

**11 Pentecost
August 25, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

For the past week or so Caren and I have been in Edinburgh, Scotland for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Every year thousands of performers take to hundreds of stages all over Edinburgh to present shows for every taste. From big names in the world of entertainment to unknown artists looking to build their careers, the festival includes theatre, comedy, dance, physical theatre, circus, cabaret, children's shows, musicals, opera, music, spoken word, exhibitions and events. The week we were there was also the week of the Edinburgh Book Festival with authors and lecturers from around the world.

To give you an idea of the size of the Fringe Festival here is the catalog. There are over 53,000 performances of 3,400 shows in 300 venues. Those venues run from a backroom in a deli, to a lecture hall at the university, to a bunch of shipping containers welded together with a stage and stadium seats, to large classical arts performance theaters seating close to 1,000. On top of that, there are free street shows running almost no-stop right on High Street ... the center of this 1,000 year-old city.

It was an amazing trip, not only because of the pure joy of attending so many wonderful shows, but also to get a view of the United States ... and of the world ... from a different perspective. To be asked, "Where are you from?" and respond with "Florida," seemed always to push the next question, "Where in Florida?" When I would reply that I was from St. Augustine, "the oldest city in the United States" and tell them that we just celebrated our 450 birthday, they would smile ... with an "Oh ... really?!?" kind of smirk.

As people from different countries we found commonalities and distinct differences. The people we met from Britain and Scotland felt we had a common bond in our elected leaders,

Donald Trump and Boris Johnson. Yet, to a person, everyone we met expressed their sincere confusion about Americans' fascination with guns, and the country's inability to dealing with the consequences of the bloodshed they cause. However, regardless of who we were talking with, there was an underlying sense of optimism for the future of us all ... around the world ... in spite of the issues all of us are facing at the moment.

As you might imagine, Caren and I were attracted to shows that spoke to issues of human rights and compassion. We saw productions dealing with poverty and abuse of justice, the Black Lives Matter movement, war crimes, betrayal, human trafficking and slavery. There was a presentation at the Scottish Parliament Building of the prestigious World Photojournalism 2019 Exhibition. It contained pictures about political, economic, environment, culture, and sports news over the past year. Consistently, the photos depicted the consequences of failed policies and the victims ... sometimes in very painful circumstances. Yet, these photos ... and the stories they told ... also seemed to contain a sense of hope ... hope for something beyond the status quo ... hope for something that just might bring fairness, justice, and love to a broken world.

This is not a sermon this morning ... nor is it a travelogue. Of the many plays that we saw, the opening of one of them stood out for me as both timeless, and geographically and politically universal. I want to read to you the opening monologue:

XXXXXXXXXXXX

The setting for the opening of this play is a university classroom somewhere in an unnamed country in the Mideast. The professor enters the classroom:

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So what can we do? What can we do to bring an end to all this carnage? What can we do to bring peace and reconciliation to our land? Surely, the key is to talk ... and we have to be inclusive. We must build bridges, not walls. We must reach out and talk to one

another ... person to person ...honestly, openly, without interference or restriction from religion or state.

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Please remember ... what I just read is the opening monologue of a play that we saw in Edinburgh. It was written by an Englishman, and the setting is an unnamed country in the Mideast. The play was written over the past couple of years. However, I hope you sense the timelessness, and the geographic and political universality of what the professor is saying.

The name of the play I read from is “Judas.” It is a modern day telling of the Biblical story of Jesus and Judas, and it faces some basic question about whether the action of Judas were actually a betrayal of Jesus, or is there another side to the story? The author of the play ... and the principal actor ... is Tim Marriott ... a well-known BBC sit-com personality. Hopefully, you will hear more about Tim Marriott as we move into 2020.

One last comment: I mentioned that in the face of prejudice, bigotry, violence in so many forms that were referenced in many of the productions we saw, there was a sense of hope that things were beginning to change. There was a vision of a planet where peace, justice, respect of others, and fairness in all forms prevailed.

I had the opportunity to share a pint of ale with Tim Marriott’s co-producer. As we got to know each other he mentioned that he was an atheist. Joe was one of the most optimistic atheists I have every met. And his surname is Angella ... as in Angel. I found the encounter synchronistic. In the words of Tim Marriott from the monologue I just read:

What can we do to bring peace and reconciliation to our land? Surely, the key is to talk ... and we have to be inclusive. We must build bridges, not walls. We must reach out and talk to one

another ... person to person ...honestly, openly, without interference or restriction from religion or state.

Amen.