

CAME
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A Pastoral Sermon Delivered to the Community of Campbell Chapel AME Church on 13 August 2017, Following the Events in Charlottesville, VA on 11-12 August 2017.

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening **came**, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he **came** walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 **He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.** 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Matthew 14:22-33

Many things CAME in the past few days. On Friday night, people of different faiths, races, and walks of life CAME together in the inter-faith St. Paul's Memorial Church on University of Virginia's campus in Charlottesville, VA. On that same night, Alt-Right/KKK protestors CAME publicly, in plain sight, with their faces visible, with torches in their hands and surrounded the Church. On Saturday, people CAME to affirm the renaming of Robert E. Lee part to Emancipation Park, CAME to support the removal of the statue of the Confederate war hero, Robert E. Lee, and CAME to be in solidarity with those in the Charlottesville community who are enduring the past and present faces of racial and social oppression that characterize the culture of Charlottesville. On that same day, Alt-Right activists CAME to a "Unite the Right" rally at First Baptist Church in Charlottesville, they CAME to protest the removal of the statue and the changing of the name, they CAME and killed three people, they CAME and threatened clergy united for racial justice, one CAME and drove a vehicle killing a thirty-

two-year-old woman and injuring nineteen others, something CAME and caused the crash of a Virginia State Police helicopter, killing two.¹

Many things CAME in the last forty-eight hours: signs of hope and signs of despair CAME; evidence of love and evidence of hate CAME; reasons to shout and reasons to sob CAME; possibilities and impossibilities CAME to pass.

In today's text, night CAME, Jesus CAME, and Peter CAME. (1) **night** CAME after Jesus and the disciples performed the miracle of the multiplication of two fish and five loaves of bread, (2) **Jesus** CAME (walking toward the boat of the disciples battered by the waves with the sea against them), and (3) **Peter** CAME (out of the boat, walking on water, headed toward Jesus). Another way to look at this text is that challenge CAME, hope CAME, and disciples of hope in the face of challenge CAME.

The challenge of night – its darkness, its storms, its waves – CAME. Between the impending violence promised in the duel between North Korea and the United States and the tip of the iceberg that is what has transpired in Charlottesville, surely we are living in the midst of the challenges of a night season. Our night is filled with cloaked and uncloaked enemies. Our night is filled with the chill of hatred and the heat of torches. Our night is seasoned with the storms of ICE agents and those unconcerned though we live with disabilities, chronic and fatal illnesses, and preventable diseases. Our night is filled with a sense of separation from those, like Jesus, who should or do love us the most. Our night is filled with a feeling of abandonment when we cannot see that anyone loves us at

¹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Brian M. Rosenthal, "Man Charged After White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville Ends in Deadly Violence," *The New York Times*, August 12, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-protest-white-nationalist.html>.

all. Our night is filled with the need for isolation and the need for community all at once. Night CAME.

However, the hope of Jesus also CAME, walking on the water as morning was breaking. As spectacular as Jesus's grand water-walking entrance was, most of the disciples on the boat were terrified at the appearance of him. After all, Jesus was not where he was supposed to be (on land). Jesus was walking through a storm on water. Jesus was walking in the liminal space between night and morning. Yes, Jesus was and had the peace that could cause the wind to cease. However, hope does not always feel so hopeful to us.

Then there was Peter, he CAME to Jesus with a bit of hope in the midst of the challenge. However, Peter found it difficult to sustain his hope – that is his hope to walk as Jesus was walking, his hope to overcome the fear of night, storm, and water's water-walking oppositional viscosity, his hope to reach Jesus safely.

Then there are those of us who CAME to hear this word today. This morning's scripture encourages those of us who CAME to keep coming as Jesus CAME – and as Peter CAME (and was learning to come). So what is it that we CAME today? What is it to come again? What is it to keep coming?

- First, To Come is to Respond to the Presence of G*d with Curiosity
 - When Peter saw that Jesus was present -- and that Jesus was present *not* in the “safety” of the boat, but on the sea, Peter met the presence of G*d through Jesus with a sense of curiosity and asked Jesus to command/invite him out of the boat. Peter met the presence of G*d with curiosity.

- Some of you are wondering what this acupuncture business that has been mentioned in this announcements this morning is all about. The NADA protocol, NADA standing for National Acupuncture Detoxification Association, has been used for PTSD, stress, and challenges with addiction – as is explained in your program this morning. However, it has a hidden history that can only be discovered through a bit of research – research driven by curiosity. The NADA protocol was actually developed by Mutulu Shakur, a Black Panther (and Tupac Shakur’s stepfather) who established and managed one of the most effective drug detoxification programs in the country between 1978 and 1982 – the Harlem Institute of Acupuncture and one of the most innovate Black health associations – Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA). This was subsequent to his work at Lincoln Detox Community, which began in 1970. I share this today not only because we are invited to received and begin learning the NADA protocol after service, but because Dr. Mutulu Shakur knew how to follow a healing path with the curiosity of innovation. From the fruit of his curiosity, he developed a healing design that could be shared with others. It is because of the curiosity and generosity of one who learned that healing path that today *we* are able to join the healing path with our own curiosity and generosity.²
- In the days to come, we will see signs of healing, signs of hope, signs of good, signs of justice. Yes, we will see some other stuff too. However, when we see the signs of healing, hope, justice, and Jesus, we must not continue doing what we have always done, we must not assume that we know and understand what it is all about. Rather,

² “Tenisha Dandridge,” *Everyone’s Place: Acupuncture and Wellness*, accessed August 13, 2017, <http://everyonesplacecom.wordpress.com>.

we must follow the signs with curiosity – ready to receive the good that the Divine is sharing (and share it with others).

- Second, To Come is to Respond to the Command of G*d with Courage
 - Yesterday, I had two moments in which I knew I was encountering the Divine without a doubt. In the first of these moments, I pulled out of my garage to see two little women rolling down the middle of the street in their wheelchairs, holding hands, talking, laughing, and smiling together. What was so Divine about this sight was neither their size, nor even the fact that they were in the middle of the street, but the combination of these facts with their joyful courage.
 - Peter CAME out to Jesus with a courage that was unlike that of his peers. Having asked that Jesus command him to come, he was empowered by the command Jesus gave. He knew that if Jesus commanded a thing, then he could depend on that command and that he could walk in and follow that command with courage. Though Peter began to sink, he *began* with an excited, perhaps even joyful, response to the command of Jesus to *come!* It was not just the command of Jesus that empowered Peter, though, it was also the companionship of Jesus!
 - Maybe you do not have the courage of Peter, but if you can find a friend with whom you can connect, maybe you can roll down the middle of the street in joyful and courageous solidarity, maybe you can walk out on water, maybe you can fly and soar to the highest heights. Do you see Jesus today? She is in the woman sitting next to you. He is in the child beside you earlier today. They are in the ones run over yesterday. Yes, he's also the one about whom good news has been written and preached through the sacred text we call the Bible. Jesus is commanding: run out and take my hand so we can roll with joyful courage.

- Finally, To Come is to Respond to Fear with Faith
 - The second instance of Divine encounter yesterday was around 10 pm as I was getting some of my 10,000 steps in. I passed by a Black family outside of their home. They had music playing and three of the family, stood doing the salsa (in front of (and to the delight of) a matriarch perched in her chair. I could not believe my eyes. After the day that I had seen and experienced through the news, after the trials on every hand, this family had not internalized fear, but rather faith. Yes, faith is the only thing that keeps us dancing when world around us is crumbling. Faith is the thing that keeps us when the storms of life are raging.
 - In fact, when Peter began to focus on the storm, his fear grew and it caused him to begin to sink, but Jesus reached out his hand, caught Peter, and encouraged Peter to have faith and not doubt.
 - O, is there anybody here whom Jesus has caught in the midst of a courageous act turned frightful? Is there anybody here who is ready to response to scariness of this world with the faith of one who declares: “I ain’t skeered; I ain’t never skeered!”? Is there anybody here who feels their help coming, that they are not sinking and don’t have to sink anymore – ready to keep water walking? Is there anybody here who is ready to dance the dance of faith through it all?!?!

Today, we have an opportunity to be among the people, among the churches, among the disciples of Jesus, among the beacons of justice who *CAME* like Peter *CAME*. We have an opportunity to respond to the call of Jesus to *come* and do what we have never done before, what we never thought we could ever do, what we thought was impossible and improbable, and what we thought was unclean and unholy because it was unusual and out of the ordinary. Will we live up to our call and be a people

that CAME? Will they say of those of us who CAME here today that when the world was turned upside down, *we* CAME and stood, sat, and laid right side up, declaring that justice and peace go hand in hand, insisting that love conquers hate, living out the belief that every human being has the right to a life of dignity, safety, food, shelter, health care, resources, and equal and equitable opportunities to his/her/their neighbors? Will they say of us that we CAME as a light in dark places?

- Will they say of us that we CAME with holy curiosity?
- Will they say that we CAME with sanctified courage?
- Will they say that we CAME with fearless faith?
- Will you say of yourself I CAME when no one else would come with me?
- Will you say of yourself I CAME when I didn't know exactly what I was coming for, but just knew I had to come?
- Will you say of yourself I CAME when I saw the injustices of the past and present and could feel that there were more on the horizon?
- Will you say of yourself I CAME for others not just for myself – though I know like James Baldwin knew that if they CAME for you in the morning, they will be coming for me that night?
- Will we say we CAME together until we reached the promised land together – a land not stolen, but freely shared for survival, for thriving, for peace, and for goodness?
- Will we say we CAME until justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?
- Will we say we CAME to bear one another's burdens and, so, fulfill the law of Christ?
- Will we say we CAME that the life of the universe we inhabit – and the lives of all of its inhabitants – might be able enjoy and celebrate sacred abundance?

An invitation is extended to all of us today. When Maya Angelou met Tupac Shakur on the set of Poetic Justice, she recalls that he was fighting with someone on the set. She CAME to him, took him aside and said: “Do you know how important you are? Do you know how valuable your life is? Do you know that people stood on auction blocks so that you could be here today?” Tupac was so moved that he began to cry. After that day, Tupac was different on the set – and with Dr. Angelou. He did not instigate or provoke others in the same way – even as he continued his *own* path of doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Divine. Today, Jesus CAME and is calling out from the challenging place of the water, in a storm, between night and day and saying *you* are important, *I* would give my life for you, won’t you come to me. If you feel the call today, come give me your hand and Jesus your heart. If you need community today, let us join together and strive to be a people who CAME (and are coming). The call is open.