

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
July 3, 2011

Sermon Notes: “Seeing Through; Unforced Rhythm of Grace”
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Seven or eight years ago, I was in training at Westchester Medical Center as a chaplain intern. It was before my ordination, while I was still in seminary and continuing to work as a full-time special ed teacher at Ossining High School.

It was a late evening. I was on call when I got a request from the nurse’s station in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit or NICU. A parent who was unable to get to the center that evening had asked for someone to visit her daughter and say a prayer for her. The child was in NICU and, like all the other newborns there, in an incubator. This child was born days before after being carried for only 22 weeks.

This was my first pastoral visit to the NICU, and I was unsure what to expect. As I gowned and covered, I asked the nurse to direct me to the child in what seemed like a room right out of a science fiction movie: filled with glass-domed small pod-like enclosures, connected to an array of electronics and monitors and breathing devices. The drone of air filtration systems was everywhere, punctuated by the beat of audible readouts on the equipment – all in a steady rhythm, so steady that any variation immediately produced a nurse from what seemed to be out of nowhere.

As I approached the incubated infant I realized that I had never seen a human being this small. I stood; captivated. She was less than 10” long and lighter than 12 ounces in weight. Her hand was smaller than the print on my thumb. Every feature was there.

As I put my palm on the incubator, preparing to pray, it was magnetic; I found myself suddenly aware of being connected to the universe, beginning to end, before birth, after life, in this segment from days old of the infant to more than fifty years of my own – no difference between the two. There completeness of being and freedom in that moment has not been felt since, in quite that way.

God: before, after, during – and I could effortlessly slide from one end of the universe to the next for I was part of it all. I had seen through the veil and saw my life in front of me and how it fit into the greater design – and not understanding any of it – funny, I didn’t need to.

I did not pray over that little girl that day.
We prayed together, as one –
embraced in the glittering and palpable presence of God, Universe...
more.

It was cosmic.

There are times, in different ways, when we see through everything else as if it weren't even there.

Ahas!

Moments of clarity.

Visions.

It comes in various ways: through everything to a deep and abiding presence of who we are,
who we are in relation to one another,
and who we are in our combined relationships to God.

It is not quantifiable, containable, or able to be possessed or packaged. It is before and beyond anything we have spoken, created, or produced. And it surpasses all we have forgotten or will ever know.

It's humbling and I believe it is what is everywhere

I believe it to be the Abiding Presence:

all that is in the universe here now in this moment –

or as Jesus called it: the Kingdom of God...and it is at hand.

“Shout and Cheer! Raise the Roof! Your king is coming on a Donkey! No more wars. Peace to all nations, freedom of prisoners (the oppressed), abundance, and no more weapons but sister and brotherhood in celebration.” So says the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah might also have said: “We are all children on the universe and the God who created all things, has brought us here in more than we see.

It seems those in Zechariah's time sometimes forget, too; they needed to be reminded, as well. I am sure they wondered why they forgot, so often, as we do – that they had nothing to fear in such a relationship to God, just as we have nothing to fear in such a relationship.

Even Jesus showed frustration at the denseness of so many around him: “How can I account for this generation...spoiled, whining; calling John crazy and me a lush.

You can hear him in this morning's gospel:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”

That day I put my hand on the incubator – there were no material possessions that came into play, no status – other than being authorized to be there, no exchange of goods or services, no worry, fear, international headlines....

It was a moment of the unforced rhythm of God's grace – as is this time with you. I hope you find such grace in your life and share them with others – for it is already there.

I pray with you that we all remember that of which we are a part and the Light of God that envelopes and is our very essence.

Today, in this act of breaking bread together and the meal we share remembering these words of Jesus, we enter into what is already here – but in an intentional and conscious way. Seize the moment; see through all that is in the way

And, welcome the unforced rhythm of grace!

Amen.