

MOUNTAIN RISE MESSAGE

“Situational Awareness”
November 13, 2016 Mtn. Rise
The Rev. Dr. Greg Osterberg



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Paul the apostle writes to a church he helped start in what is now Turkey.

Galatians 6:7-10 - Common English Bible (CEB)

7b A person will harvest what they plant. **8** Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. **9** Let’s not get tired of doing good, because in time we’ll have a harvest if we don’t give up. **10** So then, let’s work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.

Luke presents Jesus teaching his disciples while in the Jerusalem Temple.

Luke 21:5-19 - New Revised Standard (NRSV)

5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, Jesus said, **6** “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”

7 They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” **8** And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’[a] and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. **9** “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.”

10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; **11** there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven...

18 But not a hair of your head will perish. **19** By your endurance you will gain your souls.

The world’s winningest athletes seem to have a knack for “It.”

CIA agents spend years acquiring “It.”

Many parents, and teachers — the ones with “eyes in the back of their head” — they have mastered “It.”

“It,” is “*situational awareness.*”

It's an ability to scan one's surroundings, comprehend the meaning quickly assess what will likely happen next, then decide what to do. This whole process happens in a "twinkling of an eye!"

"Situational awareness" drove the heroics of Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger, who is the focus of the movie still in the Pittsford theater now.

[SLIDE: Poster, Sully]

How cool would it be to have Tom Hanks play you in a movie?!

[SLIDE: Poster, Sully HANKS & SULLY]

"Sully" was able to quickly assess his crisis, his whereabouts, his assets —then beautifully land a commercial airplane in the Hudson River. Sully's "situational awareness," cool head, experience, skill helped him read his *new situation* with failing engines, so he could abort his flight plan; then find an open space in New York City to crash land!

His "situational awareness" helped him avert a major disaster, *and* save 100's of lives!

No matter if you're aiming to land a jet, excel in a sport, *or* parent some active kids: "situational awareness" is critical! It helps us actually see what's going on, so we can figure out *what to do next*! It's essential to surviving and thriving in life.

Jesus had "situational awareness".

In fact, that's what he's giving his disciples in Luke 21, our reading. At this point in the narrative, Jesus is just days away from arrest and crucifixion. So now, his focus shifts to preparing his followers for the situation in which they'll be after he's physically left them.

Of course, Luke is *also* writing Jesus' message to followers who came later, who have never seen Jesus face-to-face, but whose lives are directed by his love, and by his call to live with faith and compassion.

By the time Luke wrote (late 1st Century, or later) scholars tell us Christians had experienced persecution:

- their "religion" was foreign to Romans,
- their practices mysterious,
- so "Middle Eastern" in origin,

Romans really didn't like them.

[SLIDE: PAINTING - *The Torches of Nero*]

In year 64, a great fire broke out in Rome, destroying homes and businesses, so was economically devastating! Emperor Nero was rumored to have *ordered* the fire himself. (We *still* hear that he played the fiddle as Rome burned!) So, in order to dispel the accusations, he accused and savagely punished the already-detested “Christians.”

According to Tacitus, a senator and a historian of the Empire, Nero used Christians as human torches. [depicted in painting] Christians were sporadically persecuted for another 250 years.

Jesus words are intended less as *predictive* than as a *comfort* — reminders that no matter the calamity, no matter the unjust, despotic “leader”...

God has a purpose for them *still*:

- to bear witness for God, and for good
- to hold onto faith, and core values
- to be a community of love for *all* people!

And, by living *this* way, no matter what the situation —

“By your endurance you will gain your souls,” Jesus says.

Well, Mountain Rise friends, now OUR situation is a world in turmoil, a situation that resonates with Luke’s description: wars, famines, plagues and persecution of “foreigners,” of “others.” This last week capped off a year of degenerating civility, an erosion of moral values, a perverting of truth, and of disrespect for human beings — especially the less powerful.

We, as people of faith need to know that we are here for a purpose. We need “situational awareness” because our world, our country, is a different place than we thought.

Luke wrote long ago, and now our leaders of the United Church of Christ write to us, in this new situation of turmoil. Let me share their Pastoral Letter, that they may help us get better “situational awareness” — along with some comfort and courage.

Their letter is titled:

"United in Christ's love, a just world for all."

[SLIDE: "United in Christ's love, a just world for all."]

“Dear United Church of Christ, we were built to heal (church) “bodies” broken and divided. This is our calling. Our core values of love, hospitality, and justice-for-all must be fully embraced in the days to come. It could well be that we were called into being for just such a time as this.

We, the Officers and Council of Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ, call upon the church to seek a pathway that envisions a *just world for all*. Those who *celebrate* this election must show a *humility* that honors the pain of those whose dreams were dashed by the outcome. Those who *grieve* must find a *courage and hope* found in a faith, not in earthly power, but in the redemptive love of our Risen Christ.

It is with this humility and faith that we can fulfill our mission: to build a *just world for all*.

We stand in the face of fear and hate to proclaim that "*love wins!*"

We rise up and respond to public derision of "*the other*" with a full embrace of and warm welcome for *all* God's beautiful children.

We confront the injustices of the powerful with a steady drumbeat of justice.

It seems appropriate to remember the words of the civil rights activist and songwriter James Weldon Johnson's hymn:

‘God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray....
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.’

We now must stand, “true to our God and true to our native land.”

Let what we do in this time help both America, and our denomination, become what each name aspires to:

A UNITED States of America, and a UNITED Church of Christ.

And may it be our love of all, our welcome to all, and our justice for all that unites us.”

Signed: “The United Church of Christ National Officers”

So, now Mountain Rise,
May the Spirit of God inspire our “situational awareness,” in this turbulent moment of The *21st Century* that *we* may emulate the faith & courage, followers of Christ have been called to live since The *Very1st Century*.

In the words of our reading from Galatians 6, (invoked by Secretary Clinton in her concession speech:)

“Let us not tire of doing good,
because in time we shall have a harvest if we do not give up.”

As Jesus promised, “By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

Perhaps friends, even the “soul” of our nation!

May God help us to make that so! Amen.



*“United in Christ’s love,
a just world for all.”*



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