wife (who was white from Austria) the judge was so annoyed that he threw the case out of Court. Richard had a furniture shop in NE, DC. Recently I went to his funeral, met his children, and in the obituary they mentioned the incident. I had a long conversation with his family.

CORE Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio at Camp Joy, a Roman Catholic Institution.

Five of us attended in my auto. We drove from Washington. I remember the horse shoe bend (a bridge that connected Covington, KY to Cincinnati).

We all decided to go swimming at the pool at midnight.

A night club in Prince George's County, MD

We had heard that this club was opened to all so we went there for a night out on the town. We were having a wonderful time when we heard a crash and a brick came through the window, then another, and another. Wally Nelson, who had come here for the summer from Cincinnati, Ohio was hit in the head with a bat. The police were called and they escorted us back to the Maryland/D.C. line in South East. The next day we went back to pick up our automobiles.

CORE Convention at Racine, Wisconsin

We drove out there in my auto. It was six of us including Frank Wint. We stopped in Cleveland and spent the night with a friend whose address had been given to us by the CORE chapter in Cleveland. The next day after arriving I attended the morning session but took off the afternoon. Frank & I drove to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to visit my brother, Melvin, who was attending Milwaukee School of Engineering.

CORE dinner at end of summer (annual one month focus on DC) at the Rhode Island Plaza, 13th & Rhode Island Avenue, NE

The Rhode Island Plaza was a new apartment building opened to everyone. We went there for a celebration after one month of focusing on projects in D.C.

Wally Nelson and his wife Juanita came from Cincinnati, OH. I have a photograph of him speaking at the CORE dinner there. Recently I drove through that area and discovered that the building had been torn down and only a vacant lot exist.

Mary Church Terrell was an educator who graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio. She was involved in civil rights causes in D.C. The D.C. Government had passed anti-discrimination Laws in 1872-1873 that all well behaved persons regardless of race or color could have access to any restaurant, hotel, theatre or other places of public accommodation. In 1901 all D.C. laws were coded but these laws were left out. They were discovered by Thompson D. Todd an African-American broadcaster. Mrs. Terrell and two other friends went to Thompson's Restaurant on 14th & F Street, NW and were refused service. They filed suit against the restaurant. Judge Myers ruled that even if the law had been legal that they no longer applied because of the long time lapse. An appeal was made to the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled that the D.C. Government had the legal right to pass them and that since they had not been repealed they were still in force. They were immediately reinstated.

Letter of disbandment dated 1956

Letter of James Farmer Testimonial Dinner on February 9, 1979 at the Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington, DC

Memories of James Farmer of CORE & George Houser of the Fellowship of Reconciliation at the CORE Conventions

George would play his guitar and sing, and Jim would lead us in singing song:
If I had a Hammer; Where have all the flowers gone; This land is my land;
This little light of mine.

Such wonderful memories.

Thompkins W. Hallman