



Christ United Methodist Church

Creating committed Christ-followers for the transformation of the world.

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

John 20: 1-18

Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay

April 16, 2017

Alive!

All of Friday night I had a dog trembling next to me in bed.

There was thunder and rain and lighting and Mickey Mantle Macaulay Wiggen is terrified by such things so he put his pit-bull/beagle self alongside his mother because being terrified is not to be borne alone.

In between thunder rumbles I found myself praying that the rain would cease by the time of our Celebration of Creation party that was to be held here on Saturday.

Saturday morning the rain continued.

So, Alisha and Katy and the fabulous volunteers gathered and the intrepid critter keepers decided that the zoo part of things – which included a baby cow, donkeys of many sizes, a bearded dragon and dogs, bunnies and alpacas – all those animals would need to be inside in the commons area.

Here. At your church.

So, they brought the animals in. The air in the commons got heavier and heavier with bodies and humidity and, well, the donkey did what creatures do when they need to get rid of things and one of our volunteers felt the impact of the donkey smell mingled with popcorn smell and she said –

Out! All the creatures must go out! Because she was worried that the aroma combo would spur some other, more human responses that would also add to the scent bouquet of the day.

So out the creatures went.

As I got to church, Katy told me that the Celebration of Creation petting zoo party was the worst best idea ever.

But as the creatures got reset, the sun broke through the clouds and hundreds of people came here to celebrate the goodness of spring and new life and hope and if they weren't already here the woman dressed as a chicken on the curbside hollering people in made sure that all of creation came out to celebrate all of creation.

It was the worst best idea ever.

The sun rose. The rain stopped. The terror of the night gave way to the joy of celebrating creation.

Another snippet from the faith lab of this church.

Last Sunday we had seventeen children in the first and second grade Sunday school room.

Seventeen!

Chaos was real and so too was the desire of the teachers to share the lesson of the day.

The lesson was a hard one, about the powerful and joyful entry of Jesus into the gates of Jerusalem followed by the heartbreak of being betrayed by friends, followed by the tragedy of Jesus being left to die on a cross.

As their good teachers were seeking to unpack that story, one of the students clearly was paying attention because she said:

I HATE this story!

The story of how it was Jesus lived in the midst of a people desperate to learn the ways of love and shared access to life's abundance and the story of how it was the love Jesus taught inspired such hope that crowds of people gathered to water the hope in their hearts and the story of how that kind of mass movement of hope terrified the authorities so they shut it down by hanging God's body on a cross:

That story is the worst best ever.

So, we feel the pain and the exhaustion when the disciples approach the tomb, don't we? After years of loving and following Jesus and after the worry of knowing that what he sought to teach and live was going to get him killed and knowing that some of them had denied Jesus and some had betrayed and all wondered how they could have stopped the violence, they approach the tomb.

And find it empty.

Too much! Absolutely too much for their grief-soaked hearts to take in. So, some run for help in understanding this added grief and Mary Magdalene stays weeping by the empty tomb.

She doesn't even have the body of her beloved Jesus to honor with her care.

It is too much.

When she is approached by the man, she takes to be a gardener, she is too grief fuddled to take in that he is the very love she seeks - Jesus.

Risen from the dead.

Alive forever more!

She wants to cling to him - we understand this so well, don't we - but he tells her with what I believe is the utmost gentleness that she has to love him enough to let go - to understand that he has work yet to do.

So, she does. She lets him go. And then she runs to tell the others about the amazing encounter she had with the living Christ.

Alive! Forever more alive!

A year ago, I preached on Easter with a grief numbed heart. My mother had died the week before.

I know that many of you - probably all of you - know the grief of experiencing the death of a loved one - a mother or father or dog or child or grandparent or friend.

Grief is full-body hard work. Grief takes us over and the things that bring it roaring into our souls are so varied and unpredictable.

I have been learning this past year what it is to be like Mickey - in the midst of a thunder storm, metaphorically speaking - without the reassuring warmth of my mother telling me that the world is a safe place and I will be just fine.

I feel tremblish without her.

In thinking about my own grief and sense of how will I live without my mother I have been keenly tuned in to the grief of the disciples on Easter morning.

I understand their confusion and stagger. What is life now?

Who are they without a touchable Jesus? Who am I without my touchable mother?

So, when I encountered recently the power of a song performed by one of my favorite groups: Sweet Honey in the Rock, I thought "Yes, that's it!". That's grief turned into Easter celebration.

The song - "Wanting Memories" - speaks of what it is to love and to let go and to mindfully choose to live the lessons the beloved has sought to teach. I could be singing this song to my mother. Mary Magdalene and the disciples and each one of us could be singing it to the risen Jesus:

The words go like this:

I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me,
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.

You used to rock me in the cradle of your arms,
You said you'd hold me till the pains of life were gone.
You said you'd comfort me in times like these and now I need you,
Now I need you, and you are gone.

Since you've gone and left me, there's been so little beauty,
But I know I saw it clearly through your eyes.

Now the world outside is such a cold and bitter place,
Here inside I have few things that will console.
And when I try to hear your voice above the storms of life,
Then I remember all the things that I was told...

I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me,
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.
I thought that you were gone, but now I know you're with me,
You are the voice that whispers all I need to hear.

I know a please a thank you and a smile will take me far,
I know that I am you and you are me and we are one,
I know that who I am is numbered in each grain of sand,
I know that I've been blessed again, and over again.

I am sitting here wanting memories to teach me,
To see the beauty in the world through my own eyes.

(Yasaye M. Barnwell)

The beauty of the world is the message my mother sought to teach me. When I live it, she lives.

And oh, the beauty of the world is the message of Jesus. When we live that message, Jesus lives in and through us.

The beauty of the world, seen with our own eyes. A world in which the teachings of Jesus are made flesh by the people of Jesus who allow his teaching to guide their lives forever more.

Following the Risen Jesus is choosing to allow memories to teach us and transform our hearts and lives.

Being people of Jesus is to believe that God will breathe life into the valley of dry-boned despair. Violence and fracture are not God's vision. God will lift us from the graves of despair.

The stone has been rolled away!

The power of love always rises.

And we will live and sound the Resurrection Song of loving the world and our God with all we have and loving all people in such a way that no child wants for food, safety, or home in this world where there is enough for all.

We want to see and love and work and stretch to create the beauty of the world with our own hearts.

From the worst kind of dry bones crucifixion despair, we rise with Jesus.

Turns out, that's the not the worst best idea ever. It's just plain the best.

Amen