

Yesterday I got the privilege of being part of a Juneteenth celebration in Cedar Falls, Waterloo. And when I was first asked to be a part of it, I thought, why are you asking me? And the person organizing it said, well, we want you to come and talk about what it means to be marginalized and organize and gain strength and power through that. Now, I'm looking out and I know all of you are not looking at each other, but you're all trying to figure out how I represent marginalized people, right? I mean it's a Juneteenth celebration. Why would I be there?

There's a lot of steps that got us to that part. The celebration started with Pastor Abraham from Jubilee United Methodist Church in Waterloo, and he talked to us about Juneteenth. What it meant in 1865 to be a black man and be living in Texas. And he has this very booming voice. He's a very big presence, and so you listen to, you know, there was no pause. And then I'm standing right next to him, and they look at me, and I'm like, I'm not yet. The next person came up and talked about what it meant to be an Iowan in 1865 and to serve in the Army that went down to free everyone. And then it went to me a little later, and I'm sitting there, and I'm still wondering at this point why I am talking about marginalized power. Because, what does it mean?

Howard Thurman wrote that the disenhearted are the people who are just trying to live. They are the people that have no power because they're trying to live every day for survival. The people in power intentionally keep those people out of power. They keep the people who are just trying to survive to keep surviving. I didn't say what race they were. I didn't talk about any other thing other than its people trying to survive. That's why we're marginalized? All of us right now live in a world, where somebody else is making decisions on how we should live. Somebody else is making decisions on whether or not our schools have funding. Whether or not we have transportation to give people from Madrid to Boone to the hospital, or the doctor's visits. Somebody else is making decisions about what we can and can't read at our libraries. We don't look marginalized because we work very hard to make sure we're not. We work very hard in this community to make sure that we are feeding the children. We make sure in this community we're working very hard to have drinkable water. We work hard to make sure that our kids have access to everything they need, whether that's at the library, it's at school, it's in sports. We support everyone in this community much better than everywhere else we go.

After we got done at the meeting, we went to another celebration. We went over to the Waterloo side. I don't know if you know that much about Waterloo and Cedar Falls, but they hate each other. And I mean hate more than yes. Madrid and Woodward, worse than Madrid and Woodward. Like we were there and everybody that was at the first event were all Cedar Falls people. The second event was in Waterloo, and two people came with us over there. They're marginalizing themselves because they can't let one road. They let one road be a huge divider. They don't work together to take care of the kids. They don't work together to take care of the schools or anything. They let a line divide them. I thought it was interesting, because while we're there, it's a huge Juneteen celebration like I said. We're celebrating the people were allowed to be people, that people were allowed to be free, but they were embodying and trapping themselves in an event that didn't allow them to be free. And that's like today's reading.

The prophet Isaiah is talking about everything going on in the world at that time politically. People not allowing themselves to help one another. Their government, their leaders, both religious and political, were holding them together and holding people to remain and

marginalized situations. And Isaiah is telling them this is an Earthly problem. This is an Earthly opportunity. God did not intend for us to be like this. You can make the change. You can create a world where you don't have to be marginalized. You can create a world that you can help your neighbor. If you wait long enough God will show it himself in ways that you can't imagine. God will give you the strength to make the change. God will give you wings that will allow you to fly and be that change. Isaiah was brilliant. He lived in a time in a world that was completely and utterly painful to everyone. He lived in a community that people were suffering every day. He knew there wasn't enough food. He knew there wasn't always clean water. He knew that people were sick and suffering in ways that they didn't always let show. And he knew that his faith was enough to give him strength to help others. To give him strength so that somebody else could see him. And somebody else might think you know if he can do this. why can't I? If he can find guidance and faith and love in a world that it's all lost, maybe I can too.

When I was at this event yesterday, I talked about all of you. I talked about how we help this community. And the table I was sitting at, they're, like, well, that doesn't count for us. I asked them why not. I asked them what makes you different than the people in my church. You don't know any of them. They don't know you. Why wouldn't this work for you? And one lady said, well, my mom is in a nursing home in Kansas City. So, what happens in Madrid doesn't affect me. And I said, tell me about your nursing home. Tell me about your mom, and she does. And then another lady said, well, my mom is in a nursing home in Wakeon. And that's the exact same thing that my mom's going through. And somebody else at the table said, well, that's happening to my mom, and she's in Council Bluffs. And the more we talked, the more we realized we have more things in common than we have that are not. They were empowered that day. They were given the strength to come together and realize that just because they're strangers doesn't mean they're not neighbors. They were given the strength to realize that if they talk together and actually listen they are getting the wings to soar above the resentment, above the hate, above the pain and suffering. They're given the ability to do God's work. They're given the ability to see that there is a point that is a much better world for all of us. And I hope that carries them through the rest of this week, and that it carries all of us through for the rest of our days.

Let us pray.