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**“A Durham Drum Major for Justice”**  
A sermon by Jimmie Hawkins

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)**  
**January 14, 2018**  
Amos 5:18-24, Luke 13:10-17

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First, I give **God the glory** for what God has done and is doing today. I am honored beyond words to preach at this joint worship service between **Covenant Presbyterian and First Presbyterian Church** as we worship our God and celebrate the ministry of the *Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* I want to thank **First Presbyterian Church** and **Rev. Mindy Douglas** for your gracious invitation to be here as your preacher on this Sunday. I have known Mindy since we both started ministry over 25 years ago, and I must say that she has always been a very warm, competent, caring minister of the gospel of Christ Jesus. The clergy here I consider not just my colleagues in ministry, but my friends: *Marilyn, Sam, Sue and Cherri and Julio*. I always have felt at home at FPC.

**Covenant Presbyterian**, I can't express the love and gratitude I feel for your being present here today. *Sue, Connia, Delia and Ike, Otto, Howard, Yolanda, Lorraine, Sarah Bell, David, Rosemary*, to name a few, it means so much to see your faces again. But 'Who's at 2620 Weaver Street?' You know somebody is going to show up and say, "Ain't nobody told me we weren't having church today". For over 20 years we were on a journey together and it represent the best years of my life. Rev. Delton Farmer, God bless you and your wife Cynthia, for you have not only been my colleagues in ministry, but your son Joshua and my son James were best friends.

I bring you greetings from your **Office of Public Witness** in Washington DC. From my family, my **wife Sheinita**, our **children Kaela and James** who send their love and regrets over not being able to be here. They miss you all greatly and send their love. Both children are playing sports over the weekend and quite frankly, I don't think that I could have gotten Kaela on the plane if she came back to Durham.

Who I am today is to a large degree due to the multiple connections between these two congregations. The **last two sermons** I preached in Durham were at Covenant Presbyterian Church on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> the following week at FPC. These two congregations share a connection in the truest sense of the reformed faith. They are the two oldest Presbyterian congregations in Durham city and county. *First Presbyterian Church*, founded in 1871, at 146 years is the oldest. *Covenant Presbyterian*, founded in 1887, at 130 years is a close second. Between them they have 276 years of ministry. Together they helped created the **Durham Presbyterian Council**, from which sprang *Presbyterian Urban Ministry*, the *Duke Campus Ministry* and *Housing for New Hope*. When Covenant was relocating to Lincoln Street in 1967, it was FPC that gave a love offering to support the building campaign. For over a decade in the 1980's, they taught their children the Word of God at the same table in a joint *Vacation Bible School*. When FPC hosted the New Hope Presbytery Meeting in 2012, they had the pastor of Covenant preach; and when Covenant hosted in 2015, they invited First Presbyterian Church to be their partner. The *Rev. Dr. Joe Harvard*, the former pastor of First Presbyterian Church, is now the moderator of Covenant. I'm just glad he waited till I was gone, because I might have been out of a call. I am thankful for these two congregations and the centuries of ministry they have provided for this community in their service to Christ.

Please consider with me the **sermon title**, “A Durham Drum Major For Justice.”

Our **New Testament** passage of scripture is **Luke 13:10-17**.

**10** Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. **11** And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. **12** When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” **13** When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. **14** But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.” **15** But the **Lord answered** him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? **16** And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” **17** When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

This passage contains three components: a **miracle of compassion**, the responding **criticism**, and the **rebuke** by Jesus.

At first glance it is a **healing story** of a woman unable to straighten her back. In the Bible such deformity was attributed to an evil spirit, as were ailments and disease. Today the medical diagnosis of a curved spine is called *Lordosis*, or swayback, a lower back inward curve; or *Kyphosis*, a rounded upper back; or *Scoliosis*, a sideways curve to the spine, often S-shaped or C-shaped.

But it is also a **Sabbath controversy** wherein Jesus is covertly accused of breaking the Sabbath. The Sabbath was established in **Genesis 2** when God rested on the seventh day of creation and blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it as a day of rest. In **Exodus 16** the Sabbath was set aside as a day of rest from the harvesting of manna. In **Exodus 20** the Fourth Commandment commanded it to be kept holy. In **Exodus 31**, the breaking of the Sabbath became punishable by death. Even the **land** was to have its rest every seventh year and the worship of God was mandated to be held on the Sabbath.

When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, his contention was that he was not breaking the Sabbath but actually fulfilling its intent. He stated that we were not made for the Sabbath, but that the Sabbath was made to support us. To offer a moment of rest, a chance to catch our breath. A pause in all of the business of life and to stand still in the presence of our creator with all of life's worries put aside.

I don't know about you, but I have been **breathless** for more than a moment this past year. Washington DC is a trip. And it has presented people of faith with one crisis after another. From the immigration ban, to the president's careless critique of the Charlottesville murder, to DACA deadlines, the dismantling of the ACA, Russian interference in the elections in Durham NC, but we won anyway, increased ICE raids, *Jeff Beauregard Sessions* as the Attorney General, *Rick Perry* over the Energy Department, anything that the President of the United States has tweeted in the middle of the night, have caused me to lose rest.

But I've come to the conclusion that this is the moment to which we women and men of faith have been called to, for such a time as this. The church was created not to flourish in those times when all is well. No, the church was created in the crisis of a crucified savior, disciples who fled, persecution for the government. We are crisis

people created for crisis moments to do ministry in the midst of chaos. This is our time. For too long we have let others define who we are. We are not conservative or liberal Christians; we are followers of the Christ who said, *“no greater love has anyone than this, to lay down one’s life for a friend.”*

And at its heart, this is an **Advocacy Story**. **Jesus** not only heals the woman, but addresses the sin in society which justified not helping her simply because it was the wrong day of the week. There should be no reason to keep us from doing good, from being just, from giving love.

What does it mean to be a Christian? What is at the heart of our doctrines and our beliefs? Jesus resolves this conflict by upholding compassion, mercy and love as the most important attributes of God’s children, especially as it pertains to assisting the poor and suffering. They can’t wait til tomorrow. A hungry child needs to be fed, not when it is convenient, but right now. Someone who is about to be evicted, can’t come by later in the week, but need help right now. A woman dealing with sexual abuse can’t be told to go home and pray for her husband who is the cause of her abuse, she needs the church to offer her a place to go. And immigrant who is being chased by ICE needs refuge right now.

This is the **model of advocacy** we need today, one which meets the immediate, emergency needs of any community. To feed the hungry by food banks, kitchens and pantries; to house the homeless through Housing for New Hope; to provide medicine for the sick at Lincoln Community Clinic; books for our children. But we are also called to address the ills in our community which keep people hungry in a land where food abounds; the sick next door to a hospital; the homeless sleeping outside a hotel.

Just this week **CNN** posted a video of a woman dismissed from the hospital, escorted out to the sidewalk by a security guard in her hospital gown and left in front of the bus stop. Just this week, the governor justified requiring people to work who receive Medicare. In Kansas, if you receive benefits there is a limit on how much money you can withdraw from an ATM, no more than \$25. And the president, the president has declared that some countries are of greater value than others. Some are just excrement deposits of brown emojis with smiley faces while others are bright sparkly radars of purity and light. In *Durham NC*, affordable housing for all of Durham's citizen's in need of it is still a dream deferred.

**1).** We need **Durham Drum Majors of Justice** who see a Need, speak to that need, and provide relief to that need and then address the societal ills which keep that need a reality.

On **Feb. 4, 1968**, the **Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.** spoke about how he hoped to be remembered and gave his own eulogy under the banner of a Drum Major for Justice: *"I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question... that I did try to feed the hungry... to clothe those who were naked... to visit those who were in prison... to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a **drum major for justice**. Say that I was a drum major for **peace**. I was a drum major for **righteousness**. And all of the other shallow things will not matter'"*

There is this link between **Dr. King and the Bull City**. He came to **Durham** on at least four occasions between 1956 & 1964. The first being **October 15, 1956**, when the

Durham Business and Professional Chain invited him to speak at **Hillside High School**. He revisited on **February 16, 1960**, when he visited the Durham Woolworth's and addressed 1,200 people at White Rock Baptist Church, with Covenant Presbyterian being one of the sponsoring congregations. It was in Durham where Dr. King coined his famous "*fill up the jails*" rallying cry during this speech. Again in **1964**, after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, he spoke at the **Jack Tar Hotel** and **Duke University** and returned the following week as 5,000 Durhamites listened at **North Carolina Central University**. He cancelled two other speaking engagements in Durham in 1968, the latter being on **April 4, 1968**, the day that he was murdered on a motel balcony in Memphis. And it is a powerful thought that if he had only come to Durham that day, instead of going to Memphis Tennessee. Dr. King came to Durham so much because he saw an ally in this city which already had a history of advocacy for the cause of justice.

**Jesus** came, not for the benefit of those who have, but for those who do not. Jesus is not Lord of the rich, but of the poor. In his **first sermon** he boldly proclaimed, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" He said, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*" He promised a **place in his father's kingdom** for those who provided for the suffering: "*for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these (my brothers and my sisters), you did it to me.*"

Dr. King came to **Durham October 15, 1956**, and spoke at **Hillside High School** where he told the students *"Doors will be opened to you now that were never open in the past."* But let me tell you, some of those doors won't just naturally open. Some of them need to be pried open, some of those doors have to be pushed open. And sometimes, you have to kick them in because someone is standing on the other side, trying to keep it shut.

**2). We need Drum Majors of Justice to Set Us Free.**

**Luke 13 15-16:** *15 But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?"*

**Jesus frees this woman** from bondage, both spiritual and physical, and **Jesus is still setting us free today**. But not from those opinions others cast upon us, but also from being the one who casts doubt, suspicion and hate upon others. Jesus told the story of the **Prodigal Son** but there were two sons in this story; one disobedient, one faithful; one repentant, one resentful. Too often, this is the face that the world sees of the church, judgmental, narrow and still.

**Rev. King** came to Durham for a second time on **February 16, 1960**. This was four years after the Durham sit-in at the Royal Ice Cream Parlor and a short time after the Greensboro sit-in. While here, he visited the Durham Woolworth's which had closed its lunch counter after demonstrations the previous week. He spoke to a standing-room-only crowd of 1,200 people at White Rock Baptist Church. A service wherein the program listed Covenant Presbyterian as one of its host congregations. He said, *"Let us not fear going to jail if the officials threaten to arrest us for standing up for our rights."*



*Maybe it will take this willingness to stay in jail to arouse the dozing conscience of our nation."*

The **conscience of America** is still dozing, still asleep. We are a nation which is so self-absorbed upon our own needs that we fail to see the ways in which we are part of the problem. We have been promised a slogan to *"Make America Great Again"*. I fear that greatness is defined by wealth, power and race. We don't need to make America great, we need to make America just. We need to make America peaceful. We need to make America non-racist. We need to make America tolerant, for the first time.

We need drum majors who are going to be the drums and wake us up by sounding the alarm that today is the day for which we have been called for just a time as this.

In December I went to **Israel** just two days after the President made his announcement that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. For many Christians this sounds good on its surface, but it actually complicates the peace process there for Jerusalem is divided into East Jerusalem for the Muslims, West Jerusalem for the Jews, with a small dwindling Christian presence as well. We went to church on Sunday aboard a city-bus. At the checkpoint, all the Palestinians had to get off the bus and wait outside as armed soldiers boarded to check passports. Then they checked their passes. This happens each day. This is demeaning, demoralizing and a form of apartheid. It is reminiscent of Jim Crow. It is akin to the Native American genocide as more and more Palestinian land is seized for settlements. And the President thinks that declaring Jerusalem as the capital of Israel helps to bring peace to the Holy Land. We can't side with the oppressors and say that we stand for peace.

**Durham** needs Drum Majors for Justice who will go throughout this city and county, nation and globe, proclaiming that our God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Durham has such a long history of **Drum Majors for Justice** that needs to continue:

- It was in Durham that the first sit-in occurred in **1957** at the **Royal Ice Cream Parlor**, three years before Greensboro.
- It was in Durham that **MLK** preached what was to become one of the chants of the Civil Rights Movement, *“fill up their jails”*.
- It was in Durham, when churches were leaving downtown that **First Presbyterian Church** stated “we are downtown by history and by choice” and it has been a constant presence for justice, equity and grace.
- It was in Durham where **Drum Majors in education** such as *John Hope Franklin, Leroy Walker, James E. Shepherd*, educated the minds of this city and the world; and let’s not forget *Delia Robison* at Jordan HS and *Howard Fitts* at NCCU.
- It was in Durham where **Drum Majors in Business** founded *North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company and Mechanics & Farmers Bank*, not just to make a profit, but to bring a people out of poverty. Both *Booker T. Washington* and *W.E.B. DuBois* visited Durham and DuBois called Durham “the Black Wall Street”.
- It was in Durham where **Political Drum Majors** named *Elwood Boulware*, an elder at Covenant Presbyterian Church, who became the first AA elected to Durham City Council and who worked tirelessly for civil rights and justice. *Deborah Giles, Mary Ann Black, Ike Robinson, William Bell* who have fought the political battles so that our children and elderly might be protected.

- It was in Durham were **ministers** such as [\*Dr. Pauli Murray\*](#) (1910-1985), the first woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest advocated for gender and racial equality.
- Durham has had a Drum Major named **Joe Harvard** who when he heard that the Klan was coming to Durham he joined with *Bishop Elroy Lewis* and *Rabbi John Friedman* and said, “Not on my watch. Not here. Not now. Not ever.”

The **legacy** is here, the call is clear. What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”

Reverend Jimmie Hawkins

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*Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation (i.e., are written for the ear), the written accounts occasionally deviate from proper and generally accepted principles of grammar and punctuation. Most often, these deviations are not mistakes per se, but are indicative of an attempt to aid the listener in the delivery of the sermon.*

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