

Campout
Japanese Internment
 ABC 7/18/21

As usual, we'll use something historical I read recently as a starting point. We'll begin with an easy question: What happened Dec 7, 1941? *Bombing of Pearl Harbor*. The next day president Roosevelt asked congress to declare war on Japan. 3 days later war was declared against Germany & Italy. On Feb 19, 1942, Roosevelt issued executive order 9066. What was it? *It authorized the evacuation of all persons deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centers further inland. Who were these persons deemed a threat to national security?* All those of Japanese descent in western AZ, all of CA, & west of the cascades in OR & WA. Around 110,000 Japanese-Americans (2/3rds of which were US citizens) were sent to internment camps in CA, AZ, UT, ID, WY, CO, & Arkansas. Roosevelt's Attorney General told him it would be a massive civil-rights violation & urged him not to do it. But public opinion won out. A famous newspaper columnists of that day wrote this:

Since the outbreak of the Japanese war there has been no important sabotage on the Pacific Coast.... this is not, as some have liked to think, a sign that there is nothing to be feared. It is a sign that the blow is well-organized & that it is held back until it can be struck with maximum effect (Walter Lippmann).

Don't you love his logic? Because there has been no sabotage by Japanese Americans it means it must be coming. General John DeWitt, head of the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command used the same logic saying, *The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing & confirming indication that such action will be taken.* Another journalist put it this way: *The Japanese in CA should be under armed guard to the last man & woman & to h*ll with habeas corpus (the rule of law under the constitution) until the danger is over (James Westbrook Pegler).* In other words, don't let these people have the due process of law. The FBI reported, *that every Japanese in the United States who can read & write is a member of the Japanese intelligence system.* Therefore, the decision was made to detain them. Everyone whose ancestry was even 1/16th Japanese (a single great-great-grandparent) was required to register for removal from the exclusion zone, including orphans & adopted children of Japanese descent. They weren't even

allowed to move out of the exclusion zone to avoid being imprisoned. A couple of quotes from those who were locked up:

Without any hearings, without due process of law..., without any charges filed against us, without any evidence of wrongdoing on our part, one hundred & ten thousand innocent people were kicked out of their homes, literally uprooted from where they have lived for the greater part of their lives, & herded like dangerous criminals into concentration camps with barb wire fencing & military police guarding it (Kiyoshi Okamoto).

When we got to Manzanar, it was getting dark & we were given numbers first. We went down to the mess hall, & I remember the first meal we were given in those tin plates & tin cups. It was canned wieners & canned spinach. It was all the food we had, & then after finishing that we were taken to our barracks.... The next morning, the first morning in Manzanar, when I woke up & saw what Manzanar looked like, I just cried. & then I saw the mountain, the high Sierra Mountain, just like my native country's mountain, & I just cried, that's all (Yuri Tateishi).

I recently read Daniel James Brown's book, *Facing the Mountain*, in which he chronicles the journey of 4 Japanese American families & their 2nd-generation sons who ended up in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team & were deployed to Italy, France, & Germany. The 4, as were the vast majority of those in the 442nd, were US citizens, American-born children of 1st-generation Japanese immigrants who themselves were ineligible for citizenship, although many fought for the US in WW1. They fought for their country while their parents were imprisoned. From the prologue of the book the author says:

For all their essential Americanness, the traumatic events of that December brought back into focus something they had always known: their place in American society remained tenuous. Millions of their countrymen regarded them with an unfettered animosity born of decades of ... anti-Asian rhetoric spewing forth from the press & from the mouths of politicians. Local ordinances regulated where they could & could not live. Labor unions routinely barred them from employment in many industries. Proprietors of businesses could, at will, ban them from entering their premises. Public facilities were sometimes closed to them. State laws prohibited their parents from owning real estate. In many states they were not free to marry across racial lines. Their national government prohibited their parents from becoming citizens....

For those young men there was no obvious path forward, no simple right way or wrong way to proceed with their lives. Some of them would launch campaigns of conscientious resistance to the deprivation of their constitutional rights. Others—thousands of them—would serve, & some would die, on the battlefields of Europe, striving to prove their loyalty to their country. Scores of their mothers would dissolve into tears as they saw grim-faced officers coming in past barbed-wire fencing bearing shattering news. But by the end of their lives almost all of them—whether they fought in courtrooms or in foxholes—would be counted American heroes....

It's the story of the first Americans since the Cherokee in 1838 to face wholesale forced removal from their homes, deprivation of their livelihoods, & mass incarceration.

But in the end it's not a story of victims. Rather, it's a story of victors, of people striving, resisting, rising up, standing on principle, laying down their lives, enduring, & prevailing. It celebrates some

young Americans who decided they had no choice but to do what their sense of honor & loyalty told them was right, to cultivate their best selves, to embrace the demands of conscience, to leave their homes & families & sally forth into the fray, to confront & to conquer the mountain of troubles that lay suddenly in their paths.

Eventually, Secretary of War Henry Stimson announced that Nisei (ni-say), those born in the US to parents who were immigrants from Japan, formerly classified as *aliens not acceptable to the armed forces*, would now be subject to the draft, even from within internment camps. Roosevelt activated the 442nd Regimental Combat Team nearly a year after the signing of EO9066, saying, *Americanism is not, & never was, a matter of race or ancestry.* & yet the 442nd was to be all Japanese with Caucasian officers. The Army called for 1,500 volunteers from Hawaii & 3,000 from the mainland. An overwhelming 10,000 men from Hawaii volunteered. The announcement was met with less enthusiasm on the mainland, where most draft-age men of Japanese ancestry & their families were held in internment camps. Hawaiian-born 2nd-generation Japanese Americans made up roughly 2/3s of the regiment, with the remaining from the mainland. The motto of the unit was *Go For Broke*, to put everything on the line. After training was completed, on April 22, 1944, the unit left Mississippi on their journey to Europe for their 1st combat assignment. They arrived in Italy in June 1944, where they began to fight the Germans. In Sept of 1944, the 442nd participated in the invasion of southern France, successfully liberating French cities from Nazi occupation. The unit went on to fight with the 92nd Infantry Division, a segregated African American unit, in driving German forces out of northern Italy. Eventually, some were involved in the freeing of Jews at Dachau.

The 442nd is the most decorated unit for its size & length of service in the history of the American military. Eventually, 21 Medals of Honor were awarded to men in the 442nd. 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, 560 Silver Stars, 4,000 Bronze Stars, & more than 4,000 Purple Hearts, among others. In 1962, Governor John Connally of Texas made the members of the 442nd honorary Texans in appreciation of their rescue of the *lost battalion* of the TX National Guard in 1944. April 5 is celebrated as national *Go For Broke Day*, in honor of the 442nd's 1st Medal of Honor recipient, pfc Sadao "Spud" Munemori, killed in action near Seravezza, Italy on April 5, 1945. HIS STORY

Munemori had volunteered for the Army one month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Along with all other Japanese American soldiers, he was soon demoted to 4-C class, removed from combat training & assigned to menial labor. While he was transferred to a series of army bases, his parents & siblings were confined at Manzanar. When Japanese American soldiers were allowed to reenter active service in March 1943, Munemori volunteered to be part of the all-*Nisei* 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He was the 1st to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor in the 442nd.

Here's what happened:

Seeing his squad leader go down, Munemori realized he was in charge of his unit. With his men in disarray, & with rounds whistling past him in the dark, he launched himself forward, rallying his men & leading them through the minefield, quickly closing to within 30 yards of several entrenched machine-gun nests. As they neared the German gunners, his men dove for cover in shallow shell craters, but Munemori charged directly at the Germans, hurling grenades, coming with 15 yards & taking out 2 of the nests before beginning to work his way back toward his men under heavy direct fire. He had nearly made it to a crater where 2 of his men ... were sheltering when an unexploded grenade bounced off his helmet & rolled toward the crater. Without hesitating, Munemori dove for the grenade, arched his upper body over it, & smothered it just as it exploded, killing him instantly but sparing the lives of his men.

We could connect all this to Scripture in a number of ways & talk about racism or giving your life for others or Jesus dying for us. But let's go another direction. The Sunday before the Americans of Japanese descent were taken to the camps, many Japanese pastors spoke to the situation they were facing. Rev Dr Hideo Hashimoto did just that. His sermon was titled, *The Babylonian Exile & the Love of God* using as his text Ps 137. On Sunday, 5/10/42 Hashimoto began his sermon, saying,

The order has been definitely issued that we are to be evacuated, beginning the coming Friday. This is the last Sunday of our life outside the barbed wire fences.

A myriad of mixed feelings overcomes us as we reflect upon the past – how we took freedom for granted; of the future – of the life in the concentration camps; children cramped & stunted; young people, demoralized; old people, bitter. & the present, a nightmare.

How are we going to "take it"? are we going to be bitter & resentful? Are we going to be cynical & indifferent? Or are we going to overcome the paralyzing & embittering experiences of these days & of even more critical days to come, & turn this evil to good?

Whenever we are confronted with the painfulness of the present, the immediacy of which overcomes us like a distorted out-of-focus close-up in a snapshot, it helps us to take a long look back to a period of human history when man had gone through similar experiences, unscathed, triumphant.

Compared with the harrowing experiences of the Jewish people following the defeat of Jerusalem... ours is but nothing.

The terror of that war, the bitterness of defeat, the resentment against being torn away from home, still somewhat stunned but unconsciously the rebellious feeling of a despondent captive in the midst of repulsive splendor of the conquering civilization – these are all reflected in the sorrowful poetry of the Lamentations & the 137th Psalm:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down & wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, & our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (1-4).

Later during the sermon, he refers to Is 42:1-4 which says,

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break & a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; & the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.

Pastor Hashimoto then said,

Years later, Jesus Christ fulfilled the prophecy of this great seer, who laid the very foundations of the belief in the redemptive love, central in the Christian faith.

Out of the depth of despair & suffering, the prophet saw the truth of Love that stoops to save the most undeserving sinner. He showed thus that even out of racial disaster & tragedy can come a great good; that out of the depth of despair one can peer into the depth of unfathomable Love of God.

The situation which confronts us as we meet together in this last Sunday service before evacuation is far from the horror & disaster of the people of Jerusalem. There is not the physical suffering nor the bitterness toward those who must carry out the order. We go as residents & citizens of a nation cooperating in the efforts for national defense. We have grave doubts as to the wisdom of this procedure & as to the motives of some of the groups that engineered this evacuation. Yet we have nothing but good will & the sense of loyalty to the people & the nation.

Yet some of the elements of the circumstances & the feeling of Israel are there. We are branded as enemy aliens. We are to be uprooted from HOME as we know & loved it. We must cast away the business & other endeavors for livelihood built after a generation of toil & sweat. We are to be carried away captive, exiles – destination unknown. The same longing for home, for creative participation in the nation in crisis, for freedom, above all, is there.

He continued,

Our evacuation must prove more redemptive than punitive. We have been shocked into the realization that we have fallen down upon the God-given task. We have come to realize that we have been sinful. We have been shocked into realizing that the world is not an easy-going, happy-go-lucky sort of picnic, but a just, righteous, & moral one, where man reaps what he sows.

Moreover, in the congested Centers where we are destined to stay, perhaps for the "duration", we shall be given an unexcelled opportunity for the practice of what we have been taught to believe. It was difficult in the world, where competition was the order of society to practice neighborliness & brotherhood. In the camps, cooperation will not only be highly desirable, it will be the absolute opportunity to prove that Christianity works... If it doesn't work in the Centers, it will not work anywhere. For that very reason, Christians are on trial. This is the testing of our faith.

It is not enough that we go half the way; we must go the whole way – to make friends, to be good neighbors ... to serve, & to sacrifice.

God is ever with us; but especially in our trials & tribulations. Like ... Isaiah, we turn from despair & find God, forever ready to stoop down to save us, giving us a new insight into the Heart of Hearts, the citadel of Love. The minute we realize our relation with the Eternal, the Creator, we are free. The army rules, bayonets, & barbed wire fences cannot hold us.

& then he concludes,

We are free – free to grow in faith, free to serve our fellow men, free to search the unfathomable depth of the Love of God, free to seek & fulfill our mission.¹

Let me wrap up with a letter written by a Japanese-American couple to their adult son & wife. The story goes: Yoshi & Karen pulled into his parents' driveway. *Do you think they will help us?* Karen asked. *Help us with what?* asked their kids, before rushing out of the van to see their grandparents. At the end of their weekly Saturday noodle lunch, the kids ran outside & the adults stayed at the table. Yoshi started to speak to his parents quietly. *Karen's company laid off a thousand people this week.* A hush fell over the table. *So far, she's still okay. But we just don't know. We're not here to ask for money. We're here to ask you for something more valuable than money.* The clock ticked loudly on the wall, counting the seconds of suspense. Yoshi finally spoke, *You lived through the Depression & the camps. We want to know how you survived.* Yoshi's parents looked nervously at each other. Those times weren't something they talked about. Digging up some money would be easier to unearth & share than those memories. Especially because their daughter-in-law wasn't Japanese. After a long pause, Grandmother Hana said, *Okay, but not today. We need to think, to talk, to get ready. We will write you a letter.* & so, a few weeks later, this promise was kept.²

Dear Yoshi & Karen,

Before we left for the camps, we had a prayer service at our church. We heard the story of Jesus saying goodbye to His disciples before He went to the cross. Jesus told the disciples to love one another, so others would know about Jesus. We prayed together, & then we boarded up our church, hoping it would stay safe.

*We remembered Jesus' words when we had to say goodbye. **Love one another.** Jesus said those words before He left this world. It was a terrifying time for the disciples. & now it was a terrifying time for us. The hardest part was that we were sent to different camps in Arizona.*

¹ <https://timseng.net/tag/japanese-american-christian-leader/>

² https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Make_It_Simple_Acting_Together_Sermon.pdf

When we arrived at the camps, it was hard to breathe. Everything familiar had changed in a day. We had to endure large annoyances & small annoyances. Hot weather, bitterly cold weather, dust, cramped quarters, sick people, bad food. The indignity of being the subjects of the nation's suspicions. It was hard, but after a while all the injustices just became normal.

*We wrote to each other every day. Even though we couldn't send all the letters, at least each day we could be faithful. Jesus' words stayed in our minds when we felt bitter & angry. **Love one another.** Just that. We remembered our church & how much our Christian family helped us.*

Jesus went away from the disciples. We went away, too. Everything changed.

Everything except God, who made us & continually loved us. Somehow the Spirit that Jesus promised came to us. It moved among us like the dust. We didn't die inside. Our baptismal water kept us from drying up in the desert. We prayed. It was easier when we tried to keep each other going. Jesus walked with us, comforted us, & showed us what sin looked like.

There were so many people to help. We tried to witness to Jesus by keeping our hopes alive. Many people were looking for good news & something to hold on to. We made a new community—we had to. We learned to work together, not just worry together. This kept all of our spirits up.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be a model for others. We felt God's spirit drawing us to faith, pulling us on, pushing us out to someone else. & we knew deep down that God's love was something totally opposite from the injustice inflicted on us.

How did we survive? Only God knows. When we finally saw each other again, all the tears came. They washed away the dust of the camps. But the residue remained. What remained was the compassion we learned. We still feel it when we hear of the injustices in God's kingdom.

*Our best advice to you in these times of change is the advice of Jesus. **Love one another.** That is the strongest tool for you & our beloved grandchildren, for your congregation, for God's world. Hold on to Jesus' words & practice them.*

*Jesus knew we needed to stay focused, so He gave us the gift of a commandment. **Love one another.** These words are a touchstone for your children—a comfort & a call.*

Don't worry so much—love so much. When everything is gone, love remains. & a new reality, no matter what it is, brings new chances for worship & witness to Christ's love, multiple chances to pour out God's love that lives in you.

*Maybe our advice will seem too simple for this modern world. But you asked & now we tell you. How did we survive those times? We survived by Jesus' words, **Love one another.***

Love,
Mom & Dad³

It's hard to imagine all these Japanese Americans went through. If it was us, how would we respond? But is today much different? Not really. While people aren't being put into camps due to race, we're divided racially, we're divided when it comes to masks & vaccines, we're divided

³ <https://stjamesgettysburg.wordpress.com/2011/10/02/love-one-another/>

politically, we're divided financially, & we can go on & on. & all of this happens even within the Christian community, the church. How must we respond to these divisions? With love. Jesus died on the cross in our place, for me. But He also died for those in the other camps. His command to us all is still, & I leave you with this:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:34-35).