

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY

Fourth Sunday of Easter - May 2, 2004

Theme for May: Everyday Spirituality

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Acts 9:36-43

For Our Reflection:

Woe is me, woe is us, my dearest:
we wanted only love, to love one another,
but among so many griefs it was fated
that only we two would be so hurt.

We wanted the you and the me for ourselves,
the you of a kiss, the me of a secret bread:
and that's how it was, infinitely simple,
till hatred came in through the window.

They hate, those who did not love
our love, nor any other love: those people,
wretched as chairs in an empty room -
till they were tangled in ashes,
till their ominous faces
faded in the fading twilight.

- Pablo Neruda, One Hundred Love Sonnets, LXII (p.133)

Everyday Spirituality: Marriage

As many of you know - and some of you are tired of hearing - I've been married three times. This fact alone gives me credentials to talk about MARRIAGE - not because I know so much - but because I've learned so much.

Joe and I married when we were very young - he was 34 and I was 27. He was in the teacher's union, I was in seminary - "church marries labor" was our motto. We knew A LOT about politics and theology - and coping with family dysfunction, emotional vortex and mental illness. But we knew NOTHING about how to create solutions in the midst of the chaos.

We knew that divorce was preferable to murder - and that's the course of action that we took. It took us 14 years to apologize to each other for our contributions to the drama - having finally learned some things from our second spouses.

Carl and I married 11 years after we met and two years after he stopped drinking. We learned together how to create solutions for numerous problems and how to make the most out of what we had - which wasn't always a full deck. After 20 years we parted ways, each of us on our own special blend of pharmaceuticals for brain chemistry disorders of the inherited kind, each of us wanting the best for the other and knowing it wasn't being together.

My third and last husband, barring any unforeseen multiple personalities between us, married me two years ago and continues to choose every day to STAY married to me. That was part of the agreement we made going in. We will have none of this "love you forever" crap. Marriage is a choice made again and again and never taken for granted.

By the time John and I married we had both learned some things about marriage that may contribute to the success of the endeavor. Here are a few of those things:

1. Marriage is not the union of a man and a woman.

Marriage is the union of two people, their immediate families, their extended families, their ancestors, their children (real and imagined, existing and future) - their co-workers, friends, neighbors, doctors, pets and household furnishings. One can pretend that marriage is an isolated relationship on a yacht in a foreign sea. But the ghosts and legacies of all those other relationships will find you. We all come with an ARMADA - inside and out. So its better to go into marriage knowing that - and learning to celebrate - or at least accept - that fact.

2. Marriage is not the union of a man and a woman.

Marriage is the encounter between AT LEAST two value systems, two cultures, multiple past lives; AT LEAST two sets of expectations steeped in the primordial soup of images and alternatives-to-reality offered incessantly by modern American media; AT LEAST two sets of often conflicting needs, two theologies, two voting records, two dating histories, two dietary preferences, and two ways of processing and offering information. You don't need two genders to get VARIETY, DEPTH or MYSTERY in a marriage.

3. Marriage is not the union of a man and a woman.

Marriage is two separate beings or things entering into a close relationship. "Let not the marriage of true minds admit impediments." The marriage of music and drama can be found in opera. A sailor "marries" two ropes by interweaving their strands.

There are priests and nuns married to Christ, ministers married to the church. Our text this morning was about a Disciple, Tabitha / Dorcas / Gazelle - who was essentially married to Christ. She was dedicated to good works and charity - using her talents as a seamstress to assist "real widows" - women without family and destitute. "Real widows" are described as those who had not only lost their husbands, but children and other relatives as well. Even in scripture - the state of marriage went beyond "a man and a woman" - to the village that surrounds us and is our very life.

There are people married to their careers and gangsters married to the Mob. Many scientists are married to a theory and philosophers married to an idea or world view. I find that I am essentially married to a particular "unnamed" political party, deeply wedded to Zoloft - and committed on a daily basis to the belief that there is a "truth" or "meaning" to life for every person and it is not our business to tell others what their "truth" is or force them to buy into ours.

I believe that when I married Joe I actually married an IDEA of him that I projected quite proficiently - on which I later impaled myself. When I married Carl, I imagined myself performing a rescue operation - creating a union of necessity rather than choice.

In marrying John and his family and extended armada - a commitment I did not take lightly - I believe I chose (and continue to choose) to be partners with him in a whole range of life tasks and experiences. And it is within this partnership with John that I have discovered that:

4. Marriage is not the union of a man and a woman.

Marriage is a series of encounters with the DIVINE with and through another person. . When I am with John I see more Beauty in the world - partly because I'm seeing things differently - partly because we point out the beauty that we see to each other - increasing the sheer volume of beauty that we behold.

. Embodiment is much less an irritation and more a joy since John has been around. Playfulness, worship, passion and affection are all elements of our sexual life - something new for me and a gift to us both.

. Gratitude is a theme in our relationship - which we express verbally and physically - to each other, to our local and global village, to the One who made All of This Possible.

. We laugh a lot. And we cry. We share a sense of humor and a sensitivity to the pain of others that makes it easy for me to feel what John is feeling and vice versa. There is a deep sense of BEING KNOWN by John that leads me to feel that I have COME HOME when I am with him. Through John I experience BEING KNOWN by and COMING HOME to God.

I am well aware that the future of our marriage includes all-nighters and dirty diapers, disagreements and frustrations, the deaths of parents and all kinds of physical ailments that come with aging and sheer chance. It will include war and injustice and poverty and ugliness and grief.

I am also aware that the future of our marriage includes many birthday parties and bedtime stories, political victories and opportunities to give things away. It will include beauty and gratitude, worship and passion, laughter and healing and moments of peace.

Marriage is not the union of a man and a woman.

Marriage is finding Love and Life and God in the presence and actions of another person. It is not a ceremony and a promise of forever. It is a daily choice to come home to someone, be known by someone, offer beauty and meaning to someone, seek what is best for each other – and for the armada or village or family or whatever we want to call this matrix of life that we are an irreplaceable part of.

Marriage is a Human Right and a Human Condition.

As with any Human Condition, God is present in Marriage - blessing, healing, encouraging, shaping and hoping for the best for all involved. May God's blessing be recognized and celebrated in your marriage - past, present, future - whatever and whomever that marriage is with. And may we continue to learn about the meaning of life from the partners we choose and the God who made them.

Bulletin

WE GATHER FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

Music for Gathering

Welcome and Perspective on the Day

Musical Preparation for Worship - A Time for Centering

+ Call to Worship (unison)

My heart was a wilderness, I heard your voice;
my grief divided me, you held me close;
bitterness consumed me, you overflowed with trust;
I longed to be with you, you let me stay.

+ Opening Hymn How Can We Name a Love CSB # 84

+ Opening Prayer (unison)

Like the sudden rain upon the grass and like the sunlight my God is come to me;
as the footfall of a child who was lost, as the rhythm of an unremembered song.
Your coming is like freedom to the prisoner, like the return of those long captive.
You are the movements of the dance I had forgotten, you are the face of satisfied desire.
My soul is stirred for you, my beloved, I cannot contain my heart;
for you have seen my longing, and your eyes are dark with love.
Your love is stronger than death, your passion more relentless than the grave.
You will but speak the word, and I shall be healed;
though your touch is the touch of a stranger, yet is your voice my home.

+ Our Common Prayer (unison)

Creator God who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our debts As we
forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil, For Thine is the
kingdom and the power And the glory forever. Amen.

Time for Silent Reflection

One: My soul waits in silence.

All: God is my rock and my fortress. I will be at peace.

Silent Reflection

The Assurance of Good News (unison)

God's love is stronger than death;

God's passion is more relentless than the grave.

Sung Response "Hallelujah. God be praised!" (CSB #5 Refrain)

WE TEACH, REFLECT AND PROCLAIM

The Just Peace Reflection was introduced to
our worship service by our Just Peace Committee.

It is a weekly reminder of the need for social
justice in order to create a peaceful world.

Just Peace Reflection

Conversation with Our Children

Reading from the Christian Scriptures Acts 9:36-43

Sermon Everyday Spirituality: Marriage

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION

Intercessions, Celebrations and Encouragements

Call to Prayer Be still and know that I am God Hymnal # 743

Time for Silence

Our Joys and Concerns and an Offering of Prayer

Sung Response In Solitude Hymnal #521 vv. 1 & 2

We Offer Our Gifts So That Our Lives May Be Our Prayer

Offertory

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

You took my extravagance and asked for passion;
you took my self-absorption and created insight;
you saw my need to give and called forth charity;
you accepted charity and made me long for justice.

+ Sending Hymn The Gift of Love CSB # 38

+ Commissioning (unison)

May the God who dances in creation, who embraces us with human love, who shakes our lives like thunder, bless us and drive us out with power to fill the world with her justice. Amen

+ Sung Response (we gather in some semblance of a circle)

Hymnal # 236

Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja,

Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halleluja, halleluja.

+ Postlude

WORSHIP NOTES

Call to Worship is by Janet Morley, All Desires Known p.80

Opening Prayer is by Janet Morley, Ibid. p.102

(based on John 20:1-18, Song of Songs 5:2-8)

Prayer of Dedication is by Janet Morley, Ibid. p.78

Commissioning is by Janet Morley, Ibid. p.88