

# **“The DNA of Call” by Peter Bankson**



**Trinity**

**July 17, 2022**

Our theme for this Pentecost season is “Wisdom is Calling.” The reflection question has been “Who are you listening to?” Good question! To which I might add... and how are you listening?

When I looked at the scriptures for this week, they felt really relevant to where we are as a community. I knew I'd offered the Word on them before and wanted to offer something different.

While I was wandering around in my head looking for a metaphor to help focus my thoughts, I heard something unexpected that woke me up to a new possibility. Sitting on the back porch with Marjory over a late supper after the Celebration Circle meeting last Wednesday, I heard the insistent call of a cicada! First one of the year! Right outside in the catalpa tree! Piercing and insistent. A cicada! Could that, somehow, be wisdom calling?

That screech in the night got me thinking about the metamorphosis it takes for a cicada to find its voice:

- Born from an egg in an open wound cut by its mother on the small branch of an oak tree;
- Dropped to the ground, where it dug itself in to feed and grow in the dark for years;
- Called by mysterious forces to climb back up the tree and find a place to crack open its protective shell ... and spread its wings ... and sound its piercing call;
- Then, within a matter of days, it does or doesn't mate and make the eggs of the next generation before it dies.

Throughout its life, each cicada has several forms, but it is the same individual. It has the same DNA, but its way of being changes from phase to phase, from egg to larva to high-flying adult. That metamorphosis may be much clearer in the life of insects, but I see it s a way of understanding deep changes in us humans as well.

Here at Seekers, we talk about the cycle of call and how it may change as we pass through different stages of our lives,

how God's call on each of us can lead to metanoia (a new understanding) and at some point to metamorphosis (a new incarnation). My sense is that even though our outward appearance may change, our DNA will remain the same. I believe that our DNA is carried in our values, which shape how we live as part of the Body of Christ working for peace and justice. I'll pick up this DNA image again in a few minutes, but first, another thought or two about metamorphosis.

The metamorphosis of a cicada is, at least for me, an amazing example of how the mysterious vision of the Creator of every thought and thing has packed a complex and transformational life into a being less than the size of my thumb!

Metamorphosis is the rapid change in form of an organism as part of its development after birth. Different sub-species of cicadas have different life cycles, some as short as a year, and others as long as 17years! That's a long time to spend in the dark, waiting to be called into the light!

Last year, the visit of Brood X 17-year cicadas coincided with the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Seekers Church growing here on Carroll Street. I'm not sure what it means for us to share that timing with Brood X cicadas, but there are elements of their life cycle that we might find descriptive.

But enough with the bugs. I'll get back to their life cycle later, but I need to turn to my reflections on where we are in OUR life cycle. The past two years have been pretty chaotic. I think we've been in a kind of Culture/Covid Chaos Cocoon, a time when we've pulled away from the wider world so that we can live through some kind of metamorphosis.

As I reflected on our theme and this week's scripture lessons, here's what I heard:

1. Like Amos, Wisdom seems to be calling us to cry out for peace and justice.

2. We may be in a time of metamorphosis where we will be changed.
3. We are each unique and stronger together when we listen to each other.

### **Wisdom seems to be calling us to cry out for peace and justice**

Amos heard God give him a message for the people of Israel. He was a herdsman and arborist, not a prophet, but the Holy One called him, and he responded. His charge to the rulers of his day sounds pretty appropriate for our chaotic time.

Three weeks ago here, Paul Holmes picked up on our Friday conversation with the local community through the racial justice vigil, a tradition that has grown since before Covid-19 caught our attention. He shared his deepening understanding of the painful strength of racism, conscious and unconscious, as an influence for injustice. Paul challenged us to help reclaim Christianity for Jesus. Is that Wisdom calling? Do we have ears to hear? Who are we listening to?

The group of Seekers that sustains our Friday Racial Justice Vigil is also meeting regularly to support different activities, including "Freedom Fridays," where those who come help write letters to encourage people to vote. They are also working with Dave Lloyd to plan a new tour spotlighting the local history of racist behavior. They are also thinking about a new page on our Seekers Church website explaining our commitment to "recognize the value of each individual and seek to heal any wounds of discrimination inflicted by our society and church." (The call of Seekers Church) The racial justice group is having an energetic conversation about how to be more creative and inclusive as we uncover, acknowledge, and seek justice for the different ways we have, as individuals and as a family of faith, contributed to the agonizingly slow journey toward racial justice. They are also working with Covenant Christian Community to nurture the long-standing conversations on race and diversity. This group is preparing to ask the

Stewards of Seekers Church for affirmation as one of our “ministry teams.”

One fresh understanding for me in this area came from an essay titled “The Civil War at 150 Years: Deep Wounds Yet to Heal,” by Joseph V. Montville, a former foreign service officer and professor at Carter School of Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. Here’s the piece that struck deep in me:

The evidence is strong that the wounds of history can only begin to heal when they are uncovered and exposed to contemporary generations which have the moral commitment and wisdom to acknowledge the hurts inflicted on others by their forbears. And to express remorse for what their people did in the past. And finally, to ask forgiveness of the victims and their descendants.

Montville, J.V. (2018). The Civil War at 150 Years: Deep Wounds Yet to Heal.

In: Rothbart, D. (eds) [Systemic Humiliation in America](#) pp 105–129

This feels like an invitation to me to keep working to see things differently, from the perspective of the “other,” the person who is different from me. It reminds me of a deep understanding from my distant past: “What you see depends on where you stand.”

It takes new insight to open our minds to new understanding ... to open our hearts to new compassion. The turbulence of these days is opening our eyes to new (and painful) reality. This reality is calling for new voices to cry out for peace and justice. If Wisdom is calling us to follow Jesus, we may be ready for some deeper change, to crawl out of the dark, wet earth, crack open our well-worn carapaces, spread our wings, and cry out into the darkness like that cicada last Wednesday, announcing that we’re here to help reclaim Christianity for Jesus!

Get ready for change!

## **We are in a time of metamorphosis where we may be changed**

The racial justice team isn't the only source of new ideas in Seekers. We are hearing different voices from within the community, inviting us to see things differently.

Last Sunday John Morris referred to "metanoia" as inner change and asked if we're ready. Good question. In Jesus' example, the Samaritan picked up a man he'd been taught to reject, cleaned his wounds, took him to a safe place and paid for his care. What might that look like here in Takoma DC, with national turmoil boiling out through the broken windows of federal buildings 6 miles down North Capitol Street? How would our understanding need to change for us to act like that Good Samaritan?

The week before John's reflections on metanoia, Brenda reflected on her 20 years of service as a member of our Servant Leadership Team, helping hold us together as we stepped away from the building where we were born as a family of faith and claimed our place here in this vibrant, inclusive community on the edge of our nation's capital. Her choice to stand aside from the SLT as her grandson Vander Sage joins the family is opening new opportunities for Brenda, for her family and for us at Seekers. Her choice, long-anticipated and elegantly timed, opens our ears to hear Wisdom calling to many of us in new ways.

There are a lot of other questions on the table:

1. We're having conversations about what kind of community support we need from our Servant Leadership Team.
2. In our Time & Space Mission Group the return of outside groups wanting to use our space to hold their community life is raising questions about what it means for us to claim a ministry of place right here, right now. The very positive response last Friday from Groove Camp, the

week-long music camp for youth, and the big wedding the week before are both refreshing reminders that we are part of the larger Takoma Park community, and our hospitality can be a positive contribution to community life.

3. Perhaps related to this, our Outreach Mission Group is planning a community conversation about new ways to reach out to the many new neighbors who will come to live in the hundreds of new apartments being built all around us.
4. And we recently had a Saturday morning community conversation about the values that describe and define us as a family of faith. We hope this will help us clarify what is important to us and shed fresh light on our DNA as a part of the Body of Christ.

Amos sees and confronts the greed of the wealthy in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. How does his prophetic word ring true in our time? Is this a call to metanoia? As we listen for wisdom at Seekers, could metanoia lead to metamorphosis? Are we hearing Wisdom calling us in some new direction?

**We are each unique and stronger together when we listen to each other**

Given all the painful pressures that have come upon us, it's really important that we support one another. Thank God we are able to do that in many ways.

One of our core values is to honor our individuality, our diversity. But this can be complicated, particularly when we disagree. If each of us is unique, why are we worried about being different? It seems to me that an awful lot of the anger and tension, at every level of community, from global to local, rests on criticizing the differences between us. This week's Gospel lesson from Luke, Chapter 10 offers a good example of how our differences can attract our fears and frustrations.

Poor Martha is sweating in the kitchen, trying to get a satisfying meal on the table for their important guest, Jesus, and the rest of the household. Meanwhile her sister Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, inviting him to go deeper in his teaching. Depending on where you stand on the matter of family (or civic) responsibilities, it's easy to criticize one or the other of them. But as I read this lesson in the light of our challenging times right now, I was reminded of the importance of diversity and the need for different parts of the Body to help the whole community along the way.

Martha seems to be modeling the importance of efficient hospitality, working through a long "TO DO" list in order to get a good meal on the table in time to welcome Jesus and whoever else came with him. Mary's choice, to pay attention to their guest, illustrates a different, more relational kind of hospitality.

Different cultures seem to hold up different values when considering action. Anglo (Roman) cultures have valued centralized organization and "efficiency," where other cultures value "community." In my limited experience, both of these are important elements in the life of a faith community on the Way with Jesus. An important part of our life together is building ways to live out our common values, supporting both the inner journey and the outer journey as the warp and weft of weaving community life. Both of them are part of our DNA, and many community activities embody both the inner and outer dimensions of community life.

On Friday there were eight of us at the racial justice vigil, holding up our signs and waving at those who passed by our place. But as we stood together and called for justice with peace, I heard threads of compassionate conversations among us. If we think about it, we can usually make time for BOTH the mission of our outer journey AND the compassion of our inner journey.



As we contemplate the possibility of morphing the structure of how we are together, I'm convinced that it will be vitally important for us to make room for both of these dimensions of community life, our outer journey or ministry as individuals and as a community, and our inner journey of prayer and reflection connecting us with the holy Wisdom that is calling us. We are each unique and stronger together when we can step beyond our prejudices and hear each other

Yesterday morning, as the weekly reflection on Inward/Outward arrived in my inbox, I heard another cicada calling out for deeper listening. Here's a part of the reflection from Kip Dooley a member of 8<sup>th</sup> Day Faith Community:

Too often, we allow our own internal conflicts and harmful cultural conditioning to determine how we hear Jesus' voice. If Jesus sounds harsh, dismissive, aloof, or cruel, then it's probably not Jesus talking, but the voice of our own inner critics, our trauma, or our supremacist culture.

When I let the silence deepen and the day soften, I hear him differently. Listening in this way, in the company of trusted friends, cannot give us the answers to all our questions, but it can give us a taste of that "one thing" we need to continue on our way with dignity, faith, hope and love.

-Kip O'Connell Dooley, 8th Day Faith Community, Inward/Outward, July 16, 2022

## **Closing**

As I reflect on our theme for this season in light of John's focus on metanoia and the image of the morphing cicada, I hear Wisdom calling us in several new ways, among them:

1. The ongoing work of Stewards on the emerging new guidelines for how we understand, and maintain, our Servant Leadership Team.
2. The community conversation clarifying Seekers' values, our DNA as a part of the body of Christ.

3. The exploration of how to reach out to new neighbors who will be moving soon into the hundreds of new housing units within half a mile of our sanctuary.
4. The preparation by the racial justice group to seek affirmation as a ministry team of Seekers Church.
5. That call by Paul Holmes to take a prophetic stance to help reclaim Christianity for Jesus.

Since Pentecost our worship theme question has been “What are we listening to? Given all the conversations under way, on Zoom and in person, we seem to be listening to each other and the community around us. It seems pretty clear to me that as we keep listening, we need to be open to new understandings, and even new structures – to metanoia AND even metamorphosis.

Maybe that’s a good place to end, with this final thought as our worship focus shifts from Pentecost to a new summer season: Wisdom is calling. Keep Listening!

Amen.