

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
August 28, 2011

Stormy Weather
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Sermon Notes

For the first time in memory, several churches in New York closed for today's services. They had good reason to do so, with the present storm and the good sense in encouraging people to stay indoors and not move into the hurricane and its potential risk.

In the same way, many other churches are open. Worship will be adjusted in some, as with ours and the absence of our musicians, stopped in their tracks by the shut-down of mass transit – filled in ably by Annie!

But we are here for those who cross the street or wander in to dry off or have a bite to eat at the end of our worship.

And, it seems we have made it through the worst of Irene.

But whether on this Sunday folks stay home or take the soggy and windy path to the church, whether at home or here – we are still together and in the presence of God. There is no special doorway or fee one needs to enter or pay to be with God. In fact there is little we have to do except to remember that God is always with us – even in the midst of the greatest of storms.

That's it. That's all we need to do. Just remember that God is with us. Here, home, in the rain, dry, being evacuated from hospitals, or even the too many who will find transition through the effects and accidents caused by nature's ways in a storm we call Irene.

That's it, huh. Well, not so easy to do.

The hard parts: The loss of life, injury, and damage.

We all strive to hold on to the "higher self" that Matthew refers to in this morning's gospel. He quotes Jesus in somewhat poetic ways, which suggests a literary summary of a broader discussion or series of discussions, but nonetheless the message is clear:

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Lose their life: or in today's terms, maybe something more like "First things first." We are children of God, in the many ways we know God, and we are all on the transitory road, the transversal crossing space and time to the welcoming that awaits us beyond all we can imagine.

Still, it's really hard to get through some of the things we face without falling into blind denial, which is no tribute to a God of our understanding or own resilience.

And it's hard to keep this all in mind and heart.

It's just hard.

And faith, prayer, communities of faith and prayer, meditation, spiritual actions of all sorts – remind us that we are more than whatever it is we may be facing. That reminder for me – comes best in community.

There is a courage inside each of us that comes out of the sheer burst of love that created the universe and each of us in it. That "lightning" that brightens even the darkest night, the flash that gives us all we need to see – is profound and cosmic. It is in each of

us. Present in varying degrees of consciousness. After all, it is not earthly in the sense of accomplishments or possessions, which capture much of our attention so often.

So it can easily fall from our daily thoughts of sustenance, inspiration, and humility that reflect the great light that God has placed in each of us.

Still, this is a light – lightning that is powerful enough to bore through even the densest of our defenses or denial.

And the “boring through” process always works better in the company and community one another.

Truth is, if I had never known others who had embraced the great spirit within, spoke of it, practiced it [however that is done], I never would have known it. I really do not believe that for me such things, such growth toward God, heaven, wholeness... would I ever have found in my own company, alone.

Even so. Even seeking this presence and protection, even in the midst of such endeavors I still have stumbled into the pitfalls, pratfalls, temptations, and disappointments in my own behavior and responses.

No one ever told me that was part of the human condition, the journey, until much later. I hate to tell you how long I held on to the lesson I got early in life, from somewhere, somehow that I needed to be perfect, with a soul “white as snow” as they nuns called it.

That was and continues to be impossible for me.

The lack of understanding that I didn't need to be perfect to enter into God's presence, in fact the total opposite was true – but that early belief was a terrible burden, one that totally ignored the human condition, except in punishing terms of sinfulness unless one was somehow able to elevate oneself – through sainthood, ignorance, or denial; separating oneself from the reality and spirituality of the world into which we were born; a world into which we were born to be a part of with the gifts God gave us to bring to it. Not as some singular performance stage for the dogmatic critics to submit their reviews.

And sometimes those gifts took a while to emerge. Sometimes we needed to go through some stuff, still do, to move fully into the consciousness of the presence of God in our lives. And, sometimes people have called us on our stuff: just as Jesus did here with Peter. “Get the behind me Satan” is a strong reprimand, but no stronger than “That's it! Either you're with me or you need to move on” or something of that sort.

Peter was still caught up in this stuff about Jesus being able to just bring down the power of the heavens, on with the revolution, let's give these Romans what they deserve and get into power so that heaven on earth can start now and we can help all those oppressed, and, and, and...

And, he cared about Jesus. He didn't like it when Jesus said he was taking his light and his courage, staying on the path, and entering into a place and situation where his life was in danger, where he very well might be executed, crucified, and when that happened that he would rise again and be with them always...

No, Peter didn't want to hear it. We don't like to hear it, even in reflection upon events nearly 2000 years ago. And we certainly don't like to hear it when someone we love and care about seems determined, even in the face of the greatest of dangers, to have the courage to go forward into conditions too difficult to consider.

Now, there are many examples of bravery in the name of God and what one believes. And not all of them, not most of them, have anything to do with martyrdom. One crucifixion is enough for me.

And, not every courageous person dies in a violent way. God requires no such thing. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, died in his own bed.

No. The most courageous thing, the thing that transcends any act of willingness to enter into physical or other threats of danger – is the act of believing in God, finding God in every situation – even when it takes time.

That, I think, is what Jesus' teachings and commandments and rebukes, when called for, are all about: "Have ye no faith?" "O ye of little faith."

In today's words, "C'mon. I though you believed. Believe. Really, believe. Trust me. You can believe."

So as Jesus leads the disciples on their unfolding journey and the beginnings of our own in many ways, we continue on the path to find God.

We help one another to find God in the greatest and smallest of things. And then the challenge is for us do our best to act like people who have found God, in whatever that means.

On a day like this when the helpfulness of New Yorkers rises in the midst of a storm, let's take a lesson and help each other even without crises

Included in that to spread the news, the Good News that without denying the difficulty of the moment or moments – we believe the promise and presence of the risen Jesus, the Grace of God, and the fresh winds of the Holy Spirit that are always, really, here.

Reminding us that we, and our loved ones...have nothing to worry about and everything to look forward to.

That, to me, is the most courageous of all acts. Believing in such a way that we will be led, knowing that no matter what we need to do or wherever we need to be – we believe we will get through.

Believe because it is true.

Courage.

Amen.