

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House  
Christmas Day 2011

Sermon Notes: *Into Our Care*

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I would like to ask you to take a look at the picture on the front of the bulletin for a moment or two. It took on a different meaning to me in preparing Christmas Eve and Christmas Day's worship. Our two services are a bit different, and last night one of the influences for me is someone named Kathryn HawkerSelf, self-described as a

A forty-something pastor pondering the meaning of life with kids that turned into adolescents when she wasn't looking...

And just to make life interesting, I'm a graduate of Calvin College and United Seminary (Twin Cities) serving the UCC church nearest Eden Seminary.

I detest broccoli and sound-bytes and hope to be wise by the time I turn 60 (which is getting freakishly close!). I love writing, toddlers, sudoku, and pretty things.

Well, I have recently turned 60 and *wise* is still elusive. Which is why I turn to others beyond my own thoughts, and to God beyond all of our ability to know God.

I think that if, in fact, we – or anyone – knew everything there was to know about God and God's mystery, well we would have a quite damaged God, indeed. Imagine a God we could fully know in this form. Considering how limited we are, it would mean a God that was also limited.

Still, even without fully knowing all the mytery and wonder about God, in most ways we still fundamentally know right thing to do – in terms of peace, love, hope, and joy: but we have the hardest time getting it going in ways we all probably hope for.

Paul, the evangelist, might have been talking for us all as he was referring to himself and the time he will meet his maker, when he said:

Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

Paul brings to mind a recent prayer I once knew well and have, of late, rediscovered. It's called Patient Trust and it is written by the Jesuit theologian Teilhard de Chardin. The prayer states, in part,

Above all, trust in the slow work of God  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

Still, being on the way to “knowing everything completely” as Paul states or de Chardin “on the way to something new” – does not mean that the path is easy. Does not mean that there are unexplainable conditions through which we travel. What they and others call us to is the hope and hopefulness of such full and complete times when the one who sent Jesus meets and greets us.

What that also means is that all those who have gone before us, those we remember especially around the holidays, have had their reunion with God and await us when our time brings us home. I think today of my brother whose birthday is today and who was killed when he was 18, more than 40 years ago; and I think of him greeting my Dad who left this earthly dimension in early October. And I am certain in ways I cannot understand that they with all others, are, as my friends from 12 step programs say: *happy, joyous, and free*.

And this, in our Christian tradition, has to do with a most amazing turn of events a reversal of form, in a way. This is where Kathryn HawkerSelf comes in. In our Call to Worship prayer last evening, we used one of Kathryn's creations. In part it read:

We ask [if you will come into this world we have messed up] not because we are guilt-ridden  
or want to be, but because the fullness our lives longs for

and depends upon us being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us, when you came, wearing no more than diapers, and trusting human hands to hold their Maker. That caught my attention. The idea that God placed Jesus the Christ into our hands to care for, to learn from, to know and to love – so that we might come to believe better in all the things we hope for, starting with him in whatever the diapers of the times were.

It is the way with every child when they enter this world, totally dependent upon others. It says something about the way in which God depends upon us; it confirms a trust God has with us that God make clear before in the time of the covenant with Moses. In other words, God does not believe we can fail, even when we make terrible blunders; blunders which perhaps will diminish with time as we come more and more to realize that we are trusted by God and with such trust we have enormous power to change the world for the better, which is another way to say reflect better the Love of God that placed the Child Jesus in our hands in the first place.

Even when we did Jesus such wrong, neither Jesus nor God nor Spirit abandoned us. That is the Love that we recall in its most exceptional presentation tonight and in these days. It is the picture on the front of the bulleting that shows us, through Mary and Joseph and all the world and the cosmos compressed about – shows us as being given the charge to care for Jesus then and now, in knowing who we are as the result of God's trust and Love for us.

In closing, let me end with something that is true, I think. The world has never been right. There would have been no need for intervention of God through Jesus or in the prophets and witnesses of God in other traditions – if the world had been just fine. There is no going back to what was to find a better place. We are here, born into this night for the same reason that Jesus was: to bring hope and love, promise and justice; heart and breath in ways that reflect the trust God has always had in us and the power we have with God in our lives to make this world “a new kindom” on earth...recognizing always that we are incomplete until that time, again, when we stand in the presence of God. It is not just the birth of Jesus we celebrate tonight, it the rebirth of each one of us as those who care for God in this

world. Care...for others...for God; the way God has trusted us to care for God's son named Jesus.

We have much to do, and in this service of scriptures, readings, silence, light, and darkness, let's enter this space, this word as the real crèche we have been given and for which we and our gifts have been called.