

Joy Comes with the Morning

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Psalm 30
Acts 9: 1-6
John 20: 19-31

As most of you know, I serve on the Committee on Ministry for the Northern California Nevada Conference, United Church of Christ. Thank you, Todd Evans.

We meet monthly, and walk with and examine candidates for ordained ministry, a path that our own Janet Volkman is just beginning.

Part of the ministry of this church is to provide a welcoming pulpit for those candidates, a place to practice and hone their skills. Over the last couple of years we have been blessed with the presence of Rachel Knuth, Rebecca Anderson, Jeff Munnis, Valerie McEntee, Steve Foss. So, when I knew today was an open slot, I volunteered to find someone to fill it, one of our seminarians. I first asked Jeff Crews, who I still hope I can entice someday soon, but he's serving an internship in Orinda and couldn't find a substitute there. Then I asked Ayanna Moore, but she had a long-standing date at Glide Memorial in San Francisco. She also promises to come at another time.

So then I wondered what the lectionary readings were for today, and if any of them resonated with me. The Revised Common Lectionary is a three-year cycle of readings – Old Testament, New Testament, Psalm and Gospel – that are thought to be the core of Biblical wisdom for Christians. Every three years you can be sure to meet Zaccheus up in the tree, or, as in today's readings, Saul struck blind on the road to Damascus, and Doubting Thomas. I've been a member of this church since 1998 so I'm on my fourth cycle with these wonderful stories. It's like meeting old friends again every Sunday.

But I have found that each time we meet I hear something different, learn something new. I'm not the same person I was three years ago, or six years or nine years. All the things I've done in that time, all I've seen and heard, have changed me. I'm hearing with different ears, seeing with new eyes.

So the February night I looked up the readings for today I had just come home from a Committee on Ministry meeting. I was very emotional, very sad, because one of my colleagues had come that day, for the last time. She is dying of brain cancer.

Coincidentally, or maybe not, depending on your view of the Holy Spirit, I had spent some time the night before talking to my sister about the effect Barbara's death had on me.

So the thing that leaped out at me from today's readings was this:

The phrase in the Psalm we read earlier that says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." I wrote that down immediately and put it on my bulletin board.

My bulletin board is full of things. I've joked with Nancy that when I die, all she has to do is collect everything off my board and she'll have a ready-made eulogy.

But here's why I think those particular verses were thumb-tack worthy.

They embody what I believe about God's love for us. That it is constant, always present, always enduring, ever renewing. Our human lives will include pain, suffering, grief and weeping. I have certainly shed my share of tears and I'm sure you have too. I have gone to bed weeping.

But -- the morning comes. The sun shines. You begin again. If you think you're doing that alone, my friends, the footprints you see in the sand are when God is carrying you.

And -- the morning comes. The birds chirp. A kitty snuggles into my lap. The wisteria blooms. I re-learn, and re-joyce, that I have been given the gift of life.

Isn't that the story we've been immersed in for the last six weeks? Isn't that the central message of last Sunday? What is Resurrection except the chance to start again? To begin anew?

I don't know about you but I'm grateful to have a do-over. I have an abundance of sins of commission and omission, things I have done and not done, things I have said and not said. I am plenty in need of forgiveness and redemption.

But joy comes with the morning. Joy comes with the gift of a new day.

How many here would rather give a gift than receive one? I have this image of God smiling every morning, giving a gift to a billion souls. Think how joyous that might be!

And weeping may linger for the night. Is that ours? Is that God's? Yes. And yes.

I am sure everyone here this morning has had the experience of doing something -- cooking a special dinner, presenting a perfect gift, performing a wonderful service, only to see it completely unappreciated by the recipient. It's demoralizing.

It's depressing. It makes you angry with the one you were trying to shower with blessings.

How do you think God feels? Individually and collectively we have under-appreciated and ignored and abused the gifts with which we have been bestowed. Our record as stewards is not good.

But joy comes with the morning.

Joy comes with the chance to try again. Joy comes with the opportunity to let go of those things that make you weep in the night.

God comes with the chance to try again. God comes with the opportunity to let go of those things that make you weep in the night.

God comes with the morning.

Substitute any word you want in the first phrase, "Weeping may linger for the night."

Fear may linger for the night. Hate may linger for the night. Separation may linger for the night. Grief may linger for the night.

But the second phrase is the key, the eternal key, the ever-present key.

Joy comes with the morning.

Life comes with the morning.

God comes with the morning.

They are all the same.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.