

Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.  
...he could do no deed of power there ... he was amazed at their unbelief.

A wise man once said that the modern mechanic's toolbox needs only two items: WD40 and Duct Tape: WD40 for things that are supposed to move but don't; Duct Tape for things that are not supposed to move but do.

What do we need in our modern spiritual tool box?

What needs to get moving that is stuck?

What needs to stick together that is moving around?

We find one of these tools in our reading today: in church, we use the word *call* for this tool.

We do not use the words *destiny* or *fate*, as people outside of the church often do, for we believe that *call* involves choice.

You can say "no" to call, though I strongly advise against it; Jonah would certainly support this advice, as would many like him who have found themselves swallowed up by the misery of running away from call.

Fate and destiny allow no room for freedom, for choice: fate cannot be escaped--when you try to escape it you run right into it; destiny asserts divine-right and privilege, a locomotive that runs over whatever lies in its way.

Now, we have all heard yahoos claiming God spoke to them to do this or that, using the language of call: we have observed a lot of harm done with bogus justifications of righteousness in service of this or that; but their misuse of call for self-justification does not excuse us from taking up one of the most essential tools in our spiritual toolbox.

We have to begin by saying that call is not about success, but courage. And, we have to say also that call comes from within the context of community and is affirmed by it; however, as we have seen in the prophets, sometimes the community lags behind in responding to call. Sometimes the role of the prophet is to be a lonely vanguard--seeing

things that remain invisible to the community, saying words that break apart things that are stuck together and holding together things that are broken.

And yet--please observe--call is ineffective in the absence of community.

God's call comes to Ezekiel, the prophet, and it is a burden, not good news: his success is not something that he is promised to see; his call as a prophet is to be courageous. The word of the Lord comes to him, saying "Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them."

Courage and call go together. Prophets courageously leave the outcome to God; prophets leave the community's response to God alone.

And yet--again, please observe--call is ineffective in the absence of community.

We read the story of Jesus returning home--to his own people, to his own community.

"Is this not the carpenter's son" his people say. And Jesus Christ himself, *in his own community*, "could do no deed of power there."

And so he gathers his disciples and tells them what we modern disciples need to hear today: "If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

Sometimes call is about shaking off the dust of refusal, and with courage moving on to those who will accept and listen and believe in the power of God *to restore hope to the broken-hearted, to heal the wounded, and to reconcile us together--to hold us together in our brokenness.*

This is the third Sunday after the Charleston Massacre: we have been praying for Mother Emanuel, for our brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle under the yoke of racism; we have been praying for black pastors whose courage we celebrate as they seek to respond to God's call in the wake of this outrageous loss.

On June 27th, Bree Newsome, a 30-year-old African-American woman, was arrested at the state Capitol after scaling the 30-foot flagpole and unhooking the Confederate flag.

As police officers shouted at her to come down, Bree Newsome shimmied to the top, took the flag in her hand and said, "You come against me with hatred and oppression and violence. I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today!"

Newsome recited Psalm 27 and the Lord's Prayer as she brought the flag down. As soon as she reached the ground, she was arrested, along with James Tyson, a white man, who had stood at the bottom of the pole to spot her as she climbed down and to help her get over the fence protecting that flag.

"Whether we hear or refuse to hear, we know that there is a prophet among us."

This was surely a deed of power, of healing, of hope, and of reconciliation.

It is WD40 for things that are supposed to move but don't; it is Duct Tape to hold together things that aren't supposed to move but do.

I am not a prophet.

I care too much for what you think about what I say when I stand here before you. We pastors are called to the community of the church. Our words often need to be tempered, for we know that we are called to serve the community. But, pastors are also called by God to challenge the people they love.

The modern pastor often finds that WD40 and Duct Tape are needed at the same time, and this is such a time.

I believe Bree Newsome is a prophet, and that taking down that flag was a prophetic act. We must look at this prophetic act and ask what it has to say to us about the call of God in our lives and to our church, for we are happy to be a community of faith. Like all communities of faith we need help in seeing how we are stuck and need to get moving, how we are broken and need to be held together.

Rev. Craig Jan-McMahon  
First Congregational UCC  
B Pent. +5; 6/28/2015  
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Now, I know not everyone follows facebook, and that the news comes to us filtered and in service of other interests.

So, begging your pardon for the length of this sermon, I would like to read from Bree Newsome's statement on taking down that flag as a response to the Charleston Massacre.

There is neither time nor attention sufficient to read Newsome's statement in its entirety, and though I believe to remove parts of her statement is like removing parts of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," Even so, I will remove parts of her statement. I commend the statement in its entirety to you and have made copies for you to take home with you to read at your leisure.

I pray that you will hear these selected words with hearts open to call, words written by an African-American woman whose courage comes in the context of community, a community to which I believe we belong:

Bree Newsome says:

I realized that now is the time for true courage the morning after the Charleston Massacre shook me to the core of my being. I couldn't sleep. I sat awake in the dead of night. All the ghosts of the past seemed to be rising.

Not long ago, I had watched the beginning of Selma, the reenactment of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing and had shuddered at the horrors of history.

But this was neither a scene from a movie nor was it the past. A white man had just entered a black church and massacred people as they prayed. He had assassinated a civil rights leader.

This was not a page in a textbook I was reading nor an inscription on a monument I was visiting.

This was now.

This was real.

This was—this is—still happening.

I began my activism by participating in the Moral Monday movement, fighting to restore voting rights in North Carolina after the Supreme Court struck down key protections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

I traveled down to Florida where the Dream Defenders were demanding justice for Trayvon Martin, who reminded me of a modern-day Emmett Till.

I marched with the Ohio Students Association as they demanded justice for victims of police brutality.

I watched in horror as black Americans were tear-gassed in their own neighborhoods in Ferguson, MO. "Reminds me of the Klan," my grandmother said as we watched the news together. As a young black girl in South Carolina, she had witnessed the Klan drag her neighbor from his house and brutally beat him because he was a black physician who had treated a white woman.

I visited with black residents of West Baltimore, MD who, under curfew, had to present work papers to police to enter and exit their own neighborhood. "These are my freedom papers to show the slave catchers," my friend said with a wry smile.

And now, in the past 6 days, I've seen arson attacks against ... black churches in the South, including in Charlotte, NC ....

For far too long, white supremacy has dominated the politics of America resulting in the creation of racist laws and cultural practices designed to subjugate non-whites. And the emblem of the confederacy, the stars and bars, in all its manifestations, has long been the most recognizable banner of this political ideology. It's the banner of racial intimidation and fear whose popularity experiences an uptick whenever black Americans appear to be making gains economically and politically in this country.

It's a reminder how, for centuries, the oppressive status quo has been undergirded by white supremacist violence with the tacit approval of too many political leaders.

The night of the Charleston Massacre, I had a crisis of faith. The people who gathered for Bible study in Emmanuel AME Church that night...were only doing what Christians are called to do when anyone knocks on the door of the church: invite them into fellowship and worship.

The day after the massacre I was asked what the next step was and I said I didn't know. We've been here before and here we are again: black people slain simply for being black; an attack on the black church as a place of spiritual refuge and community organization.

I refuse to be ruled by fear. How can America be free and be ruled by fear? How can anyone be?

So, earlier this week I gathered with a small group of concerned citizens, both black and white, who represented various walks of life, spiritual beliefs, gender identities and sexual orientations. Like millions of others in America and around the world, including South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley and President

Barack Obama, we felt . . . that the confederate battle flag in South Carolina, hung in 1962 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, must come down. ...

We discussed it and decided to remove the flag immediately, both as an act of civil disobedience and as a demonstration of the power people have when we work together. Achieving this would require many roles, including someone who must volunteer to scale the pole and remove the flag. It was decided that this role should go to a black woman and that a white man should be the one to help her over the fence as a sign that our alliance transcended both racial and gender divides. We made this decision because for us, this is not simply about a flag, but rather it is about abolishing the spirit of hatred and oppression in all its forms.

I removed the flag not only in defiance of those who enslaved my ancestors in the southern United States, but also in defiance of the oppression that continues against black people globally in 2015. ... I did it for all the fierce black women on the front lines of the movement and for all the little black girls who are watching us. I did it because I am free.

To all those who might label me an “outside agitator,” I say to you that humanitarianism has no borders. I am a global citizen. My prayers are with the poor, the afflicted and the oppressed everywhere in the world, as Christ instructs. If this act of disobedience can also serve as a symbol to other peoples’ struggles against oppression or as a symbol of victory over fear and hate, then I know all the more that I did the right thing.

Even if there were borders to my empathy, those borders would most certainly extend into South Carolina. Several of my African ancestors entered this continent through the slave market in Charleston. Their unpaid toil brought wealth to America via Carolina plantations. I am descended from those who survived racial oppression as they built this nation: My 4th great grandfather, who stood on an auction block in South Carolina refusing to be sold without his wife and newborn baby; that newborn baby, my 3rd great grandmother, enslaved for 27 years on a plantation in Rembert, SC [,] where she prayed daily for her children to see freedom; her husband, my 3rd great grandfather, an enslaved plowboy on the same plantation who founded a church on the eve of the Civil War that stands to this day; their son, my great-great grandfather, the one they called “Free Baby” because he was their first child born free, all in South Carolina.

You see, I know my history and my heritage. The Confederacy is neither the only legacy of the south nor an admirable one. The southern heritage I embrace is the legacy of a people unbowed by racial oppression. It includes towering figures of the Civil Rights Movement like Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers and Ella Baker. It includes the many people who rarely make the history books but without whom there is no movement. It includes pillars of the community like Rev. Clementa Pinckney and Emmanuel AME Church.

The history of the South is also in many ways complex and full of inconvenient truths. But in order to move into the future we must reckon with the past. ...

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Words cannot express how deeply touched I am to see how yesterday's action inspired so many. ...

[But] as you are admiring my courage in that moment, please remember that this is not, never has been and never should be just about one woman. This action required collective courage just as this movement requires collective courage. Not everyone who participated in the strategizing for this non-violent direct action volunteered to have their names in the news . ... Nonetheless, I'm honored to be counted among the many freedom fighters, both living and dead.

I see no greater moral cause than liberation, equality and justice for all God's people. What better reason to risk your own freedom than to fight for the freedom of others?

That's the moral courage demonstrated yesterday by James Ian Tyson who helped me across the fence and stood guard as I climbed. History will rightly remember him alongside the many white allies who, over the centuries, have risked their own safety in defense of black life and in the name of racial equality.

While I remain highly critical of the nature of policing itself in the United States, both the police and the jailhouse personnel I encountered on Saturday were nothing short of professional in their interactions with me. I know there was some concern from supporters on the outside that I might be harmed while in police custody, but that was not the case.

It is important to remember that our struggle doesn't end when the flag comes down. The Confederacy is a southern thing, but white supremacy is not. Our generation has taken up the banner to fight battles many thought were won long ago. We must fight with all vigor now so that our grandchildren aren't still fighting these battles in another 50 years. Black Lives Matter. This is non-negotiable.

I encourage everyone to understand the history, recognize the problems of the present and take action to show the world that the status quo is not acceptable. The last few days have confirmed to me that people understand the importance of action and are ready to take such action. ... [Those] of us who are conscious must do what is right in this moment. And we must do it without fear. New eras require new models of leadership. This is a multi-leader movement. I believe that. I stand by that. I am because we are. I am one of many.

And Bree Newsome's final words:

This moment is a call to action for us all. All honor and praise to God.

There is something that Bree Newsome did not include in her statement, something that happened as she was taken away by the police. I saw it on CNN, and it broke my heart.

As she and James Tyson were taken to jail and treated respectfully by police officers, that flag was immediately raised.

It was not raised by white supremacists; it was not raised by those who falsely argue that that flag is a symbol of heritage and not hate; it was not raised by the the family of Confederate soldiers.

That flag was raised by one of the groundskeepers; that flag was raised by black man.

A lovely, powerful, prophetic, young black woman took down that flag; and a lovely, dutiful, black man with a job to do raised that flag back up the pole.

In this moment, in this time, in this church, God has brought us together. We are a community of faith; we are obligated as people of faith listen to prophetic words, to see prophetic deeds, and to ask how God is calling us to represent the risen Christ in the world today, for we are the body of Christ: we are united with our brothers and sisters in black churches across America who are crying out for freedom, who are showing us the way.

God's call is in their tears; God's call is in their ability to forgive AND in the justice that is required.

Let us pray that God will reveal to us how we are part of the status quo that is stuck and needs to get moving; and also let us pray that God will hold us together in our brokenness.

And dear friends in this community of faith: May God bless us as we seek to answer the Call of the Holy Spirit in this moment; may we be a people through whom the power of Christ shines; for with Bree Newsome, and for the groundskeeper on whose behalf she shimmied up the flagpole and whose behalf James Ian Tyson stood watch, I believe our time has come. Amen