

## These are the Times ...

A sermon by the Rev. Jane Campbell MacIntyre  
for First Congregational Church UCC, Camden ME  
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### Easter 6C

*Acts 16:9-15 - Lydia; John 14:23-29 - Advocate*

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*“These are the times that try men’s souls.”*

That sentence has been lodged in my head for a couple weeks now, so I just have to say it out loud.

It is the opening sentence of one of Thomas Paine’s writings that were published in the time leading up to the American Revolutionary War. In the article Paine makes it clear that it is not just ‘men’ he is referring to. The trying times were for all who lived through them – the colonists and the Europeans; men, women, boys, and girls – everyone’s.

Many times in history have been trying. I love to read history or historical novels and sometimes think ‘Gee – it would have been so exciting to live during that time.’ Anyone else??

**And here we are** – right in the middle of history being made. Are you excited yet? Or maybe, the type of excitement you are feeling now is not the type you thought of while reading that book.

Change is more comfortably observed from a distance of space or time. In the middle of it? the word I come up with is “fraught”.

If you have read or watched “The Lord of the Rings” saga – you will remember Frodo, the hero hobbit, Gandalf, the wise wizard, and the One Ring that rules all, that Frodo needed to destroy.

There was a conversation in which Frodo said:

*I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.*

Gandalf replied:

*So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide.*

*All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.*

So - - What do we do with this time and these circumstances that are given to us right now? - - Why, **be the best Jesus followers we can be!**

Look back at the Invocation we prayed at the start of the service. While they are not the words we memorized as children, they are a great summary of the Jesus Way:

*we remember with wonder and joy that your spirit is reaching everywhere:*

- *rejoicing in the liveliness of all living things;*
- *touching what is wounded or ill with healing power;*
- *gathering in the lonely, the lost, the least;*
- *soothing ancient animosities;*
- *creating and recreating a vision of hope.*

*Come now, Holy Spirit.*

That is what we are to do in these times.

To help you remember, let me put it in one word: **HOSPITALITY.**

Not hospitality as in “Hi! we welcome everyone, make sure you come to coffee hour, gee, I hope they’ll come back” – which is a good start as long as someone notices them at coffee hour - but a radical hospitality as in “I really see you. I would love it if you became part of this community. I celebrate your joys. I am concerned about your problems. Is there something I can do to ease them while we are sitting/chatting/working together?” That kind of hospitality.

In the book of Acts this morning, Paul and his friends are kicking around, trying to find a place with people who will listen to their message about Christ. They are called to Philippi in Macedonia – across the sea, where they have never been, into “*the heart of the [Roman] Empire’s project in this corner of the world, a place that lived like an extended section of Rome itself, intended to be an example of what Rome offers to the world*”.<sup>71</sup>

On the Sabbath they went outside the city gates to find a worshipping place ... outside the gates since this was not sanctioned worship. There he met Lydia and her group of women.

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<sup>1</sup> John van de Laar, “Led by the Spirit” in **Lectionary Commentaries for Easter 6C** at [sacredise.com](http://sacredise.com)

I wrote a paper on Lydia in seminary; should I read it now? 😊

Just know that Lydia was so taken by the message of Paul and his friends that she had her entire household baptized and then invited Paul and his friends to stay at her place and use her home. Not just for the long weekend; she offered her hospitality for an extended amount of time. Whatever they needed that she could provide was theirs.

She did this because, while listening, she was moved by the Spirit, and ended up founding a new church community in Philippi, bringing in her workers, her household, and all who responded to Paul's teachings. The community contained people who were the same and people who were different – all were included in the meals and conversations, as they are in every community of God.

The Spirit is still at work in the world. In the UCC we say that “God is still speaking - comma” – always opening new ways and understandings in our hearts and minds. God does not need or want the same old, same old, we've always done it that way.

God wants a community who is willing to have their eyes opened to more than they've seen before. That's what Jesus did in his conversations with the disciples.

Jesus says, “*Those who love me will keep my word, ... And the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you*”. **Rely on that!**

There is \*much\* work to be done in the world – read that invocation again for ideas, tape it to your bathroom mirror, and get involved with whatever calls to you. But, whatever you choose, \*remember\* to be the light that offers hope to the people in this hurting world. Light always overcomes darkness and people need to know that light is still shining.

These are the times that try our souls – and those of everyone around us. As followers of Jesus we must reach out in love to comfort, to reassure, and to build a vibrant, resilient community.

May it be so. Amen.