

Service of Hope and Healing

The Light In the Tunnel

February 15, 2009 – 11:00 AM

Prelude and Procession

Choral Introit “Come and Find the Quiet Center”

Chancel Choir

This is from *The Faith We Sing* (tune *Beach Spring*)

Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed;
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Welcome

(and brief explanation of service – Holy Communion, anointing with oil, prayer counselors)

Brian

*Call to Worship

Please stand for the call to worship.

Steve Hughes

*With all our heart, we take refuge in God most high,
who created all things,
the merciful Father, Source of all goodness.*

*With all our heart, we take refuge in Christ,
the Redeemer from sin,
who restores our true nature,
the perfect and mysterious Word.*

*With all our heart, we take refuge in the One who embraces the universe,
who at all times and in all places responds to our needs,
the pure and tranquil Holy Spirit.*

*Hymn: My Faith Looks Up to Thee

#452, vs. 1,2,3

*Opening Responsive Prayer:

Lay Speaker (Pam)

Leader: O God, how can we be joyful when there is so much pain and suffering in your world?

People: How can we sing songs?

Leader: There is war and unrest among the children of Abraham – our brothers and sisters are dying because of unwillingness to be more like you.

People: How can we rejoice?

Leader: We have lost our jobs, our savings, our financial security, and we worry about the future for ourselves and our children.

People: How can we be happy?

Leader: We and our loved ones struggle with serious illness, and we see them continue to suffer. Why, O God?

People: The pain is too great; the tears are too bitter.

Leader: We cannot go on without you, O God. Even when we do not feel your presence, give us the strength to seek you. In you, we find purpose in life and death.

All: You alone, O God, are our sure foundation.

Let us pray: O God, in mystery and silence you are present in our lives, bringing new life out of destruction, hope out of despair, growth out of difficulty. We thank you that you do not leave us alone but labor to make us whole. Help us to perceive your unseen hand in the unfolding of our lives, and to attend to the gentle guidance of your Spirit, that we may know the joy you give your people. Amen.

You may be seated.

First Reading Matthew 10:29-31

Charlotte Bentley

What prayer can we say when an unimaginable disaster comes to our community, wreaking havoc, claiming lives? What prayer would make a difference to those who remain?

Hear these words from Matthew 10:29-31

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

First Reflection - Where Is God in Disasters?

Jim

This time, they did not all walk away. This time they all passed away. Why? We do not know with certainty the physical cause of the crash of Continental Flight 3407, but we share the pain of instantly losing so many who are so close – even if they are strangers. With hundreds of deaths in the wildfires of Australia and devastating tornadoes in the mid-west, we are acutely aware that the forces of nature can challenge our very existence with no warning. Where, then, is the hope? The hope is in God. Lives and property can be destroyed, but God is with us. He never misses a thing, and will be there through all the tragedies and difficulties of life.

Life is fragile. Bad things do happen. But, God knows and cares for *you*. God knows how many hairs you had left on your head *after* you combed your hair this morning. God counts the sparrows. When disaster abandons its heinous child upon our doorstep, we are comforted by the knowledge that the same God who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground knows and loves each of those who died.

Special Music: His Eye is on the Sparrow

Cheryl Lassiter, soloist

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Psalm 55:22

Lisa Haman

How do we bear the anger, sadness, grief, the absolute raw emotion when we – or a loved one – receive the news of a disease encroaching upon our bodies?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.(NRSV)

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you;.(NRSV)

Second Reflection – Where Is God in Our Loss?

Jackie Short

We live in a world filled with suffering, disease, trials and hardship. Most of us when we receive devastating news or lose something that truly matters to us, will grieve. We may cry and yell at how unfair it is. We may shut down emotionally to try and protect ourselves from further loss. We seem to weave in and out of the feelings of disbelief, anger, sadness, and emptiness.

But even in the midst of intense pain and loss, we must *never* forget that there is *always* hope in the God of mercy and comfort. As we heard in the Scripture reading, God's word *promises* that we can find rest and strength in the hope that comes *from him*. Not the hope we find in ourselves or in others. Not the hope in money or jobs or possessions or worldly status. The *true* hope that will carry us through the painful losses of life and heals our souls comes *only* from God. He is the author, originator, and source of all mercy and comfort. Only He can truly empathize and see our unique, individual circumstance. He is our refuge. And like David and Paul - our hope and our salvation are in him – today and always.

Right now, in whatever situation you are facing at this moment: God wants to come into your brokenness - your wilderness and be the God of all comfort to you. Seek God now and invite Him into the *situation* where you need comforting. He will not only come along side you, to comfort you, but He will move other people to come along side and walk with you.

So let us not be afraid of our suffering and losses, but cast our burdens on the Lord - the one who came *through* Calvary, rose and ascended for *you*. Turn to Him for the lessons intended and for the comfort that comes with the trials. And after *He has carried you through* the valley, with the renewed strength *He* has given you, come along side others who are in the midst of pain and loss, to console them as you have been consoled and *guide them* to the God of hope and mercy. Then, just as 2 Cor. 1:3 tells us, "bless" meaning *praise* God for His goodness, mercy and grace.

May God Bless you and bring you peace this day and everyday.

Prayer Concerns and Praises

Jim

Encourage them to pray with prayer counselors at the end and to complete the prayer request folders in the pews. Explain prayer cards and time of prayer with counselors at the end of the service.

Prayer Chorus **Cares Chorus, #2215 (sing thru twice)**

Pastoral Prayer

Jim

The Lord's Prayer

Third Reading **Psalm 46:6-7; 9-11**

Steve Hughes

Wars are not new. Violence is not new. Humankind has dealt with human evil since the beginning of time. And yet, in the midst of violence and evil, we can still hear these words from scripture.

Psalm 46:6-7

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Psalm 46:9-11

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Third Reflection – Where is God in War?

Jim

War in Iraq. War in Afghanistan. War and strife on the African continent. War in our human institutions. War among those God has placed in our families. War with addictions. War in our very beings. We know war. War born of greed, selfishness, or yes, even evil. War that takes our loved ones and places them in harm's way. We experience the absence of love when disagreements become so profound that we wish harm upon those with whom we disagree. War inside us that threatens to take us away from God. We know that perfect love casts out all fear and ends strife. But the only perfect love is the love of God fully expressed in Christ Jesus. When God's love is present, the self-centeredness that leads us to conflict goes away. When all people accept the love of God, nation shall not rise up against nation. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, as Isaiah puts it. We don't need plowshares and pruning hooks so much these days, but the point is that strife is diminished and productive purposes are served only when God is our focus and not our own self-interests. Be still and listen – listen for that still small voice that speaks to us even in the turmoil and noise of our world. Be still and know that He is God. Let him alone be exalted in your life.

***Hymn: Christ is the World's Light #188**
Ushers come forward on last verse.

Offering
Offertory Music: Because He Lives Rob Frank, soloist

***Doxology**
***Offertory Prayer Brian**

Fourth Scripture Psalm 145:13b-14, 17-18 / John 14:27 Lisa Haman

Psalm 145:13b-14, 17-18

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Fourth Reflection - God Will Never Leave Us

Jim

He is with us. He promises to always be with us. To never leave or forsake us. If you are not experiencing his presence today, know that God is waiting for an invitation to come and help you with all of your troubles. Understand that God is not the silver bullet that makes everything right as we desire it to be. Healing and wholeness are more spiritual than physical. The greatest healing of all is the reconciliation of a human being with God. When this happens, physical healing sometimes occurs, mental and emotional balance is often restored, spiritual health is enhanced, and relationships are healed.

Jesus said, come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Perhaps the greatest obstacles to allowing God to help us with the burden of our circumstances are doubt and fear. We find ourselves or our loved ones in trouble or difficulty, and we want to fix it. Sometimes we can't. Sometimes we are paralyzed by fear that we can't. God is our last resort rather than our first refuge in times of trouble. We won't give our problems to God until they become unbearable. The scriptures have 365 instances where God tells us to "fear not" or "be not afraid" – theoretically one for each day of the year. John 14 is a prominent one which offers comfort to us as it did to the disciples near the end of Jesus' life. All you need to do is call upon the Lord, and he will abide with you, comfort you, give you peace, and redeem your circumstances. We deny ourselves the peace that God offers because we do not give our stuff to God and let him help us carry it.

Special Music: In This Very Room

Chancel Choir

Sacrament of Holy Communion, Prayer and Anointing with Oil

Hymns: Have Thine Own Way, Lord #382
Freely, Freely #389
Something Beautiful, #394

If necessary, Rob will play background music after hymns are sung.

Fifth Scripture

Pam Buzbee

Isaiah 49:13

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.(NRSV)

Lamentations 3:22-24

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."(NRSV)

Reflection: Walk With God - (Closing comments)

Jim

Micah 6:8 asks this question: What does the Lord require of you? And then goes on to answer that question. "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Walk with God, knowing that to walk with his is to trust his presence, his power, and his promises. In John 16:3, Christ reminds his followers, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" Suffering and hope are not mutually exclusive, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- He is *with* us in the *midst* of our suffering,...
- He can *redeem* and *bring hope* out of them,...
- He helps us live the way of love *through* them,...
- He *uses* other people *to bring this to pass*...
- He invites *us* to be a part of the process....because when we do, we not only see God's light at the end of the "tunnel," but we actually *become* God's light **IN** the tunnel

Go and walk with God!

Prayer for Strength (unison):

**O creator and mighty God,
you have promised strength for the weak,
rest for the laborers, light for the way,
grace for the trials, help from above,
unfailing sympathy, undying love.
O creator and mighty God,
help us to continue in your promise. Amen.**

***Closing Hymn: Great Is Thy Faithfulness**

#140

Benediction:

With God's help, may you go forth
to live deeply, with purpose
to live freely, with detachment
to live wisely, with humility
to live justly, with compassion
to live lovingly, with fidelity
to live mindfully, with awareness
to live gratefully, with generosity
to live fully, with enthusiasm.

Hold on to God's vision for your life and renew it daily in
your hearts, becoming ever more one with God.

Go in Peace. Amen.

Postlude