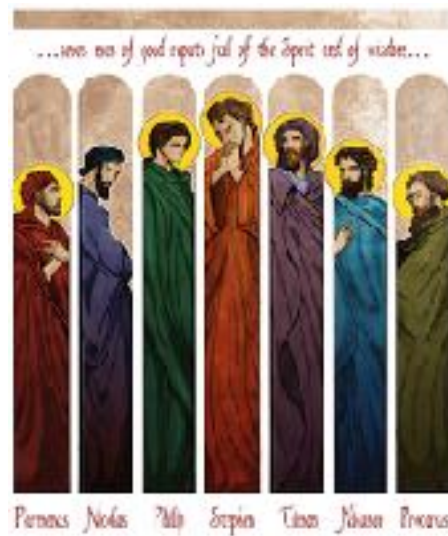


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, September 13, 2020

“Full of Wisdom and Spirit”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Christian Scripture: Acts 6:1-15



The coming month in our October *Centre Bells*, you will find that I have written to you about ‘The Signs of the Times’.



Since writing that column and watching the news for the remainder of the week, I am becoming more convinced of that which I wrote. In short, I

conclude that the 'Signs of the Times' demonstrate that the church is marching closer to its indispensability in society rather than farther away.

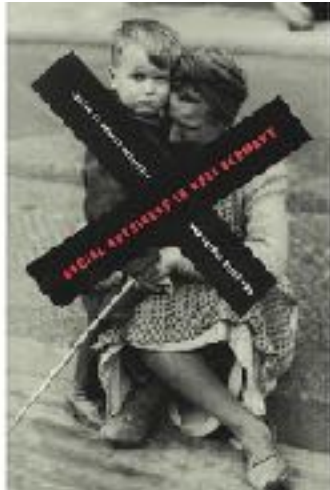


If one watches the news, it becomes more apparent that our society is beginning to lose its collective mind while wildfires rage, conspiracy theories proliferate (QAnon), our nation alienate our allies and courts our adversaries, and a pandemic waltzes leisurely thorough our country.

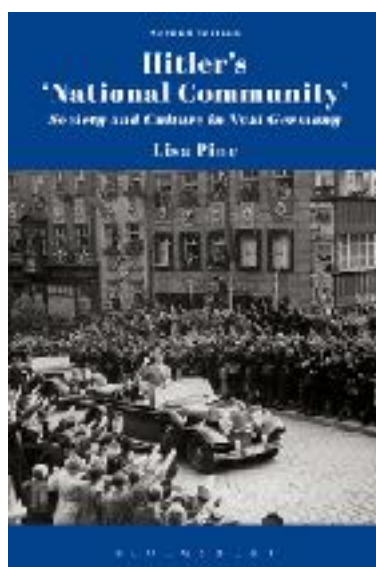


The church, specifically the United Church of Christ and Centre Congregational Church (in the heart of Brattleboro) is increasingly needed to provide, as our scripture from Acts 6:3 states, leaders who are “full of the Spirit and wisdom”.

Due to Margo Neale’s encouragement in July, I began to read more during my holiday leave. I have tried to honor Margo’s advice.



Currently, I am reading a book entitled *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* and it details the political and legal implications of a society that lost its collective mind in the 1930s. And due to its losing its collective mind, Germany took only about ten years to bring itself to complete and utter destruction. In the 1920s and 1930s, Germany was one of the most advanced societies on earth producing the best scientists, the best philosophers, and the best Christian theologians on the planet. Yet, collective insanity razed that society to the ground.



Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany teaches us about what happens when a dominate group wishes to impose itself on outsider groups *and* it is given the theological, social, political, and legal sanction to do it. Of course, all are familiar with the historic persecution and genocide of Jews. Yet, how many of us are aware of the marginalization and persecution of the disabled and mentally ill? How many of us are aware of what happened to prostitutes, gypsies, and homosexuals? The book teaches what happened to those deemed 'habitual criminals' and what happened to socialists. What happened to women in German occupied Europe was truly horrific. Even Free Masons were persecuted.



Today, we need only ask what is happening to those with pre-existing medical conditions as it regards our health care policies and COVID-19? What happens to those in our country who are not legal immigrants? What will happen to socialists? What happened to homosexuals and transgender people? What happens to women's rights to choose their own reproductive paths? What is happening to people of color, specifically Black males, who experience police brutality, execution, and mass incarceration? What happens

to diplomats, generals, CDC officials who discern public health policy using the best science available?

Now, please do not misunderstand me, I am not necessarily equating our times with the rise of fascism. What I am saying as we are moving closer towards it rather than farther away from it. I say this as a historian, not a politician nor as a minister of religion.

Let me now speak as a minister of religion. In our scripture today, seven leaders were chosen to lead the early Christian church.



While the early Christian church suffered from *persecution*, our church today suffers from *irrelevance* due to secularization. While those like Stephen were martyred, we risk extinction with dwindling numbers and declining influence. Yet, the early Christian church survived despite overwhelming odds stacked against it! And so will we! The early Christian church prospered and grew because it preached the gospel of Jesus Christ which was by its nature *inclusive*, not exclusive, and it made itself relevant and vital to communities by taking care of those who were at the time the most social and economically vulnerable, the widows.

Today, like the early Christian church did, we will decide on our church's path to follow. We will, like the early Christian church, decide on new leaders who will discern how our church will be vital and relevant in the world.



I am very proud that our wider church, the United Church of Christ, and our local church, Centre Congregational Church, boldly declare to our community and the world that: We believe Black Lives Matter. Love Is Love. Feminism Is for Everyone. No Human Being Is Illegal. Science Is Real. Be Kind to All.



It is my prayer that the decisions we make today at our Congregational Meetings are *wise*. It is my prayer that the leaders we choose today are full of the *Spirit*.

I would like to thank all the leaders of this church, especially the Deacons led by Heidi Mario and the Health and Safety sub-Committee whose hard work, whose wisdom and Spirits, enable this service to occur. I pray this message and the entire service in this sanctuary has been a blessing to you.

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to you at home, the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".