

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
The Rev. George Arceneaux
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, Wisconsin
July 24, 2022

Sources:

Luke 11:1-13

["Ta-Nehisi Coates: Trump Is The First White President,"](#) YouTube Video, October 3, 2017.

Considering the readings for today, particularly the Gospel, I find myself reflecting on that great Christian ideal and tenant: hope. And I am considering an interview held between Stephen Colbert of the Tonight Show with the author Ta-Nehishi Coates; a man known for his writing on the realities of systemic racism in the United States and the experiences of being a black man in this country.

This interview from four years ago has stuck with me in my formation not only as a discerning priest at the time when I first saw it but more importantly, it has informed my understanding of Christianity as a whole. It is specifically the end of the interview which has stuck with me. In it, Colbert says, to Coates, "You have had a hard time in some interviews expressing a sense of hope that things will get better in this country. Do you have any hope tonight for the people out there about how we could be a better country, have better race relations, better politics?"

And Coates responds, with immense ease, with an immense sense of matter-of-factness, "No." The audience laughs, seemingly out of a sense of collective anxiety; a laughter punctuating the gravity and loose reality of Coates's statement of "no" to hope. And he says, "But I'm not the person you should go to for that. You should go to your pastor, your pastor provides you hope."

No surprise then that his words stick in my mind still as I now wear the collar, but I believe his challenge is one not simply to people officially noted as pastors but to Christians everywhere, how do we each provide hope in this troubled world. Yet the challenge of hope seems even deeper than one simply put to pastors, or as a challenge to all Christians who profess the Gospel and faith in God, but Coates's challenge of hope is one that cuts down to the center of being itself: to God. And the question then is does God provide hope in our suffering world.

I know I could not be a Christian if the answer was no. Yet that hope is, I think, often hard-won and as strange and light as the web of hurt in our world is severe and ingrained. Hope is so often won through as the interminable waiting that comes when we knock on doors we hope are opened. Hope is as hard-won as forgiving others and our own seeking forgiveness in the face of hurts we inflict.

I'll ask you to consider what forlorn hope you might have as I offer an instance of that hard-won hope that inspires me this morning. I'm considering the hope won by my sister's boyfriend, a fella name Dan. Dan grew up in a Hispanic household deeply connected to a conservative evangelical church. We got to spend time with one another the week after the fourth of July and

he spoke to the complexity of his faith, informed by both hurt and goodness. He told of how emotionally abused he felt growing up, how he felt that church hurt him and how that hurt persists even now, today, as he continues to have faith and to learn what faith means to him outside of that context. He left that church, a decision which was as profoundly painful to him as remaining would have been, not only because of his years of participation and relationship with its structure and the community, but because of his family who remained. And who angrily seethed at Dan's decision to leave.

Despite that pain, Dan continues to aspire to Christ's teachings and told of a surprise that happened related to his faith. It came from Dan's father, a man raised to be taciturn, to be a man's man, a person who did not talk about his feelings. Yet there was a day when he asked, out of the blue, "Dan... Did the church hurt you?" It was an invitation, quiet and simple, yet which struck hard as a thunderbolt in its sudden entrance into Dan's life; a question totally incompatible with who he believed his father to be and the story he told himself of who his father was.

It was a question that began a conversation of vulnerability and sincere listening. A moment of healing for the pain Dan grew up within the church.

Each of us has been Dan; each of us has been Dan's father too. Each of us has been hurt, magnificently, profoundly at different times and each hurt as personal to each of us. And each of us has hurt another person, each of us has been too harsh or unkind.

And so Jesus taught us to pray "forgive our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

The hope of Christ is that belief that we may forgive and be forgiven. To hope that healing can happen in our weary world, that though we may knock at that door of healing for what may even be a lifetime, the door will be opened. Though there is still hurt to be addressed, healing happened for Dan for that moment. Think of the great hurts of your life, the losses and injustices which have left you in pain. Think of the great regrets you carry, the hurts you wish you'd never inflicted. Healing can happen in those spaces. Let us do our best in helping God make that healing, that hope, a reality. Amen.