

## Gospel Reading

Our gospel reading comes from the Cotton Patch Version of the New Testament.

The CPV came about through the work of Clarence Jordan.

Clarence, his spouse Florence, and some other cotton patchers started Koinonia Farms in southern Georgia in 1942.

They decided there needed to be a “demonstration plot” of the Kingdom of God where people built relationships with each other and built community together no matter the color of their skin.

Now, if you know your history, you know this God movement wouldn't go well in the Southern states in 1942.

So, to respond to Koinonia Farm's critics, Clarence asked a simple question.

“What would it be like if Jesus was born into the world right smack dab in the middle of the Jim Crow south?”

And since he was a New Testament Greek scholar, he set about translating the New Testament with that simple question in mind.

Hear the word of the Lord from Luke 21.

The most terrible, horrible, not good things we can imagine will happen.

“And then they'll see the son of man leading a Movement with great strength and authority. When these preliminary things happen, hold up your heads and throw back your shoulders because your freedom is arriving.”

Echo these words for me.

**Hold up...your heads...and throw back...your shoulders...because your freedom...is arriving.**

Today, I want to preach about the Movement Clarence Jordan was talking about.

Sometimes we call that Movement the Kingdom of God.

But I want to borrow a term from the Civil Rights Movement and use it as a synonym for the Kingdom of God.

That term is the Beloved Community.

The Civil Rights hero John Lewis wrote, “We defined [the Beloved Community] as a society based on simple justice that values the dignity and worth of every human being.”

If I place the Beloved community and its definition by Congressman Lewis into Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes sound like this:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the Beloved Community.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice,  
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of justice,  
for theirs is the Beloved Community.

I don’t know about you, but I want to be a part of that kind of community, the Beloved Community.

I don’t know about you, but I want to be a part of helping to build that kind of community, the Beloved Community.

But it’s hard, ya’ll.

Whenever we feel like we’re a part of the Beloved Community, there always seems to be somebody who tries to tear us from it, there always seems to be something that tries to tear us from it.

Whenever we try to build the Beloved Community, there always seems to be somebody who tries to tear it down, there always seems to be something that tries to tear it down.

What do we do about that ‘tearing.’

Well, let me tell you.

Because of advent, the Beloved Community is already in this big, wide world around us.

Because of the birth of Jesus into the lowly manger, the Beloved Community is already in the lowly, humble people and the lowly, humble places around us.

Because God is a God who is with us, the Beloved Community is already here.

But let me keep going.

The Beloved Community is ALREADY here, but at the same time it is NOT YET here.

## JOHN LEWIS

John Lewis is one of my heroes.

When he was a teenager in Troy, Alabama he heard the words of Martin Luke King, Jr. over the radio. Those words inspired him to join the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1960, he participated in the first lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, Tennessee.

He was a Freedom Rider, and risked his life to challenge the South's failure to enforce the Supreme Court's decision in *Boynton v. Virginia* that ruled that segregation of public buses was unconstitutional.

In 1963, at the age of 23, he was a keynote speaker at the March on Washington.

That same year he became chairperson of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

In his leadership role with SNCC, he organized voter registration and community action programs during the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964.

The next year, he and Hosea Williams led over 600 peaceful protestors across the Edmond Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on the way to the state capital in Montgomery, marching for voting rights.

Let me stop here and shine a light on John Lewis' hands, feet, heart and words during this work.

He was helping build the Beloved Community.

He was building a community where every human being, EVERY human being, no matter the color of their skin, would know their dignity and worth.

As he sat beside the other students at that lunch counter in Nashville, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

As he sat beside the other freedom riders on that Greyhound Bus from Washington, DC to New Orleans, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

As his voice rang out between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument in the ears of a quarter of a million people standing up for civil rights, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

As he marched side by side with other marchers over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

The Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

But let's shine the light a little brighter on the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

As he and the other marchers were on the bridge, they were attacked by Alabama state troopers.

That moment will forever be known as "Bloody Sunday."

So you might ask, "Pastor Trevor, how can you say the Beloved Community is here in the light of "Bloody Sunday?"

Well, it's because even though the Beloved Community is AREADY here, it's NOT YET here.

Racism is still here.

You can find it in peoples hearts.

You can find it in structures on which our society is built.

Whenever we build the Beloved Community as John Lewis did, there will be Bloody Sundays still.

But we can preach, sit-in, freedom ride, speak out, organize and march against that racism because, as Clarence Jordan wrote, we can "hold up our heads and throw back our shoulders, because our freedom is arriving."

The Beloved Community is NOT YET here in its fullness.

But Jesus is coming.

Racism is going.

And the Beloved Community will be in its fullness forever and ever.

Amen.

## WE CHOOSE WELCOME

We Choose Welcome is one of my favorite groups.

A group of women became a grassroots organization that sought to mobilize and equip women of faith to build and cultivate a welcome movement from their tables at home to the halls of Congress.

They hoped to empower communities to take action for the vulnerable in both their personal lives and through advocating for just immigration policies.

Just last week their team took the message of welcome all the way to the halls of Congress.

They wrote, "We're grateful for a democratic system of government in which citizens can speak directly and boldly to lawmakers. At the same time, we came away with a renewed commitment to the upside-down Kingdom of Jesus. In this Kingdom, it is ordinary acts of love - not earthly power or prestige - that radically transform our lives and communities."

They asked me to write a poem for them.

Here it is.

One  
man  
selling  
spring flowers  
in the parking lot  
of the Sunoco gas station  
at the main road from my school in the late afternoon

looks into my eyes through the glass of the window in my car and silently hopes

I'll see him and roll down my window and say to him, "How much for the flowers my friend?"

He came to us on the migrant trail from Honduras.

"Eight dollars, amigo," he says.

He hands me his world.

"Thanks," I say,

finding

a

friend

Let me stop here and shine a light on We Choose Welcome's hands, feet, heart and words doing this work.

They are helping build the Beloved Community.

They are building a community where every human being, EVERY human being, no matter the origin of their birth, will know their dignity and worth.

As they sat beside each other at their tables at home and talked to each other and prayed with each other about welcoming immigrants, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

As they stood beside each other in the halls of congress and petitioned their elected leaders to pass just, merciful, humble immigration reform, the Beloved Community was ALREADY here.

The Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

But let's shine the light a little brighter on our elected leaders.

Listen to these words from the most powerful political leader in our land.

“When Mexico sends its people,” he said, “they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”

So you might ask, “Pastor Trevor, how can you say the Beloved Community is here in the light of that demagogic, demonizing, destructive rhetoric?”

Well, it's because even though the Beloved Community is AREADY here, it's NOT YET here.

Xenophobia is still here.

You can find it in peoples hearts.

You can find it in structures on which our society is built.

Whenever we build the Beloved Community as We Choose Welcome is building it, there will be demagogues.

But we can sit at our tables at home and stand in the halls of congress and talk about and pray for immigrants and immigration reform and “hold up our heads and throw back our shoulders, because our freedom is arriving.”

The Beloved Community is NOT YET here in its fullness.

But Jesus is coming.

Xenophobia is going.

And the Beloved Community will be in its fullness forever and ever.

Amen.

## TRIUNE MERCY CENTER

Triune Mercy Center is one of my favorite places.

You, my friends, are some of my favorite people.

Our Vision at Triune is to restore people by reflecting God's love as we live out faith in relationship and leverage resources to empower and heal our community.

Our Mission at Triune is to share Christ's love by providing life-changing opportunities, meeting the need of the disadvantaged and doing Biblical justice in community.

Let me stop here and shine a light on our hands, feet, heart and words doing this work.

We are helping build the Beloved Community.

We are building a community where every human being, EVERY human being, will know their dignity and worth.

As we come from different 'groups' of people (different races, different countries, housed and unhoused, addicted and recovering, gay or straight, ANYTHING that makes us different from each other) and yet sit TOGETHER in the same pew in this sanctuary on Sunday mornings, the Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

As we eat lunch beside each other in the dining hall after Sunday service, talking with each other and being here for each other, the Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

As we open the mercy center and ourselves each Saturday through Thursday to anyone who needs a listening ear, a loving heart, and a kind friend to accompany them on their way, the Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

The Beloved Community is ALREADY here.

But let's shine the light a little brighter on relationships and community.

Listen to these words that we hear over and over again on social media and the 24 hour news cycle.

“Our society is divided and can’t be put back together again.”

“We are broken and can’t be repaired.”

“There is only harming, not helping; only hurting, not healing.”

“We’re building walls, not building tables.”

So you might ask, “Pastor Trevor, how can you say the Beloved Community is here in the light of this division, brokenness, harm, hurt and callousness?”

Well, it’s because even though the Beloved Community is **ALREADY** here, it’s **NOT YET** here.

Division is still here.

You can find it in peoples hearts.

You can find it in structures on which our society is built.

Whenever we build the Beloved Community as we’re trying to build it at Triune, there will be people who try to tear it down, there will be things that try to tear it down.

But we can build relationships and community with each other, and we can “hold up our heads and throw back our shoulders, because our freedom is arriving.”

The Beloved Community is **NOT YET** here in its fullness.

But Jesus is coming.

Division is going.

And the Beloved Community will be in its fullness forever and ever.

Amen.