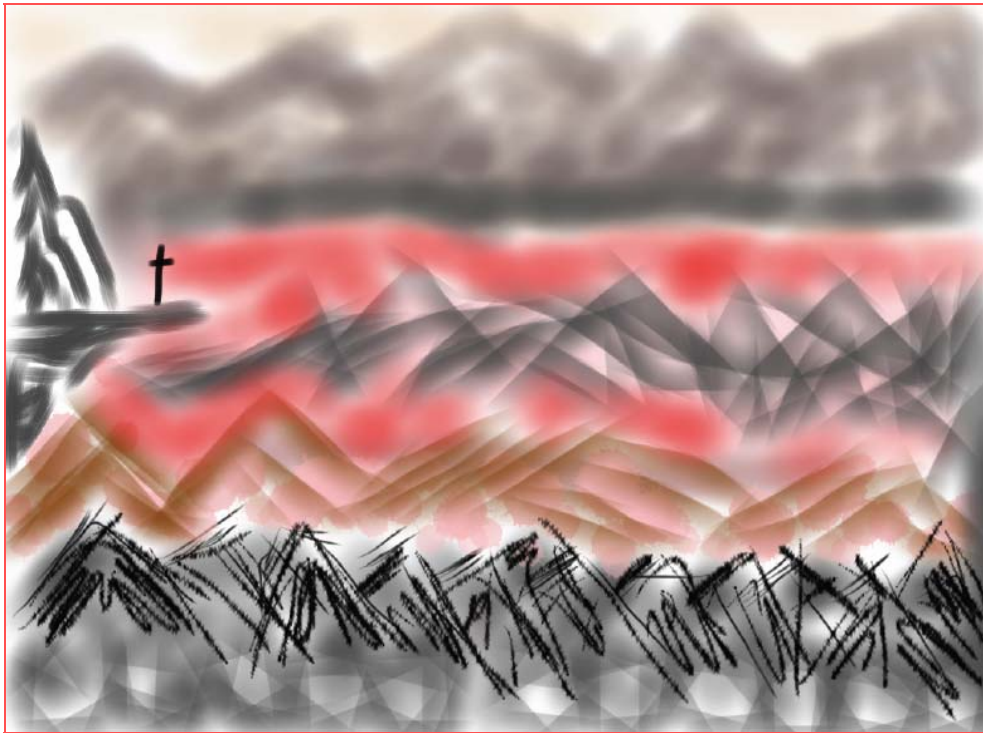


Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
February 5, 2012

“From the Wood of the Cross”
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Readings
Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39



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A while back, I began the practice of meditation. Usually, I sit quietly in the morning and find a word or thought that I repeat to get centered and then let it go from there. I usually set a timer for ten or fifteen minutes, just in case I fall asleep!

On my days off, I don't set an alarm and allow myself to remain thoughtful and quiet for as long as the Spirit moves me. Sometimes the meditation can last quite a while.

One morning last week, I was a bit fitful. It took some time to settle in. At one point, I began to meditate on the word “healing.” It is a critical theme in so many ways – in our own personal lives, community, church, and beyond and often in my heart. Within just a few seconds, an image began to form in my mind. I was able to stay with it and what emerged was something very much like the picture on the front of the bulletin that I drew in an attempt to capture it.

To tell the truth, neither the vision or picture didn't much look like "healing" to me. There were no people, no fields of colorful flowers, bright blue skies, or anything of the sort. Instead, it was somber but strangely not sad. But I couldn't get it.

So, I wrote to my friend San in California. She has a knack for seeing into and beyond such things. I sketched the image out on my tablet and sent it to her having no idea what she would see. When she responded, it was amazing how I could clearly see what she saying in that "heart-place."

Part of what she said was:

"imagine flying to the site of the cross with no jagged journey and dismantling the wood for a small house to welcome fellow travelers....

[travelers] who perhaps did not know they could fly over all those cliffs and valleys....

you will teach them...

we are not here to suffer, but many have [suffered] at their own or others hands,

but it was not in Creation's plan...

to learn that all is well is one thing...

to have the faith it is true is another...

to welcome unbelievers [and] ragged faith to the cross another....

BUT....

to have a house of faith built from the wood of the cross and all the scars and such,

[...] having transformed [...] suffering to GRACE????

Now that is a life well lived"

Really made me think about what the cross is to us as Christians. And, for those who might not be of the Christian faith but honor Jesus as a rabbi, prophet, or spiritual leader – the cross, for them, too can have meaning.

If we think of Jesus and all that hung with him on the cross on that day of his execution and if we were **somehow** able to create a welcoming home from it – all the suffering of the world would surely be healed by entering its space.

All the suffering of the world would be transformed by embracing the teachings of the one who was crucified because of

God's love for him,
his love for God,
and "their" love for others.

Any home built of such things would have to be a powerful healing place.

And, I believe we live in such a place of home built by this grace, it's just that we just don't always remember it.

We get caught up in fear, worry, disappointment – forgetting as other friends of mine remind me – “that we have nothing to worry about” if we realize just how present God and Soul is in our lives. I sometimes think that I worry about not having something to worry about. When there is nothing to be concerned over, instead of just enjoying it – I go out looking for trouble. It's taken time, but I am getting better at just letting it go.

Ah, letting go...

This morning's first hymn, *Spirit Divine, Attend Our Prayers* written by Andrew Reed in 1787 invites the Spirit to reveal our emptiness and woe; let go of the veils – not to be overwhelmed but to see how powerless emptiness and woe are against the grace of God.

In so many ways, the fear of looking intentionally at what it is that has us spinning is more frightening and painful than the actual “things” themselves. We humans can be so fearful, at times; but we also have the potential for great faith and courage.

As my friend San suggested, sometimes forget what we know deeply in our hearts and souls – that we can fly over all those “cliffs and valleys” making a house and a home everywhere we go out of the cross that broke through the veil once and for all. It's real...

Yet, the reality of God's presence is a contradiction in itself. God is beyond real, if you think about it. So, even the language that we use limits and confines our thinking and turns us back like a wall lined with barbed wire when we get as far as we can go. Yet, there is no wall – if we are willing to go to let the winds flow from a place where *meaning*, that is our ability to make sense of God – is not a requirement, but an faith is; if even an unbelieving or ragged faith.

I know that may sound strange. It's just the words...

Simply, the presence of God turns everything around far beyond what we understand or have the capacity to understand, God's best explanation to us of who God is for our limited ability to grasp such a thing was to simply say, "I Am" when Moses pushed God to name Godself. I wonder if God chuckled at such a silly question or premise that humans thought God had a name.

It's humbling to acknowledge such things...

And, it is hard to be vulnerable to such great unknowns. It is no surprise that many hold so fast and tightly to literal interpretations of the Bible to avoid the submission of oneself to the Great Unknown, perhaps as good a name for God as any other. It may be hard to grasp and even considered heretical by some, but I believe that God is even beyond God's inspired word. We need words. God – well God doesn't need anything in any way we really understand.

Isaiah conveys his frustration with those around him who keep missing just how "far beyond" God is:

Have you not been paying attention?
Have you not been listening?
Haven't you heard these stories all your life?
Don't you understand the foundation of all things?
God sits high above the round ball of earth.
The people look like mere ants.
God stretches out the skies like a canvas—
yes, like a tent canvas to live under.

Later, he tells us that God doesn't lay back, doesn't come and go. "God lasts!" he says with emphasis.

God. Lasts. What a Beautiful God. Everlasting God.

Time and again the prophets and stories of the First Testament repeat this message.

Haven't we been paying attention?

We have such a hard time learning. Now, more than ten years ago, when Matthew Sheppard was killed, I thought finally people would come to understand the senseless bullying and torment and violence that people who were gay experienced day in and day out. I thought, how could anyone not be moved by the compassion of this tragic event. And still the violence continues. And this is just one example.

Weren't we all paying attention?

It seems now and then we are not so good at this.

I shouldn't be too hard on others though, knowing how dense I can be at times, how anxious and worried; how judgmental...

I forget. I get all excited and forget. Caught up in things. Feverish, even.

In the many ways in which I take comfort in the New Testament, one of them is realizing that even the disciples didn't always get it, weren't always paying attention even with Jesus right there.

In Matthew this morning, they all arrive at the home of Simon and Andrew, where Simon's mother-in-law is ill. Read between the lines, they were all excited and upset. They told Jesus and the visitors at once all about her, her being sick and feverish...

So simply, so calmly the text reveals the healing grace of Jesus. "He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

Our fever has been lifted and we have been called to carry the Good News to others in all the ways we know that "God lasts." We have been saved – from ourselves and our thinking and limitations – once we allow ourselves to be lifted up and the fever taken away and our service to others continued.

This table that we will share today is the symbol, the image of God in this room and world through the reflection of Jesus and his life among us. This is the hand of God – as good as it gets – in the one bread and one body, we though many.

The house of faith that transforms suffering to grace, a life that takes the wood of the cross and builds a welcoming for all; truly is a life worth the journey to get there. And it begins anew at this table made of that same wood...