

## “A Year of Jubilee”

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September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Rev. Dr. R. Scott Colglazier  
Senior Minister  
Leviticus 25:8-12 / Luke 4:16-19

First Congregational Church  
Los Angeles, CA

*Well, what a great Sunday it is to be together and enjoy this festive day, and to look forward to an even more festive fall at First Congregational Church and Pilgrim School. I want to say again how grateful I am for our new Head of School, Paul Barsky, and I can assure you that Paul and I already have a positive working relationship and I think it's only going to get better as we move through the fall.*

*There's so much I'm looking forward to . . . in a few weeks we'll have our Blessing of the Animals . . . that is always a highlight . . . and I'm looking forward to kicking off a fall sermon series in a few weeks that I've titled – The Religion of Tomorrow – and I think you're going to find it really interesting and challenging . . . and I'm also looking forward to finishing this construction project in a few weeks!*

*That's a little bit of a threat and a little bit of a promise! But we're going to finish it and it's going to be fantastic . . . and then I'm looking forward to our full reception as a congregation into the United Church of Christ . . . and that's going to be a good thing for us this year . . . so . . . I'm just saying . . . this is going to be a fabulous year and I hope you'll be here every Sunday!*

*There's actually a wonderful tradition in Judaism and Christianity for celebrating all-year long . . . because in Judaism there was a ritual observance called the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee took place every 50th year. After 7 cycles of Sabbath years – 49 years – the Jewish people would set aside the 50th year for a time of personal and social restoration.*

*The land would go fallow, and the good earth would organically heal itself. And the same was true of relationships. Debts were forgiven. (And that includes all those Student Loans!) Old grudges that had torn apart friends and families, wounds festering over the years with bitterness and anger, they were joyfully and generously dismissed.*

*Forgiveness dropped from the human heart like confetti at a Fifth Avenue parade. Jubilee was social. Jubilee was personal. It allowed society to reboot itself, and to move forward unburdened by the mistakes of the past. A Year of Jubilee!*

*Now, what's interesting is that when Jesus delivered his first sermon in the temple, he began by stating: “I am here to proclaim the Year of the Lord!” That's a reference to Jubilee. And what is the Year of the Lord according to Jesus? Well, it's about bringing good news to the poor, release and liberation to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for those who have been oppressed by the injustices of life.*

*Jesus is doing something quite brilliant here. He's really saying that every year should be a year of Jubilee. Why in the world should we wait around for 50 years? We need to find the courage and faith to live in the here and now, and the calling of any church community is to bring as much Jubilee as*

*we possibly can to the lives of others! So what would it look like for us if we declared this year as a Year of Jubilee?*

*Well, I'm thinking about this in a variety of ways . . . I'm first of all thinking that this could be a year of Jubilee for Pilgrim School and First Congregational Church of Los Angeles. The last few years have been challenging years between the church and school. I don't need to go back. You don't need to go back. The past is past.*

*But I think we should make this a Year of Jubilee for both organizations! We have a new Head of School, and I will tell you that I have so much respect for Paul, and also his immensely talented wife, Rema. Mark Evans is the new chair of the Board of Pilgrim School, and there is no one I respect more in our church than Mark Evans.*

*We now have families from Pilgrim coming to our church and we have people in our church going to Pilgrim. Let's make this a year of Jubilee! And when we can find ways of doing things together, let's do them together. And when the school must move forward independently from the church, or vice-versa, let's do that too. It's Jubilee.*

*But I also think about what it might mean for each of us personally to find a year of Jubilee. Is there a person here who doesn't need a fresh start? Sometimes it's a big change. Sometimes it's a series of small changes. But I'm talking about turning over a new leaf so we can become – not what we think others want us to be – but so we can become our true selves.*

*The cultural word for it these days is the word "pivot," and "pivot" simply means that we recognize its time to do some things differently in our lives. Life should be a series of pivots. In many ways, I think God is always inviting us to pivot. To find greater meaning in life. To discover more joy in life. To embrace a better way of relating to others in life.*

*And so God is that presence inside us, tugging at us in a variety of ways to pivot and embrace newness. The whole idea of a Year of Jubilee is to find a way to reset, reboot and pivot toward the life God is calling us to live. It's Jubilee.*

*But beyond the local and beyond the personal, the year of Jubilee was also supposed to be a year of national restoration and wholeness, because what it recognizes is that some things from the past – nationally, not just personally, but nationally – cannot easily be fixed, and that the only way to go forward is to forgive and start over.*

*Let me say that again . . . sometimes the only way forward is to forgive and start over, and that means starting where we are, and not where we would like to be.*

*We're facing a crisis right now in our country around immigration, and we are especially facing it here in the state of California. This is not new. It's been going on for decades, and it's a challenge that neither political party has been able to solve.*

*On the one hand, you have a value or a principle that needs to be upheld, namely, that if a person enters our country, he or she should go through the proper channels and enter the country legally.*

*That's a value. That's a principle. For a democracy to work, laws must be honored, and I know that, and you know that too.*

*On the other hand, we have a social reality. We have thousands and thousands of people who are living in this country, and for whatever reason they circumvented legal entry into the United States. I'm not saying it's right. But it's reality. I'm sure some attend this church each Sunday. (And by the way, they are always welcome in this church.)*

*But what we know personally and institutionally and nationally is that sometimes we don't get to start where we would like to start; sometimes we have to start where we are, and this is where we are when it comes to immigration.*

*But these are real human beings. That's why our faith in God is so important. Faith in God enables us to see the real humanity of others. In many cases, these people came to this country because they were desperate to find a better life and take care of their families, and I dare say that if some of us were in the same circumstances, we would have done the very same thing.*

*In the vast majority of cases, these are people who are working hard, and they have children and grandchildren, and they are making a positive difference in our cities and towns and economies, and they have good lives, and they celebrate birthdays and they go to school and they grieve when a family member dies.*

*They are human beings with needs just like the rest of us. And they also have dreams! That's why they brought their children here in the first place. They have dreams.*

*But what has come into focus this week is that there is a specific group of people called "Dreamers," these are basically young adults who were brought here when they were children, and all they have ever known is the United States of America.*

*They may not technically be citizens, but they go to schools and they drive cars and they attend colleges, and these young adults are making a contribution to our country. Their "status" is no fault of their own.*

*But now what they're facing is the possibility that we are going to kick them out of the country, and we are going to rip apart more families, and we are going to ruin more lives! My faith teaches me that when it comes to a choice between enforcing an idealistic principle or embracing someone's humanity . . . that humanity should come first.*

*If ever there was a group of people needing a little Jubilee right now, it seems to me that these Dreamers deserve it! Don't you? And personally speaking, I think the compassionate thing to do, the Jesus thing to do, the Christian thing to do, is to give them an expedited pathway toward citizenship, but at minimum we should stop terrorizing them with the threat of deportation.*

*Look, no one is endorsing illegal entry into the country; but at a certain point my faith teaches me that the only way forward is to forgive and begin where we are. Is it too much to ask that we address*

*this issue humanely, and in a way that is consistent with the values of Jesus Christ? We're talking about real human stories . . .*

*I think of Ana Sanchez . . . she was brought to this country when she was two years old . . . her parents risked everything to bring her here . . . everything . . . and she is now a college student and she works a part-time job in an after-school program and in a few years she will be a teacher. She may well be teaching your children or grandchildren at Pilgrim School. Who knows? She's a dreamer.*

*I think of Vanessa Rodriguez . . . she has been living in Texas for 12 years . . . and she is now in her second year at the University of Texas, and each day, as she tries to do her homework and become a success, each day she worries that she won't be able to take more classes beginning in January. She never knows when she will be deported. What are we doing to that young woman? People love her on campus and she's a dreamer.*

*I think of Fidencio Perez . . . he was told in high school by a guidance counselor that, "Kids like you don't go to college." Imagine that. "Kids like you." But he did finish high school, with honors, by the way, and then he went on and got a degree from the University of Memphis, and then another degree at the University of Iowa and then yet another degree at the University of Iowa. He's an amazing artist, and his goal is to eventually run a museum. He's a dreamer.*

*And let me tell you about Alonzo Guillen . . . he was from Lufkin, Texas, 22 years old, and when the floods hit Houston after Hurricane Harvey a few weeks ago, he and his brother got in a truck, pulled a small boat, drove to Houston, and they started rescuing people in those flooded neighborhoods. But something went very wrong. The currents were too strong. The boat capsized. And this young man, a registered participant in DACA, a dreamer, drowned two weeks ago trying to help others.*

*Friends . . . do you ever think of how little Jesus asks of us . . . I mean, really . . . so little . . . he asks us to be compassionate, to care for justice and fairness, and most of all, he asks us to remember that everyone has a human story.*

*Policy is important. Theology is important. By-laws for an organization are important. Laws are important. But in the end . . . there is nothing more important than the human stories each of us carries.*

*So join me this year . . . let's make it a Year of Jubilee! Let's celebrate a great year with Pilgrim School and First Church. And let's celebrate a great year with a few personal pivots that will make our lives better. And then let's make it a year of Jubilee for our all God's children who deserve mercy and compassion and justice. Friends . . . I love you all . . . let's love one another. Amen.*