

Always...

Delivered at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church & Neighborhood House, NYC
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Sermon Notes

Back in 2000, as I began to study for ministry, I did my first unit of Clinical Pastoral Education – CPE – at Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, NY. The hospital is a 100 bed trauma one center and quaternary care hospital, providing specialized trauma care and organ transplants.

Chaplaincy is a very interesting specialized care ministry. The training is even more interesting. As an intern, they basically give you an ID a beeper an assignment and rounds schedule and off you go.

During my first weekend on call, I got beeped-in sometime in the early morning. A young man had taken his kayak over an 80' waterfall. He was flown into the center by Stat Flight helicopters and was in the pretty bad shape. His mother had called the pastoral care department at the hospital and asked for a chaplain.

I spent most of the night into the early morning standing by, keeping the family company, offering what words I could, praying with them when asked, and praying to God quietly inside to take over. I had little clue what to do – except to stay, until it was time to go, which wasn't always easy to tell either

I left the ER sometime after dawn, returning late the next day. As I was walking in, I saw the young man's mother. He was doing better – and she couldn't thank me enough for all I had done and said. On and on she went.

I asked myself, "What had I done?" I just stayed with them...and later in discussion with my supervisor and the rest of the intern cohort I learned about the power of presence and prayer and of staying with people through their pain.

The young man in the accident eventually would recover with the help of surgery and intensive rehabilitative efforts. I went on thinking about prayer and presence often – as I still do today/

Just as for Oriah and her friend Catherine, it was the presence they shared, before, during, and after the time of fire, that opened something beyond – between them – something that comes from *other*, the indefinable Spirit that surrounds us, gives us life and opens pathways – to all we are and are called to do beyond what we know. It's one of the ways in which I know God.

My experience is that when I am in the company of others who open themselves in this way, take the risk - even just a bit, that *things* really start happening. The

world starts to fall into place – and things that are out of alignment become obvious.

This place beyond is like the Super Highway of the Internet, the cloud that is accessible from many points at once. Where seekers of God, justice, healing somehow come together: the place of many rooms, enough for all, of tables with seats for all, and love and courage enough to spread around the entire world. Actually, it's already there – we're just tapping in to it.

To get a glimpse of what I ineptly describe, image what would happen if all the misinformation, lies, fears, marginalization, exclusion, and subsequent violence that follows such things were eliminated from the hearts and actions of humankind. What would it be like? How would the world look? What would we do; talk about; be?

Maybe it so hard to image what “dancing together” or being warmed by the same fire or “heaven on earth” might be like because in our daily lives in the midst of all the oppression marginalization and violence - that we sadly dismiss the possibility of its eradication in our life times, let alone try to envision what it would be like?

But it happens. Never quickly enough, but it does...

After 30 years of oppression – in just a few short weeks ago the people of Egypt put presence and prayer and perseverance together to an end unimaginable days ago.

What is it that makes it time? What is it that somehow goes beyond the two gathered to millions? Something gets out from in us, something that had been held back to finally is unleashed and dreams and the unimaginable become the reality.

There are here, today, those who know this vision and the spirit that moves it from one to another, touching us into a new state of being and believing

Those who move with others and call out a wrong, relentlessly – committed to change and justice, even at the potential cost of great personal sacrifice.

There are those here who stand with others, breaking the myths and the bigotry of “definitions of love” with their public and open expression of love that leaves gender boundaries where they always should have been – in the dust.

There are those here whose commitment to one another over years of covenant have created something so new, so profound that likely they are unaware of how many people walk in their light, gain strength from their courage, and continue to believe, as Catherine said, “There is no place as beautiful as this...” [Max & Harriet]

The moments of truth, of being who we are and trusting in God, however you know God, that you'll be fine...those times of placing everything on the table to be one with what you believe – that to me is the story of all the scriptures and gospels. It is the story Jesus had to tell and lived and died and rose into. And he learned it from others who never forgot.

It is worth it. It's worth all of it to live in the teachings of Jesus or others you may follow who exhort us to live a life free of resentments as part of our commitment to the broader vision of Spirit and possibility.

It's worth it to cross the street to talk with those who might be against us, to witness to them that we are not to be feared or shunned, loving them as we do, and if that doesn't work – to move on, as my friend Sandy says, to shake the dust from your sandals, leaving the rest to the Spirit. Loving them nonetheless.

And it is important: as Mark tells us this morning - to say what we mean, to be clear in all things, but especially in the face of injustice and marginalization.

It is from Janie and her life and conviction that people who are Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender should only be seen as the magnificent creation of a wild and rambunctious radically loving God who created them that this church is changing. More she has been pastor and spiritual guide to numerous gay folk like me and others who are LGBT and navigating the turbulence between who we are, church, and our civil community.

From Janie I learned about clarity, honesty, directness, presence, and love in the practice of advocacy and transparency. Be who we are. Say what we mean. "For this counsel is embedded deep in our traditions" – our origin, our creation.

In this gathering this morning are guests: Janie, June, Keith, and Andrei, Harriet, and Max and the regulars of Jan Hus and the long procession of saints who preceded us that have changed this world and continue to bring it closer to the possible that is less and less unimaginable as the revolution of the new thing God is doing in this world unfolds.

I've learned a different question along the way than the one I asked in trying to understand the gratitude of the kayacker's mom. Instead of asking "What have I done?" – It's "God what would you have us do..."

But I learned something else.

When God asks you to dance, "Say, Yes."

And when God asks you to love, "Say, yes"

And then trust in the God to whom you said yes.

From there, yes, Catherine, this world is one very beautiful place.

Always.