

Preacher, Rev. Karen Moore

09/10/06

“Your One Wild and Precious Life”

In my personal spiritual journey, I’ve begun to pay attention to the question, “To what do I feel drawn? To what do I feel creatively invited?” These days I feel drawn to the kind of prayer we practiced today – extended prayerful silence. Thank you for practicing with me.

The readings for today’s Call to Worship remind us that many faith traditions teach about the truth and need for the sacred, unconditional love that Christians celebrate through Christ. God of the universe really is Love. Yet, in challenging times it is tempting to lose the simple perspective that God is God. And, that God is Love. September in the U.S.A. has become a season of remembrance, of grief, of anger, blame, denial, death, and survival. Love seems remote – sometimes even irrelevant.

Tomorrow marks the fifth anniversary of terrorist attacks on the U.S.A. It marks the beginning of our current military involvement in the Middle East. Some are weary of hearing about it. Some are so changed by it that special services continue to be needed to remember and to honor the lives lost. Many are furious at the terrorists, the government, the war, etc.,etc.,etc. The news is full of ‘divided country’ images – of us vs. them/ Dems vs. Reps/ ‘warmongers’ vs. the unpatriotic/ right vs. wrong/ holy vs. infidel.

Last week was the first anniversary of the devastation unleashed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast. The atrocity of mostly minority poor, elderly, and sick, who were abandoned on rooftops and corralled at a convention center with no support or resources seems to be unending as so many still wait for help.

Most of us here have experienced some kind of loss. Many here have dealt with difficult losses this year. Every day of every month of every year marks some kind of tragic loss or change in someone’s life. Suffering and sadness are part of the human condition. Tragedy touches all – rich, poor, healthy, sick, motivated, lazy, privileged, disenfranchised.

In our most painful days and our weakest moments, we struggle to understand how we ended up in the sand when we thought we were on solid rock. We hesitate to be hopeful for fear of disappointment. The low days don’t make sense. Our energy is often depleted. And, gratitude is rarely our first response to painful life-changing events.

In their book, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, Dennis, Sheila, and Matthew Linn present a spiritual practice called ‘Examen’. They tell the story of children in the WWII. Even the children who were saved and taken to refugee camps couldn’t sleep at night for fear of what might happen. Someone thought to give each child a piece of bread to sleep with. That way they were reminded that they had been fed that day and that there would be food tomorrow. The Linns suggest that we can find comfort and direction in our spiritual lives by reviewing each day and asking the two questions we used today in our practice of prayer. “What am I most grateful

for?” and “What am I least grateful for?” The reflection on these two questions and sharing them allow gratitude, peace, and clarity to emerge in the midst of chaos and uncertainty. Recently, I’ve needed that type of sacred reassurance – to be able to hold what gives me life – to know that I will have spiritual bread in the morning.

In preparing this sermon I was reminded of a sacred safe place in my childhood. When I was a little girl in Hong Kong, our family summer vacations were on Laan Tau Island. We hiked up the mountain and stayed at the camp at the top in one of the rustic cabins owned by the mission. Laan Tau was beautiful – far from the crazy, hectic city of over 6 million people. We left home at 4am to catch 3 different ferries out to the island. [Today the main Hong Kong International airport is on Laan Tau Island. A huge bridge connects it to the rest of Hong Kong!] Outside of our cabin #18, I always loved to sit on the huge granite boulders that were perched on the side of the mountain. Off to my right was Kowloon peninsula and Hong Kong island. Back toward my left was mainland China. It was like I could literally see my corner of the world and how I fit into it. I felt close to God sitting on those rocks. I felt very safe on the solid boulders. I also felt a little daring to be sitting on the edge of the world like that. Today I feel a bit like the little girl firmly grounded on her rock of silent prayer and a bit daring (and vulnerable) to share it with you. Now, as the adult woman, I feel drawn to this prayerful silence. A question I hope to leave with you today is, “What draws you?” Not what are you supposed to do, ought to do, have to do... But, What draws you?

On my journey my little girl theology informed how I responded to grief and loss and the chaos in life. When I sat on those rocks I believed that if I was good enough, ‘right’ enough, Jesus would protect me and life would always provide the safe, solid rock foundation. Even before hurricane pictures, I was bothered by the vivid image of the foolish man’s house sinking in the sand. I always planned to be like the wise man. Of course, in time, I found out that ‘being good’ wasn’t the solid foundation I expected it to be. Guilt and shame forcefully steered me on an unhealthy course of doing and doing and doing more – never actually feeling or believing I could ever do enough. I found out that bad things happened to good people and good things happened to bad people. I had big questions about exactly what was the solid foundation? It’s not just about my lovely, romanticized rocks high on the mountain. It’s about the love and presence of God. It’s about being on firm foundation, alert to my part of the world and my place in it.

Where is my place, our place when the floods, winds, and wars come, what happens to us? How have we responded? In Psalm 46, there is a command, “Be Still!” It sounds like a parent talking to a restless, anxious child. How do we grieve and get up and get going? All around us are example of houses / lives built in the sand. How do we put everything into perspective? To what are we drawn?

How do we recognize the firm foundation and build upon the Rock? How do we fortify our faith as high as the Twin Towers knowing the vulnerability that exists? How do we recover or reach out to the overwhelmed storm victims who unlike us have lost everything? Where is the hope? What are the tools? How do we make a difference?

When I rely on my little girl theology all of the tragedy in the world today becomes overwhelming. I/ we can never ‘do’ enough to make it all better. I’ve listened to many sides of

the blame game about 9/11 and the Iraq war. I've given money to help victims of the Tsunami and the hurricanes. I've sent cards and emails to offer condolences and remembrance to people I know in New Orleans. I've tried to listen and not judge. Still, the question keeps luring me, "How can you help, Karen, to really make a difference? How will there ever be true peace, healing, and recovery in our world? How can I be proactive instead of reactive? How can I promote love instead of hate and resentment and blame?"

My little girl theology is alive and well - trying to "do" good? The actions I've taken are fine, but I've often stayed quite separate and in power as I've offered to help. An example of my newer spiritual practice has come in the form a different kind of questions, "Who do I know, share myself with, who is different from me? Who do I know well and care for who has very different ideas, beliefs, politics, experiences from me?" This question points to relationships, building on solid rock. I can't change the world. I can change me and maybe relate to one other person. The Linns work addresses this relational dynamic in their retreats throughout the world and in different cultures. The two questions they ask invite the sharing of stories – a common bond. The stories and relationships build a path to peace, hope, and people connecting to people.

WBC is made up of the most gracious and generous people who reach out and care for many – people of great hospitality. We are part of the rich 50 year history of this church. We are also people who've been injured, who've injured others. People who seek refuge in the storm; who sometimes panic and need to hear God call out, "Be Still, and know that I am God!"

When we look back upon the tragedies in our lives, what has been our response? Did we get stuck in the Past, in what we wish 'coulda, shoulda, woulda' been? Did we nurse anger, blame, and resentment to become isolated or insulated? Did we struggle to move through the oppressive muck? Did we seek a new normal – a healthy way to stabilize – a different way, but a healthy way? Do we die in the past and become the living dead? Do we reframe the past to inform the present, enrich our lives and move toward community and creative relationships?

My general understanding of healthy grieving includes doing no harm to yourself, to others, or to property. Almost anything else is okay if it helps you process through your grief. Public responses to the national and global tragedies show a lot of not-so-healthy grieving. Lots of blaming and isolationism. LOTS of "I'm right and you're wrong". The creative response may come on the personal level. The firm foundation may be right within each of us. Recovery and reconciliation may be possible as people connect and share their stories.

How do we cherish and remember the Past? "For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful?"

How do we survive and honor the struggles of the Present? "For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful?"

How do we live and celebrate hopeful possibilities in the Future? What is that we need to hold that gives us life, that reassures us at night that there will be bread and nourishment in the morning?

The voices in the Call to Worship called us to love. Before we can be healthy and creative toward others, we must become still enough to know that God is God. We must trust God and be centered in God's love. To what are you drawn? What gives you sustenance? Let's not waste time, energy and worries on lesser things. Your life matters. You make a difference. Cherish your one wild and precious life. You have healthy and creative choices. Even in your grief and loss, you have power. Allow yourself to build on the solid foundation of love and God's presence.

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”