

The Church Clap
Exodus 1:8-20 , 6-14; Luke 12:49-56
The Rev. Layne Brubaker
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
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This morning our Prelude played by John was a selection from Igor Stravinsky's Rite of Spring.... Which debuted On May 29th 1913. At that time Igor Stravinsky was known as a student of Rimsky Korsakov and was an up and coming avant-garde composer. And the debut of his new orchestral composition along with the Ballet Russe at the [des Champs-Élysées](#) Theatre in France was, you could say, controversial.

From the very first notes played and dance steps stepped, the crowd was immediately uncomfortable, so uncomfortable they became angry, there was shouting! Items were thrown at the stage, folks left in protest, fights broke out, Police were called, duels were accepted; by all accounts it was utter chaos and was later described as a riot. The crowd was so loud that opening night the dancers could not hear the music, and someone from the orchestra had to yell the counts so the dancer could stay on track.

Stravinsky's score for The Rite of Spring contradicted just about every rule about what music should or could be. The rhythms were complex and relentless, the percussion thunderous. Stravinsky had instruments playing in their highest most uncomfortable ranges. The opening notes are played by a bassoon playing so high it doesn't even sound like a bassoon. one exasperated critic after it's debut wrote "The music always goes to the note next to the one you expect". (<https://www.theverge.com/2013/5/29/4375736/igor-stravinsky-rite-of-spring-100-anniversary-paris-riot>)

Then there was the dancing. According to some observers this was what really caused the scandal on the opening night. The dancers were not dressed in a typical ballet costume, but were wearing baggy loose clothing, and the dance was driven into the floor rather than the typical ballet style of jumping and twirling in the air. Classical ballet dance aspired upwards, in defiance of gravity, whereas The Ballet Russe dancers seemed pulled down to the earth. Their strange, stomping movements and awkward poses defied every canon of gracefulness. (<https://www.npr.org/2013/05/30/187066946/modern-movement-how-the-ballets-russes-revolutionized-dance>)

One of my history professors in college argued that this very moment on May 29, 1913 was the birth of modernity, that the art reflected to the people all the societal changes that were rapidly happening around the world. The Modernization of music was met by riotous chaos, and it was also the birth of a new thing. Conflict is not always a sign of things going wrong; sometimes conflict is the sign of new birth.

As stated, this morning John played the opening movement from The Rite of Spring; and you may have recognized it; it is commonly played orchestral scores, and you may have even enjoyed its beauty because to our modern ears the music just isn't all that weird. It's not weird for us because Stravinsky score has had lasting effects that can still be found in much of the music we listen to today.

Last week I had the wonderful privilege of leading our youth to Montreat Youth Conference. Montreat is a PCUSA Camp and Conference center and every summer for six week they welcome youth from around the country for a Youth conference. The days of the Youth Conference are filled with Keynote in the morning (which is an interactive fun biblical lecture); small groups throughout the day (in small groups the youth from different youth groups get to know each other through fun games and recreation activities) while also taking time to dive into the day's biblical questions and themes. Then there is worship every evening. Montreat Youth worship is one of my favorite things in the whole world - the music, the preaching, the energy in room is exciting and thrilling - there is a certain freedom in worship that I have rarely experienced elsewhere.... So.... at Montreat... The days are full.... fun thrilling ... and exhausting.... Our group even managed to squeeze in a sunrise hike because they were not tired enough :) Okay.. I have to be honest I did not go on the hike - I dropped them off and then went on a Starbucks run.

On Wednesday evening after worship, the recreation activity offered was an energizer dance party in the auditorium. You all just witnessed what an energizer is. It's a bit of fun and it's always goofy (the point of energizers are in the name - you start the morning off with an energizer to get hyped for the day!) but in the middle of the energizer dance party the powers that be started playing **The Church Clap!** And the room exploded! Meaning that everyone in the room seemed to know the dance steps and they were all dancing their hearts out! Well, everyone seemed to know the dance steps except for me, Scott, and Siobhan. The three of us stood there a bit confused wondering how it was that everyone around us knew the dance. I don't know if you have ever been in a room where everyone knew what was going on and you obviously didn't, but it is a bewildering feeling. While reflecting on The Church Clap later that evening I realized that the boundaries of the church and that which God is bringing about among the youth of our church is beyond my imagining and beyond my personal edges. I don't want to be like Starvinsky's crowd shouting and rioting at the birth of a new way of being; rather I want to be open to God's newness- to God's call to step into the future. For God in fact far extends where I think God is and somehow this dance had permeated the youth of our church and it was exuberant, it was exciting. And it was time for me to catch up and learn the dance!

Both of our Biblical text today encourage us to step boldly into an unknown future. The Gospel text today is simply shocking. I almost wonder if someone quoted "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! If before preparing for this sermon I would even attribute these words to Jesus? This is not the sort of bible verse we cross stitch on pillows or write on a greeting card. One commentator states about this text:

During a season of aching division in church and society, this passage seems to affirm precisely the wrong tendencies in human communities.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-3/commentary-on-luke-1249-56-5>

Which is why we must look more closely at what Jesus is telling us here. In Jesus day and context, he and his fellow Jewish people lived under the oppressive rule of Rome and their lives were ruled by the Pax Romana, meaning The peace of Rome. However, the peace of Rome was brought by a sword. You either followed the Roman law or you died. Jesus is saying that there is a cost to following him. Jesus who is the true Prince of Peace is saying to follow him is to be at odds with the Pax Romana—this political division has the potential to divide them from their community, friends, and even their family members who would prefer to just “keep the peace” with the powers that be.

For Jesus, peace is way more than being without conflict. The word peace often gets interpreted as to be calm, to not trouble the waters, not make a fuss or cause any commotion. But the Hebrew and Greek word we translate as peace is not a word about a state of being; but is rather a verb, to do Peace, meaning to restore what is broken and make it whole again. And sometimes to restore that which is broken necessitates action or change, which can bring conflict or division. Division even with our very own family and loved ones “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” father against son

and son against father,
mother against daughter
and daughter against mother

Our Old Testament passage tells us a story about two women named Shiphrah and Puah who decided to work towards peace instead of just following orders from the powers that be. The book of Exodus begins with a crisis for the descendants of Jacob, who migrated to Egypt to escape famine in the closing chapters of Genesis: “Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” and the Hebrews became enslaved to him. Afraid of the Hebrews’ increase in number and power, Pharaoh orders their midwives to murder male Hebrew babies as they are delivered. A king/government decided to make decisions about women’s bodies and their pregnancies. Shiphrah and Puah decide that they fear God, and not Pharaoh. They would not carry out the king’s orders; they choose to defy the unjust orders of their government. When they are questioned by the King they insist that “the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them” (Exodus 1:19). The word here for “vigorous” shares the root of the word “life.” While deceiving Pharaoh, the language also winks at us the reader: the Hebrew women are full of life. Pharaoh feared the liveliness of the Hebrew people and Shiphrah and Puah would take not part in stamping it out. (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-21/commentary-on-exodus-18-22-21-10-5>)

Last Thursday, at Montreat youth Conference the story of Shiphrah and Puah was our scripture focus for the day; the theme of the day being resistance when we are with God we are able to resist evil in the world. One of the speakers, Rev. Pam Driesell, told us that for her there was an easy way to remember what evil is. She said Evil is simply the word Live spelled backwards; so evil is anything that diminishes life. Shiphrah and Puah feared God, which meant that they would not betray their God - they would affirm life - even at their own peril. *Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!*

Our Gospel text ends with Jesus' call to "interpret the present time" (verse 56) and we need to pay attention to his instruction. We to are called to interpret our present time and we are called to work towards true Peace which restores that which is broken - we are called to the work of affirming Life **of all people**. We are called to be witnesses of the Holy Spirit's new work among us and to say yes to the new and not try to stomp out the fire of new birth among us. Let's not be like Starvinsky's crowd shouting and rioting and protesting the birth of a new way of being; rather let's be open to God's newness, to God's call to step and maybe dance into the future. For God in fact far extends where we think God is. It's time for all of us to catch up and learn the dance!

Let us Pray:

Holy God, your call is not always east... it asks us to move into an unknown future and sometimes we are afraid, but God we know you are with... and the future is bearable because you lead the way. Quiet our hearts and minds so that we may follow you. Amen