



July 26, 2022

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1Kings 19:15-21

“The Only One”

Good morning and again Happy Pride Month and congratulations on your courage and conviction to be a More Light Presbyterian Congregation. I got the opportunity to be with the board on their retreat and “More Light” has both a rich and challenging history. I was highly encouraged by the board of directors and their collective commitment to embracing the persons and the gifts of the everyone who wants to be a part of the PCUSA church **without exception**, and I was SO inspired by the many sacrifices over the years, the uplifting of unknown names and deeds, and the ability of those in the past and present who are essentially saying with spiritual conviction and humility, “We are HERE and we are NOT leaving the church that we love.” So, I am looking forward to hearing about how that work will deepen and expand throughout the denomination, but especially HERE at GCPC. So, THANK YOU, Grace Covenant for joining this movement and choosing LOVE over legalism. AMEN!

Introduction: As this country reacts to the recent Supreme Court decision “to no longer make it a constitutional right to have an abortion;” No matter where you stand on the issue of being pro-life, pro-choice or anywhere in between, because there is always more nuance than binary/either or answers can provide... wherever you stand on the issue, as a woman, especially as white women, the questions I have for you are, “Do you really want the federal government OR the State government to control your bodies? Do you think it will stop with this decision? Do you think birth control will be rolled back? Do you think NC will return to Eugenics and force sterilization of predominately poor, differently able and black women against their will and to use it as leverage to get them off of public assistance? I am just saying we are never **the Only Ones**.

As a black-bodied woman, our bodies have been controlled for generations, since our African ancestors were hunted, captured and forced onto this land into generational slavery... our bodies have been and continue to be exploited, our labor extracted, and our history either erased or revised all over the globe. Our bodies have been used to experiment upon without

anesthesia, raped at will and without consequence, bought and sold, stolen and kidnapped without hashtags or the benefit of massive national man-hunts. This is not new and YOU are not the only ones in this fight...AND neither are we.

My Latinx-ae sisters, siblings who are unable to access documentation and citizenship not because of anything they have done or NOT done... are **STILL** facing the denigration of being ripped from their children, deported at will. Oh yeah! I know we stopped hearing as much about them in the news, but that's when it is worse, because nobody is watching. But, the border patrols are still there, the harassment is still there, the dehumanization is still there, and we are STILL treating Spanish speaking souls as second-class human beings. Black immigrants, the rich, expansive reality of our Asian and Pacific Islander siblings AND our indigenous siblings are STILL rendered invisible. So, WE are not the **ONLY ONES!**

Now, one of my favorite contemporary prophets is Audre Lorde. Now as far as I know, she has never SELF-identified as a prophet. And if you research her, you will see her named as an American writer, "feminist, womanist, librarian, and civil rights activist" or describing herself as a "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet."

BUT, if you read her work, her words are just as relevant TODAY as they were when she wrote them over 50 years ago. In fact, here in Asheville during the 2020 protests the younger organizers and activists were often reading and quoting Audre Lord and James Baldwin, because their prophetic words spoke to the intersections of queerphobia, transphobia, xenophobia and racial oppression that we continue to experience TODAY in REAL time. They BOTH understood like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr that we are "inexplicably linked", like Fannie Lou Hamer that "none of us are free, until all of us our free." But oddly enough, as brilliant, and bold and amazing as Audre Lorde is, earlier in her life she felt like she was the ONLY ONE. She felt alone and didn't seem to fully embrace the precious gift that she was to the world. In 1984, Essence magazine published Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between her and James Baldwin (another favorite writer and prophet of mine) that took place at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. And they were discussing "intra-racial violence, sexism, homophobia and more as they sought out the origins of so much Black marginalization." And when they were asked if they believed in the American Dream...

James Baldwin responded: *Du Bois believed in the American dream. So did Martin. So did Malcolm. So do I. So do you. That's why we're sitting here.*

But **Audrey Lorde's** response was... *I don't, honey. I'm sorry, I just can't let that go past. Deep, deep, deep down I know that dream was never mine. And I wept and I cried and I fought and I stormed, but I just knew it. I was Black. I was female. And I was out – out – by any construct wherever the power lay. So, if I had to claw myself insane, if I lived, I was going to have to do it alone. Nobody was dreaming about me. Nobody was even studying me except as something to wipe out."*

Can you imagine that! Audrey LORDE, is one of the most quoted ancestors I know of, and I have at least 7 of her books either by or about her. Last year, I participated in a 6 week learning series presented by Rima Vesely-Flad called the "Dharma of James Baldwin and Audre Lorde" in the Buddhist tradition, and there were people from all across the WORLD, and from all faiths who were HUNGRY for the wisdom of her words. She was not the ONLY ONE.

But at THAT time of her life, she believed she WAS alone, she believed she was the ONLY ONE, and could not imagine anyone dreaming about her or "studying" her or her work, but only to erase her because she was experiencing so much racial oppression, gender oppression and queer oppression in her life.

Now I hope we learned from last week's sermon as we looked closer at Elijah, that there are times ALL of us will become afraid. No matter how holy, how saved-sanctified-and fire baptized we are. And in this context, I am not referring to the SPIRIT of Fear. THAT is different! But I am talking about FEAR as an EMOTION, and a WAY our minds and bodies regulate themselves to stay safe.

So it is OKAY to be afraid! But FEAR God more than you do humankind, or your status or your position in your family, or community or in your place of work. Because the "fear of GOD is the beginning of wisdom." And that GODLY fear is not so we **can't** approach God, but it is a state of acknowledging WE are NOT in control! GOD is bigger and greater and deserves our reverence, and even though God could CHOOSE to take any of us out here in a snap, GOD

doesn't LORD God's power over us, but God is constantly pursuing a LOVING relationship with us and trying to teach us how to be in right relationship with God and one another.

AND how to TRULY follow JESUS who teaches us to live life and life more abundantly, JESUS who shows us how to embody the Fruits of the Spirit, JESUS who offers us deliverance and salvation **mostly** from OURSELVES...trying his best to teach us how to un-learn the lies we have inherited and internalized, to decolonize our minds and learn to love one another **without exception**.

And like Jesus, Audre Lorde challenges us to move beyond the silos of our oppression...to recognize that none of us are the ONLY ONES, that all of us need JESUS AND we need each other. So, in order to realize and actualize THAT type of collective-liberation, we all have to SPEAK UP whenever injustice rears its ugly head against ANY of us. AND because we are so socialized into ANTI-BLACKNESS in EVERY OPPRESSED group, while we are speaking up, we absolutely MUST CENTER the black voices and black experiences in those spaces as well. YES! Including within the LGBTQIA community. That's just the reality of our nation, whose systems, including our church and education systems were ALL formed during American chattel slavery. So enslaved people AND their descendants are still yoked to the foundations of ALL of these systems in this country whether we believe it or not. It is just a fact!

Disproportionately impacted by infant mortality regardless of economic or education status? ...**Black Women**...funneled from the school the prison pipeline through suspensions and expulsions-**Black Children**... even with higher education have maintained the LOWEST median income-**Black People**, Living in food deserts and lack of access to healthy food-**Black Neighborhoods**, disproportionately incarcerated -**Black Men**, disproportionately impacted by hate crimes-**BLACK TRANS WOMEN**.

Illustration:

So Lorde says, *"We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters [and I will add siblings] AND OURSELVES are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still- be- no-less- afraid... For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson - that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And*

neither were most of you [woman] here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak.

So Audre Lorde's words remind us that NOW in 2022 we can and will be afraid, but we have to do whatever it takes to SPEAK up and SPEAK often and SPEAK loudly. Because if you haven't noticed, we are living in a time where at least since 2008, the civil rights of women, LGBTQ plus, black people, brown people, non-white people and POOR people and all the freedoms that we have gained over the years are meticulously and methodically being taken back, and IF we continue to be SILENT, more and more we are going to see this country resembling the same violent, bloody, socio-political landscape of the Reconstruction Era.

Now, I **used** to say the 1950's but we are already **way** past that. We have just found more innovative ways to segregate schools and public accommodations. The overturn of Roe vs Wade is a move that is heading back to the late 1800's in the direction before woman suffrage when woman were fighting for the right to vote, and by the way did not want to include black women. So, if the Emancipation Proclamation was declared in 1863, WELL we are right back there at the Reconstruction Era in 1865. So NONE of us are the ONLY ONES!

Scripture Passage- 1 Kings 9:15-18

Now when we look at Elijah, it certainly appears that he thinks he IS the ONLY ONE, that after he challenged the empire of Ahab and Jezebel to choose God or Baal, after he displayed the power of God by calling down fire from heaven, after he had the over 850 prophets loyal to the will of Jezebel killed, and after he ran in fear for his life, and FINALLY got some rest and took time to eat and strengthen his body... in HIS MIND and according to his own words in verse 14 Elijah believed and he told the Lord, I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." THEN when he calms enough, and quiets enough to listen and HEAR gods voice in a whisper and COMES out of his CAVE of comfort, God RETURNS ELIJAH TO THE WILDERNESS.

But at verses 15-18 which is our focus this morning, God begins to unfold and reveal his plan to Elijah as he is returning to the wilderness. And God demonstrates to Elijah and US that none of us are the ONLY ONES...God ALWAYS has a succession plan in motion.

Illustration: I say this often when I mentor leaders that when you become a leader of an organization or movement or anything, you need to BEGIN with a succession plan. Now you may not ever see those who will follow you, but you need to create the space, and culture and structure in such a way, that the work will continue without you. That is the brilliance of the Black Lives Matter Movement, now Movement for Black Lives, is that no ONE charismatic person is at the HELM or the top, which strategically makes it more difficult to target the leader, or cherry-pick or manipulate them in order to maintain and benefit the status quo.

So God returns Elijah to the wilderness to make his way to Damascus, a metropolis, an oasis in the desert. Damascus had rivers flowing to and from it, so it was situated on fertile and prosperous ground. And **The First**, step in this succession plan is that God instructs Elijah to anoint Hazael as King over Aram. And the people of Aram, the Arameans were conquered years earlier by King David and so they had a long history of being hostile toward Israel, AND, they were prosperous from the business profits of Damascus. And God's instructions imply that Elijah would physically anoint him, but he doesn't actually anoint Hazael as King of Aram.

The significance of a prophet of God being sent to anoint a leader meant that GOD was sanctioning it, was authorizing their authority in that position, was letting Elijah know that it was going to happen.

Now Hazael harassed Israel, warred against, extorted from Israel to the point that they stripped the temple, the "house of God" just to pay Hazael to leave them alone.

Second, God tells Elijah to anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi too, as King over Israel, but there are two other Kings, Ahaziah, then Jehoram before Jehu actually takes the throne, so again, Elijah does not physically anoint Jehu, God is just saying that he WILL be the King of Israel.

And so it is that GOD puts them both in position, in authority, even when they are historic enemies of one another. And God knows that they will essentially turn away from God and turn on and DESTROY each other. And an enemy common to them both, Assyria, will eventually be the demise of most of them. AND God already knows that the people of Israel, his people will not change, he already knows that a long line of evil kings will be warned by a long line of prophets and Israel will CONTINUE in their idolatry, in their oppression of the poor and the children and the widows. (PAUSE-BREATHE)

Illustration:

In America we seem to have a twisted interpretation of who God will anoint or sanction or BLESS to fight against even his own when WE become idolatrous, and WE walk over OUR poor, WE walk over OUR children, and OUR widows. Americans have used a “manifest destiny” mentality for so long, believing in our God given right to terrorize, commit genocide and colonize whatever land, resource or people we want and seemingly got away with it. But sometimes God will use the leader of another country, a smaller, less powerful country to gain in power, to get our attention, to humble us and bring US into right relationship with GOD and remind us that we are NOT the only ones who God will BLESS!

Illustration:

Americans never imagined that our soil could be invaded and that thousands of our own people would be killed by leaders and countries **we** considered as less significant, less powerful, less advanced than us. Like over 2400 Americans killed by Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 or the more than 3000 people who died after the 9-11-2001 attack on the twin towers in NYC, the Pentagon in DC and Pennsylvania. And THAT attack was carried out with less than 20 people from the extremist Islamic group, Al-Queda. And we STILL have not fully recovered or healed from that. So Beloved we cannot afford to be arrogant enough to THINK that the takeover and exile that Israel experienced from a long time enemy like Aram could never be us. Right here in THIS country, Russia or China or Korea could be OUR Aram or OUR ASSYRIA.

Thirdly Elijah is told to anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, who will be HIS replacement. So, Elijah is NOT the ONLY ONE. He’s not the ONLY PROPHET, God had already been grooming Elisha to take Elijah’s position AND God had a remnant, a group of 7000 from Israel, who had not kissed the mouth of BAAL who had not sucked up to BAAL, who had not worshipped an idol GOD.

And that is the good news of this passage, because God reminds us that those of us who refuse to kiss the ring of an evil emperor or king, who refuse to worship the creation but worship the creator, who REFUSE to uphold the idolatry of whiteness as our GOD, as our standard of BEING, who come from every walk of life, every stripe, every identity known and those yet to be known are a part of that 7000.

We are NOT the ONLY ONES. Because GOD has a plan for us, God has reserved US, has set us aside for God's plan and God's purpose. Ain't that Good News? That no matter who you are, how you identify, what you have done or not done... **IF** we are willing to make Yahweh, Jehovah our God and Jesus our LORD and Savior we will reap the benefits of eternal life. GOD will be our GOD and wants more than anything that we be God's people. Now I know we don't like the **LORD** part because we like to hang out in the matrix and pretend we are STILL in control of our lives. WE'RE NOT!

In conclusion: So even if you feel you are genuinely alone, if you feel like you are the ONLY ONE, the Spirit of GOD is right there with you, just waiting on you to trust God, to be willing to let go of everything you think you know. To "lean **not** on your understanding, but in all thy ways acknowledge GOD and GOD will direct your paths." You are not the ONLY one because GOD- Immanuel is with us even until the end of this world. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.