

“Search and Rejoice” 9/12/2010 Kenmore UMC

Rev. Dr. Peter LeValley

“God is the One who has taught us the love and care to search out the one who is lost and to rejoice together as a community that has Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors.

Remember the last time God found you, when you knew that the Lord of creation sought you out in the midst of your wandering through life and found you and rejoiced over you. I really like the baptismal song, *I was There to Hear Your Boring Cry*, because it rehearses just a few of the times God has been there in our lives. At our boring cry the moment we were born, when we were but a child, when we first heard the wonder of God’s Word, when you found someone to share your time and you joined your hearts as one, in the middle ages of your life, to guide us through the night, when the evening gently closes in and we shut our weary eyes, and then there is still just one more surprise, I was there to hear your boring cry, and God rejoiced over you.

When I sing that song, when I reflect and absorb these parables and I think about the church, Joy is a central part.

There are so many joy thieves in our midst. Terrorist attacks, and the terror of fear that goes on and on, so that hide our lives behind id’s, and book burnings and hatred. People who make a place so sacred they squeeze the life out of it. What greater stand could there be against terrorism than to embrace those who remain true to their faith and show the world by God’s grace we can live together. We stand in line so long to visit someone or some place we forget why we wanted to go in the first place and our joy is stolen away and we are even afraid to search for it anymore.

There are people so overwhelmed with the tragedies of their life, whom the darkness has covered that they seem to suck the very light of life out of the day. There are people so absorbed by the seriousness of life that they forget the reason to be serious is the love and joy we have been given to light our lives and brighten the world around us.

There are the grumblers who only see the darkness and somehow miss the light. Even in church. Erma Bombeck tells: *The Church Is No Place for Joy*

In church the other Sunday I was intent on a small child who was turning around smiling at everyone. He wasn't gurgling, spitting, humming, kicking, tearing the hymnals, or rummaging through his mother's handbag. He was just smiling. Finally, his mother jerked him about and in a stage whisper that could be heard in a little theater off Broadway said, "Stop grinning! You're in a church!" With that, she gave him a belt on his hind side and as the tears rolled down his cheeks added, "that's better," and returned to her prayers. I wanted to grab this child with the tear-stained face close to me and tell him about my God. The happy God. The smiling God, the God who had to have a sense of humor to have created the likes of us.

There are events and people that makes us want to close the doors of our buildings and our lives and they are succeeding and we have to find away to remember that it is the opportunities to love and experience and share joy that is being robbed from us.

There is a lot of serious stuff going on, thousands killed by some people who have so lost the joy and love of life they have to steal others lives. Thousands of children dying everyday because they don’t have clean water to drink, or food to eat. There are ten’s of thousands killed because my tribe doesn’t like your tribe as we saw among the Hutu’s and Tutsi’s, and as we see in the Sudan. Financial manipulations so one person can get rich at the expense of thousands of

others. There are tragedies manipulated by people to get attention and power for themselves out of the pain and fear of others.

Jesus knew this, it was happening 2,000 years ago in ways that are not that dissimilar from our day. So when he heard the very people who knew and studied the truth of the love and hope and joy and peace God had given them and wants all God's people to know, he told them a story, a parable about God and the Kingdom of God which is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and lost one, and God is like a woman who had ten coins and lost one and they left the rest behind and went and searched for the lost sheep and the lost coin and when they found it they Rejoiced, they rejoiced so much they ran to their neighbors and told them "Rejoice with Me" for the lost is found, just so, just like this Jesus says there is joy in heaven over one sinner, one person separated from the love of god and neighbor.

Jesus is on a "Search and Rejoice" mission and as his followers so are we. We religious folks, especially we leaders have to get over ourselves and stop thinking we are the answer to the world and remember that the Lord who found us is. And the joy and wonder, the hope and peace we experience each time we remember we are held like a sheep or a coin in the hand of the Lord. And so we go shining with that light to help those who live in darkness see and come to God's light.

At the 1994 North Texas Annual Conference, Bishop Bruce Blake noted the difference between the church as a tunnel and as a cave. A cave is an underground area where one goes in and comes out at the same place, the bishop observed. A tunnel, on the other hand, is where one goes in and comes out in a different place.

Bishop Blake then went on to argue that it is important that the church see itself as a tunnel and not a cave. If we come out of church at the same place we went in, then something is wrong.

The church leads us in the direction of the light -- knowing that the light at the end of every tunnel is the light of Christ.

In a world threatened by any who would search and destroy, we are the people God has chosen and sent to Search and Rejoice and to open our minds and our doors and our hearts so that our community might be held in God's joy and love.

Search and Rejoice, remember, discover the joy in your life, that you shine with it so others can discover the joy and love god has for them.

What joy Jesus has for us and would share through us as we go on our Search and Rejoice Mission. Amen

George Matheson (1842-1906), known more for his 100 poems ("Make Me a Captive Lord," "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," "Light: What is it? It is not something to search for; it is something to search by. NO man by searching can find out God; but, if he take God without searching, he will find everything else. My evidence for God is what he shows me. I must have a torch to begin with. The room is dark, and I have lost something -- the key to my own nature. I cannot find it till I have struck a light. There must be light in my hand before I come in -- light on the threshold, light at the very door. My progress must not be from the dark into the clear, but from the clear into the dark. God is his own interpreter. In God's light shall we see light."

Paula Poundstone, comedian: "I'll tell you a secret -- adults don't know what they want to do for a living. That's why they're always asking kids what they want to be when they grow up -- they're looking for ideas."

--Martin E. Marty
Context,
1 November 1994