

WGUMC June 2, 2013 "Fearfully, Wonderfully"
Psalm 139:1-18 and Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

In the hymn "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry," there is a line that goes: "I was there when you were but a child, with a faith to suit you well; in a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell." It's an age-old impulse: to want to run away from home, escape from watchful eyes, and flee from the presence of God, to go into the dark and find where the demons dwell.

Psalm 139 captures it perfectly, this selfish impulse to take the wings of the morning and fly away from the Spirit of God. Most of us start out looking for material gifts not spiritual ones. We think, "We want it; we have to have it, even if we have to go into the darkness to get it."

And so the years fly by as we fly by, until one day we finally get to the farthest limits of the sea. We think we have arrived. But we open our eyes, and all we see is more sea. And it's kind of scary. We're lost, we're alone, and we start to panic.

Then we discover that "Even there, your hand shall lead me."

[Psalm 139:10]

In that moment, we come to understand that the way we've been living, with all of our fleeing and all of our flying, all of our getting and all of our grasping, pretty much comes to nothing. In the end, we didn't escape, we didn't acquire and we never did arrive. That's OK, because what we gained can't be measured in money or miles, anyway, only in moments. Life isn't a set of goals to achieve, but a series of grace-filled moments to embrace.

Looking back at life from the farthest limits of the sea, finally, we are able to see. And what we see is that all of those days spent complaining about the things we didn't have could've been much better spent giving thanks for the things we did have. And that's not all. We also see that the people who blessed us on our way are a lot more important than the people who hurt us along the way. We come to face the fact

that everything we've ever done was made possible by gifts we were given, or to put it more theologically, by grace alone.

When we get to that place at the farthest limits of the sea, whether it be in our 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, or beyond, that's where gratitude is born.

You might say that the first half of life is lived with an attitude; the second half, with gratitude. And I think, I hope, I'm getting there. One thing I notice is that I'm starting to spend less time complaining about all the things that my parishioners aren't doing and more time feeling thankful for what you are doing. Here in this church, I am appreciating all you who are leading a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, and making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[Ephesians 4:1-3] At least some of the time. We all have moments of grace!

And we all have gifts of grace. Though there is only one Spirit, there are many gifts. And all of them are given so that the saints will be well equipped for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. [Eph 4:4-6, 12]

Who are the saints? They aren't a football team. The Bible uses the term for all those who are set apart, distinguished by that fact that they have dedicated themselves to learning to live as Jesus lived and to love as Jesus loved. Isn't that why we're all here? In other words, "saints" applies to us.

But there are among us saints a few who stand out. Their lamp is on the lampstand and they give light to all in God's house. Their path is straight, their sights are high, their will is strong, and their heart is fixed, as Paul says, on the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 3:14] The years fly by, and they just keep going and growing in grace until they come to the farthest limits of their spiritual and physical life, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of

Christ. [Eph 4:13] You all know who I'm talking about. The first saint I want to appreciate today is Ruby Goodnight.

Dear Ruby, you are a living word of God, leading a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. By the grace of God, you have lived long enough and have suffered enough to learn to lean on the mercy of Christ and to teach others to trust in his grace. You have loved long enough to show us how bearing with one another in love can help us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

You have faithfully served the one body, received the one Spirit, held on to the one hope, loved the one Lord, nurtured the one faith, remembered the one baptism, and obeyed the one God of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ruby, you have finally lived long enough to be humbled by the limits of your physical body and to model gracious acceptance of your diagnosis to this body. Like you, I want to

be able to say, "I'm thankful," anytime anyone asks me how I'm feeling, and really mean it.

You have shared your gifts and your precious self with so many, and we wanted to thank you. Like each one of us, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. So, we made this book for you. It is filled with the testimonies and prayers and memories of your brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope it will comfort and encourage you in the weeks and months ahead until one day you fly with the Spirit into the eternal presence of God's grace and into the limitlessness of God's love. Amen.

Volunteer Appreciation

Now, we honored Ruby today not to make the rest of you think of all the things you aren't doing, but to give you thanks for the things you are doing and can do because the love of God that has been poured into your hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to you. [Romans 5:5] That Spirit has given you gifts that you give to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of this church, this body of Christ. It would take all day to thank each of you individually, so we will thank you calisthenic-ly! I'm going to have you stand up and sit down as I call out the gift you give.

- If you are able, stand up if you lead a small group, teach a Bible Study, Sunday School class or children's chapel, help with Crosswalk, work with the Joint Youth Group, participate in a fundraiser or volunteer for VBS.
- Stand up if you volunteer in the church office or library, work on the website or the church directory, or help with the maintenance of the buildings and the garden.
- Stand up if you serve on one of our leadership committees: Lay Leadership Council, Finance, Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations, Nominations, or the new capital campaign and renovation committee: Mission Possible.
- Stand up if you are signing up for our new caregiving ministry, if you knit prayer shawls, write care cards, send sermon copies, call and visit shut-ins, provide meals or transportation.
- Stand up if you sing in the adult or children's choir, play in the band, ring bells, play an instrument in the ensemble, or otherwise serve our music ministry.
- Stand up if you design bulletin covers, prepare Christmas candles, set up Kohlstedt Hall, greet, usher, acolyte, arrange for flowers, serve as a projectionist or sound technician or communion steward, provide the communion elements, get to know visitors, count the offering, bring snacks, make the coffee, wash dishes, lock up or otherwise make Sunday mornings happen.
- Stand up if you provide meals at the family shelter, serve on the Building Hope group, participate in our Change the World and Fifth Sunday of Service projects, are trained to take part in the Open Table program, or are going on the Pine Ridge Reservation or Mexico Mission trips.

That should be about everyone, and I give you a hand. After all, I get paid to be good, but you volunteers are good because you are fearfully and wonderfully made; that I know very well. So, the ushers will pass out a token of my appreciation for you. Take one and stick it in a houseplant and let this pinwheel remind you of the Holy Spirit that blows on you and through you, enabling you to breathe new life into everything you do. "I can no other answer make, but thanks and thanks and ever thanks." [*Twelfth Night*, Act 3, scene 3]

Prayer of Dedication

Three-in-One God, who is above all and through all and in all, we ask you to bless these gifts but even more so to bless these givers, these doers of your word, these volunteers in your vineyard. Pour out your Holy Spirit on them that they may receive all the grace they need to hold on to the one hope, follow their one Lord, and build up this one body. Empower them to serve you with gladness, to praise you in their work and to pause often in wonder, to strengthen each other through loving words and caring deeds, to witness to your peace and to strive for your justice. And when they grow weary of doing good, teach them how to pray in stillness and to hope in darkness and to sing of the coming light and the dawn of your new day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.