

“Stumbling Onto that Pot of Gold”

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The United Church of Gainesville

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New Members Sunday

Matthew 13: 44-45

I have a reading to share with you that is the essence of everything I want to say this morning, and I simply can't hold on to it until the end of this sermon. It's that good.

As background, I want to give you a wider definition of two words that are used in this reading, Chronos and Kairos. Chronos is time as we know it. It's the root of the word chronological for the time that passes minute by minute, day by day, year by year. The opposite of Chronos is Kairos, which is holy time. Kairos happens when the extraordinary breaks in on the ordinary. Kairos is the moment when we understand the poem or parable, when we experience true love, a moment of birth, the “Aha!” at the rainbow, the experience of grace.

In this church we call our lay care giving team that visits people in crisis or transition our Kairos ministry, because we believe that in moments when they step in, a certain holiness of care breaks into ordinary time.

With that background, I want to share with you a paragraph by Madeleine L'Engle that Sandy and I found in a spiritual journal, An Almanac for the Soul, edited by Marv and Nancy Hiles that we are currently reading before breakfast each day.

Kairos...God's time. That time which breaks through chronos with a shock of joy, that time we do not recognize while we are experiencing it, but only afterwards, because kairos has nothing to do with chronological time...

In “Our Town”, after Emily has died in childbirth, Thornton Wilder has her ask the Stage Manager if she can return home to relive just one day. Reluctantly he allows her to do so. And she is torn by the beauty of the ordinary, and by our lack of awareness of it. She cries out to her mother, ‘Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me... it goes so fast we don't have time to look at one another.’ And she goes back to the graveyard and the quiet company of the others lying there, and she asks the Stage Manager ‘Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?’ And he sighs and says, ‘No. the saints and poets, maybe. They do some’...

(Walking on Water, Reflections on Faith and Art, quoted in An Almanac for the Soul, Marv Hiles, ed.)

I could think of no better time to share this quote than today when new members join. It is a Kairos moment for me, for on this day the holy breaks through our ordinary world. Our church is renewed by each of you who joins this sacred community. And you are renewed by the

hearts and souls of everyone in this room. The key, as Emily implores in “Our Town”, is to just look at one another, to realize the beauty of life as we live it. The stage manager says that most of the time we living beings miss life. We don’t truly see one another. Only the saints and poets glimpse true meaning, once and a while.

That’s what we are when we are together here in worship, saints and poets. Worship is poetry, and we are linked in each word and prayer with the communion of saints who have gone before us, who sit next to us, and who will follow after us.

I constantly receive notes and e-mails from members of this church who have moved away, saying how much they miss this church with its unique character and blessings. If they knew the word, I think they’d say that this church was full of Kairos moments. They, like Emily in “Our Town”, tell me to tell you to treasure what we have.

Now I’m sure that loads of ministers in decent churches everywhere get the same plea from those who reflect on their sacred communities from the distance of time and place. I’m not saying we’re holy in a way no one else is. But I am saying that this moment, like the moment Emily returns to in her visit to the living, is shot through with the beauty of the holy in the ordinary.

There are many Kairos moments in a church that are not recognized until they are over. That is part of the nature of Kairos moments. But today is one Kairos moment that we can catch by stopping to truly see and celebrate each other.

One of the reasons those of us who are grandparents gush so much about the experience of our grandchildren is that grandparenting is in a way a chance for us to come back from the dead as it were, and revisit our own parenting and our own children. I wrote about this experience in my journal on December 28 of this past year.

Resurrection – December 28-2008 at the lake

Wondering about the wonder of grandchildren beyond the jokes

(If I had known...I would have had them first)

perhaps it’s the way they are a second chance
at everything I thought was over...

crib and high chair once given away return,
first steps, sounds of rooting through Lego’s,
Santa, toys in the house,
little ones hopping into our bed in fuzzy pajamas with feet,
the beach, damming the stream, poking in the campfire,
first day of school, a dollhouse,
whale house bedtime stories,
riding a two wheeler.

All these firsts we parked away
thinking they were lost, are found again.
Each return is resurrection,

and even more, not only of our grandkids,
but our kids themselves come back from
where I once thought never to see them again.

When we began this theme, “Over the Rainbow” I spoke of how the pot of gold at the end was an impossible dream that we are nevertheless meant to pursue. But faith always has an “on the other hand.” So today, I say, on the other hand, I also believe that there are moments when we do indeed stumble onto that pot of gold. Today is one of those days.

Just in case you haven’t been keeping track, this morning this church surpasses the 700 mark in membership. Oh we’ll trim it down in the fall when we do our annual pruning of inactive members, but then another group we’ll join and we’ll bounce back up to 700 again. When this church had 75 members and was struggling to know if we could in fact survive as a church, anyone there would have said that 700 members was easily the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

There’s a midrashic tale told the blessed Rabbi Baal Shem Tov. A certain Reb Moshe was very poor, and in a dream he saw a pot of gold buried under a bridge in a distant town. He went to that town and began to dig under the bridge. An old friend Reb Yankel saw Moshe at the bridge and asked what he was doing. Moshe told him of his dream. Yankel said, “That’s funny, because I just had a dream of gold under the cast iron stove of my old friend Moshe.”

Embarrassed, Moshe went home, upended his cast iron stove, and found a pot of gold. While celebrating his good fortune, he felt bad that his success came from Yankel’s dream. So he took ten percent of his fortune to give to Yankel, put it in a bag, and went back to the town where he encountered Yankel. On the way he met Yankel, coming toward him, lugging a bag of gold.

“What’s that?” asked Moshe. Yankel replied that he began digging under the bridge where Moshe was digging, found a pot of gold, felt guilty and brought ten percent for Moshe.

The story goes on with continued blessing as each shares portions of his wealth with increasing generosity. But the first point is that the pot of gold was under their own feet in their own dreams.

Jesus tells a parable, saying the kingdom of heaven is like discovering a treasure in a field and then selling everything to buy the field. Or it is like a finding pearl of great value and selling everything to buy that pearl.

Treasures are rare, mostly because we do not have eyes to see them. One treasure is here today for each of us, today in this place, among us, with our friends, our family, and new faces of those who may people our future – if we have eyes to see.

This is the Kairos moment, the kingdom of heaven. The key, as Emily says in “Our Town” is realizing life while we live it, truly seeing one another and the world around us for the hidden treasure, the pearl of

great price that it is. We are called to be the poets the saints, and see,
simply see the golden glow of every day life.

I close with the final four verses from Stephen Mitchell's
translation of Psalm 90.

“Fill us in the morning with your wisdom;

shine through us all our lives.

Let our hearts soon grow transparent

In the radiance of your love.

Show us how precious each day is;

Teach us to be fully here.

And let the work of our hands

Prosper, for our little while.

Introduction to Prayer – The bread and cup of communion are reminders to find the holy in the things of this world by paying attention to them, and realizing they are more than just bread and wine, and juice.

As we pray this morning, we add one more element to our communion - chocolate, and more specifically, chocolate as a symbol of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that we sometimes do find.

Pause in silence as the golden baskets of chocolate are passed among you. When you receive your piece of chocolate, and unwrap it and put it in your mouth, silently thank God - thank God for the chocolate, but more than that for the way it reminds us to stop and see and taste the treasures of this world, the people we love and who love us, the gifts of creation, and this church. (Pass the chocolate)

Stop and see.

Stop and taste

Stop and give thanks

Stop and receive kairos, holy time. Amen.