

“Called To Serve”

The Rev Drew Willard  
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Psalm 27:1-9

Matt. 4:12-23

‘Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues  
and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and  
curing every disease and every sickness among the people.’

Matt. 4:23

Let us pray... O God,

You have called us to serve in this community as a church –  
help us to answer your call by asking the questions  
that need to be asked:

Where is the pain that needs healing?

Where are the dark places that need light?

Amen

Breaking news is a term that is strangely appropriate  
for what it’s about.

News that breaks...

News that shatters us...

I must admit that when I first heard about

the shooting incident at that Tucson supermarket,

I took it to be just another report of a disgruntled person  
with an ax to grind against someone – this time a Congressman,  
then I heard the body count and that a little girl was dead.

How often have we heard breaking news

that leaves us shaking our heads at the depravity and absurdity  
of desperate people acting on their worst impulses.

I am reminded of a cartoon where a man turns on a TV

and sees multiple mushroom clouds of atomic bombs going off  
and he says to his spouse,

‘Well, they really did it this time! They finally blew it all u...’

Now, we have to be a little careful about bringing

too much of the world’s cares into the safety zone of worship..

This is a sacred space away from the world outside our doors –  
a refuge for reflection, imagination, and healing.

But also a place of preparation for going back out into the world,  
with renewed resolve.

Willard, p.2

That being said let us also recognize this is where we can and must  
bring those aspects of life that are troublesome  
and even frightening to us to set before God  
and put into perspective.

For God is able to handle it – and through Christ, so are we!  
We are enabled to deal with whatever ‘it’ may be.

Some more breaking news  
was the popular uprising in the North African country of Tunisia  
ousting its dictator to establish a ‘democracy’ there –  
without the help of the United States,  
or anyone else for that matter, even having a clue  
that this was in the making.

What triggered that event  
was Tunisian police destroying a roadside vendor’s wares  
because he didn’t have a permit.

This vendor had been college-educated, but couldn’t find a job;  
And when his entrepreneurial venture was callously destroyed,  
he was in such despair that he set himself on fire in protest.

The Tunisian people were so outraged by this cruel irony,  
that they were emboldened to drive out a repressive regime  
that had been in power for more than 20 years.

What both events have in common is the sacrifice of innocents  
that scandalize a community into recognizing injustice  
and start working together to do something about it.

Breaking news – the in-breaking that shatters our indifference  
and causes us to care.

There is a word in Hebrew, “perez”,  
that means ‘to break forth’, like the bursting of a dam when  
the waters pour through to overwhelm and destroy;  
and this word was used to describe God’s destructive power.

There is another word with the same root form,  
but a different meaning as in ‘the breaking of bread’.

It was in the breaking of bread that the disciples at Emmaus  
recognized they were in the presence of the risen Christ.  
And that was just one example of the transformational power  
of God’s empowering love for the world through Christ  
that galvanized a loose band of despairing people  
into a faith community that still proclaims this Good News.

Willard. p.3

Part of this kind of 'breaking news' about Christ  
was how his followers were able to recognize his innocence –  
even calling him 'the Son of God'.

And it is by comparison with Christ that  
the sacrifices of others for the sake of justice  
through the centuries ever since would be recognized.

And this is true in the 'breaking news' of Tucson and Tunisia –  
and there are other examples...

Such an incident of violence finally brought Catholics and Protestants  
to start working together in North Ireland.

A splinter group with sympathies for the Irish Republican Army  
set off a bomb that killed three little girls.

And the whole country after so many deaths, over so many years,  
was finally so collectively outraged,  
that they began to put their energies  
into reconciliation, instead of retribution.

And it was the bombing of a church in the American South  
which killed three little girls that led to a shared revulsion  
throughout our society against white racism.

So, what is our call here in this place, at this time.  
to share this 'breaking' Good News?

No need for a show of hands, but...

who here has ever engaged in a political discussion?

Who has ever been frustrated by the stubbornness  
of the person, or persons, you were talking to  
and their refusal to face the truth?

We can and should engage in such conversations,  
but to be constructive they must be a 'civil discourse'.

We can and should express our truth,  
but with a desire for the truth and not just to win an argument.

There are some real hot button issues,  
but perhaps the most important thing is in "how"  
we talk about them with others.

And wouldn't it be nice if there really were  
a separation of church and politics –  
which means there are hot button topics right here,  
without even having to go out into the world and its craziness.

Willard, p.4

So, before we can go out to correct the world's bad behavior,  
let's take stock of how well we practice what we preach.  
Let's start by making sure our words to one another are sweet,  
in case we have to eat them!

We are going to have our first Annual Meeting in our own building  
coming up next Sunday.

It will be an opportunity for all of you who are members to be on hand  
to review and consider how well we have:

- worshiped as a Christian community
- been O&A
- shared God's love
- celebrated the sacraments
- provided spiritual education
- supported missions in the community, nation, and world

And generally, well have we been  
'open to all and celebrating God in everyone'.

We have a very important role to play in this community  
and there is some risk to this,  
but if we do it right,  
we will be part of Christ's liberating work  
of easing pain and bringing light to dark places.

Here is an additional challenge to us – in the form of a contest:  
Our national church setting of the United Church of Christ  
is asking UCC congregations to share their good news  
and tell "the wider church what they made possible  
with ingenuity, persistence, faith and hard work,  
and why their story will bring hope and encouragement  
to the rest of their UCC family."

And we sure have a story to tell!

So, let us continually look for opportunities to bring 'breaking news'  
of 'hope and encouragement' through the words and works  
of this United Church of Christ at The Villages.

Amen

Psalm 27:1-9 [Of David]

- 1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- 2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.
- 3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.
- 4 One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.
- 5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock.
- 6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me,  
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
- 7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!  
8 'Come,' my heart says,  
'seek his face!'  
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
- 9 Do not hide your face from me.

Matt. 4:12-23

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested,  
he withdrew to Galilee.

13 He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake,  
in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah  
might be fulfilled:

15 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles—

16 the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned.'

17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim,  
'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,  
Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother,  
casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen.

19 And he said to them,  
'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers,  
James son of Zebedee and his brother John,  
in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets,  
and he called them.

22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee,  
teaching in their synagogues  
and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom  
and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.