

## Good People Get into Good Trouble

### My sharing today comes in a month of Good Trouble.

The late John Lewis—longtime Civil Rights Activist and leader of faith-- left as his legacy the following charge: “Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic, Our struggle is not the struggles of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”

### My question for today is

- I. Why would a **spiritual community** want to change the name of its building?  
We look at three inroads this morning to this question.

First, the precedent of name changes from our early Judeo-Christian tradition.

Abram and Sarai, to Abraham and Sarah

Hoshea to Joshua

Eliakim's to Jehoiakim

Gideon to Jerub-Baal

Mattaniah to Zedekiah

Simon to Peter

Hebrew words have deep significance as the letters come together. A name conferred is a critical component of tribal and godly energy. We find in Scripture that names of people and places were often given with great intention, connecting letters to confer meaning. Name changes often marked a shift, a new expression of divine energy, from one state to a new unfolding of relationship.

Perhaps one of the best known examples we have is Jacob.

He falls asleep on a stone at a place called Luz and dreams of a ladder stretching between Heaven and Earth surrounded by angels. YHWH speaks and Jacob awakens to anoint the stone and names it El-Bethel, House of God.

This is the same location where later in Genesis, God changes Jacob's name to Israel (one who wrestles with God), preparing him to take on increased identity as he is told that “a nation and community of nations will come from you.” This is an example of a shift from a personal designation to a broad and communal understanding of a name.

In more recent years of the Christian tradition, we look to name-changing public witnesses. He who started his life as Michael King, later became Martin Luther and then the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

He who was known as Bob feeding the chickens became known as the boy from Troy and then Congressman John Robert Lewis.

Name changing can mean the enlargement of hope for a peoples. An original name is significant. So, too, a new name describes a significant stage of emergence. Many of you, beyond the paperwork required, have felt the shift in your own lives when you have changed or taken on a new name.

Each of these name changers uplifted people were born as God's beloved and so, too do they remain beloved as they live into a new designation.

In each case, it appears that the new designation becomes necessary in order for an entity to adopt and claim a next way of being, and continue a hope that stretches into tomorrow.

- Why would a **spiritual community** want to change the name of its building?

**Because names are important. They can honor what has been and point to the new places of God's calling.**

## II. Why would a **spiritual community** want to change the name of its building?

**In order to expand God's love.**

I first became aware that Oliver's Carriage House was name for a slaveholding family because of the archival work or our community's researchers.

As they had spent time looking at the history of the former plantation on which our church property sits, they discovered that Oliver is the name of one of the many slaveholding families that owned this property, including the stables. We know that our Carriage House was erected in 1811, before the Olivers' arrival. It was meant to be a grand dwelling for prized horses.

We know that a company was hired to set about the design, but we do not know if it was workers, indentured servants, or the slaves of the congregation who back-breakingly transported stones from nearby quarry to set them one upon another. Given the nature of the hard labor, we can be almost certain that slaves would have been among those later tending to horses, hitching carriages, and hauling hay. Some of those slaves would have called their owners by the name of Oliver. They would have steadily had to say that name to describe who owned them and their children, Master.

Question Engaged #2

Notice I ask the question: why would we as a **spiritual** community want to change the name of our building? I did not ask why we as a civic entity would go about this consideration. As a spiritual people, we engage the question out of a love for our neighbor. As Romans outlines today: "**Love does no wrong to a neighbor.**"

When the building was consecrated the Kittamaqundi Community occupied these grounds as a spiritual home. A fledgling church claimed it as holy ground. **Who owns the building now?**

We might procure a deed, peer over legal documents and establish our right to this land: Kittamaqundi Community, Inc. But we know that some legal documents like some laws themselves limit a higher truth for this land. We have said it ourselves in Jubilee.

Slave holders and different wealthy owners moved on from this barn. It was in a state of disrepair that the spiritual people of a newly minted house church moved out of the plantation house (literally)...and into the stable.<sup>1i</sup>

The Kittamaqundi Community no longer met at the big house, instead we humbled ourselves into making a home where the beasts of burden laid their weary heads. In the process, homes were mortgaged, and funds were scrimped together.

The building was not procured because it belonged to the Oliver family. It was gifted because it was believed that a spiritual people could co-create a beth-el, a house of God. And the community worked to make it so bit by bit with the sweat of its brows, and the stretch of its financial capacity through sacrificial giving.

### **Our Stewardship**

When it comes to our ongoing stewardship, this Carriage House has been entrusted in our care. Not according to the dollar's purchase, but according to the Spirit's consecration and continued formation.

We are stewards on a land that can never be truly ours and caretakers of a building that we will never possess. As Enabling Minister Jerry Goethe often emphasized, *we the people church are not the building.*

It has not been Oliver or the memory of his family that has captured our spiritual imagination. It has been the Carriage House itself, whose stones still speak to us of forbearance and love. Even now the wooden beams creek their recognition.

We are endeared to this Carriage House because it shelters us from the storm, it elevates us to the highest ideals of community as we sit in its lofty sunlit expanse. It is older than we are, made of boulders centuries in the making, a testament to hard labor and community ingenuity. Originally, it held horses tethered for long journeys for business and pleasure.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that in the original manuscript and recording of this sharing that it was referenced that the KC community paid \$1 for the Carriage House. In fact, the community paid around \$70,000 for the dilapidated Carriage House and it is believed that the southern plot of land now known as the Sacred Garden was later purchased for \$1. People gave sacrificially to cover the cost of the building and its renovations.

In our tenure, the Carriage House has prepared us to come with our weariness and wonder, our sorrows and our joys, and to go from this place again and again as the hands and feet of Christ. This is our Beloved Carriage House

### **Current Distancing**

In our time of distancing from this building, we long for the stones that still speak to us, and to sound the chimes tacked to a wooden pillar await or re-arrival. We wish to gaze up together at the rough tools unearthed and barbed together so beautifully by Jack Dunlavey at the hearth of our home.

These all speak of **spiritual** community. A community that uplifts love. A love that **“does no wrong to a neighbor.”** Even now we stay home out of healthful consideration of each other and the broader community.

With the discovered knowledge that Oliver was a slaveholder, we cannot go back to a time when we did not know this fact.

Nor does the urgency of the now in this country permit us blindness to the hard images and unjust laws that our black brothers and sisters in particular have long endured.

We might say that ours is not a community that sets out to do harm, but on the contrary, we seek to live out—as Paul reminds us—the **fulfillment of love**. We did not form from a denomination mired in racist history and constructs (like my own Methodist tradition), but we have in all of our human imperfections lived with our own racial realities.

As a largely white congregation, like each I have been apart of, we often look around and lament a lack of diversity. Many of you have worked in the civil rights movement. Many moved to Columbia in order with intention to live in a more integrated and affirming place. Many of you look out now and want to pursue anti-racist action.

Some of you have asked how we, as a spiritual community, can best meet this moment with all its invitation for good trouble. Where is a starting place for this stage of our lives. As if this were—the ripe time to do right.

We ask ourselves if the current name of Oliver has the potential to **harm our neighbor**. This is not indictment on who or where we have been, it is an invitation to look with new eyes at how what we call ourselves matters to everyone, those from within and outside our immediate community.

We would consider if continuing the use of possessive name of a slaveholder, with widening eyes of historical understanding, could limit rather than enlarge our aims at love.

A name change would not be an invalidation of the good ministry done here in our tenure. Indeed, it could serve as an invitation to take the next step into our lives together.

Why would a **spiritual community** want to change the name of its building?

**In order to expand God's love together** and listen for a name that emphasizes room for all God's beloved.

III. Why would a **spiritual community** want to change the name of its building?

Thirdly, **because we are a people of good trouble.**

If you are like me, you have often desired to be good. A good daughter, a good spouse, a good mother, a good pastor. And yes, a "good white person."

And so it is with holy trepidation that I recognize in the context of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s distinction of just and unjust laws my goodness laid bare. Every time I read his words addressed to the good white male clergy of Birmingham I shutter at the mention of the white moderate. This is not a shutter of disgust for such ancestors, it is the disturbing self-recognition.

For being a good moderate profits me much, and daring to think otherwise costs me much more. Sharing with you today in this way has its own trouble. In part because I know that deep affection and memories are deposited in a place, and by extension, its name. I have come to this house more recently than many of you.

I have come as a member of community, and also as a pastor who hears King's call for the ripeness for rightness.

We are in the midst of an informational process and are heading toward a discernment in which we will hear from each other in openness and love.

*My pastoral trouble is the call I hold to uplift the renaming stories of our scriptural tradition, to recall the oppressive history of our nation which has long brought harm to indigenous, black, and brown neighbors, and point us to leaders who challenge us to be our best.*

I name my love of the Carriage House as it stands as our home.

For as much as I want to be a good (often silent) person--as your enabling minister, I am to discern the way of Jesus, of Paul, of Martin, of John, and countless women: Lydia, Julian of Norwich, Dorothy Day, and Jacqui Lewis. I am to discern the way that KC has been living so faithfully and help us to lean into our possibility.

I have long wondered if I am able to wade through messiness in order to follow the long arc of justice—so wedded am I to my comfortability.

I look out and see you who have been attentive to the causes for justice, equity, and civil rights of the last sixty years. I see you have marched on Washington, walked in Columbia for black lives, and engaged in countless works of advocacy and outreach.

**Why am I a part of spiritual community? Because I want to get into good trouble together.**

**Conclusion.**

Why would a spiritual community want to change the name of its building?

Because there is precedent that name changes can honor what has been and invite a person or peoples to a next faithful step. Because a spiritual community endeavors to do no harm to a neighbor. Because a spiritual community necessarily engages in hard conversations leading to good trouble.

I want to point lastly to the reality that a name question is but a step.

Whether or not the name changes for our Carriage House or not, the lived reality of a peoples **relies upon the content of its character**: it ministry to naked, sick, and hungry. Its engagement with justice, its love of God and neighbor. And its evolving spiritual hunger and growth to co-create with the Spirit in the time and place we are called.

I believe that the time ahead will call forth something from us that we can only now little grasp. But we know its ability to capture our imagination and our hearts for a greater good beyond ourselves. I know that often times the work of transformation happens from the inside out. And we in this time, have already born the distance from our beloved barn and in our distance, perhaps we see even more clearly what there is to love about who we are and who we are called to be.

As we look out to the days, weeks and months to come with the ongoing rest of this troubling time beset with pandemic and racial legacies of inequity and violence, we may ask from the vantage point of this Carriage House: "What are good people to do?"  
Where do we go from here?