

“Holy Moments in Life”

Psalm 23 and 46:10-11

5/14/2000 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

You’re in a supermarket or another public place with a lot of people. If you slowly and carefully look into people’s eyes, you can see the beauty that God has etched into their being. Despite their weariness, you can often see a quiet sense of joy in their mannerisms. If you do it long enough, you catch the sadness.

For some, it appears that there have been few, if any, of the fragile moments of being compassionately loved by others in their lives. They walk along with some of the weight of the world upon them as they go about their survival tasks.

When you see the sadness in their face, there is something within you that wants to put everything down, walk over to them and put your arms around them. You want to tell them that they are loved children of God. That if they fall behind, we’ll wait for them.¹ You want to tell them that God loves them to the point of laughing with their joys and weeping with their private agonies.

Perhaps you imagine that as you would hold them, you would magically make all of their pain and discouragement drain from them like a tide receding from the shore line – never to return. You want to tell them that things are going to be all right and that you will always be there to help them – no matter what. That they won’t ever be lonely again.

You want to do all that but you don’t, . . . so you stand in line at the checkout counter and wait your turn. You stare at the racks of gossip magazines with their covers filled with movie stars with their rehearsed faces of happiness.

“This little town is much the same
As others I have known.
Nothin’ much to do round here
Except work and then go home.
Get your pay check Friday night
Monday it’s all gone
And you don’t know how to make ends meet

¹ A line from Faith Hill’s “If I fall Behind” on her *Breathe* CD.



But you know you’ll ca

Susan keeps the counter clean
Donald pumps the gas
Walter lives in yesterday
’Cause today goes by too fast.
TV nights and family fights
Young girl cryin’ in the night
Cause she lost the one she thought was so right
Couple days ago.

In the store up on the corner
There’s a man lives by himself.
Never knew his love was worth
So he kept it on the shelf.
Spend your money, spend your time
Teach your children to be kind
They’ll all come home at Christmas time
And catch up on the news.

This little town’s a quiet town
I’ve lived here for a while
Young girls dream of far away
And learn to use their smiles.
Often marry much too young
Give up when the party’s done
And dream of flight, but never ever
Seem to run away.

And this little town is much the same
As others I have known.
Nothin’ much to do round here
Except work and then go home.
Get your pay check Friday night
By Monday it’s all gone
And you don’t know how to make ends meet

But you know you'll carry on."²

All of us know that the towns of our lives will be much the same as the others we've known. But each of us do find the chance and fragile beauty in life, a sense of the profound holiness in life and a sense of the holy in other people.

We have something that many may never have. At times, we've experienced a brief inspiring moment of pure beauty. These moments are rare but sometimes we find that we *can* transcend the mundane and the mediocrity of daily living.

We have come to know that we are God's children who are moving, on our tiny orb through time, to an existence where time is no longer measured and the beauty is there to stay. We have come to know this because we have found God to be a personal God, . . . our God. We've found God to be One Who loves us with the purity of our love for our children. We have been shown God is like a caring, protecting Shepherd of sheep. One Who drops everything when we finally come to our senses and come home to ourselves (and to God).

So in the face of the harshness of this world's circumstances, we come to experience the love of our Maker. It's a love so strong, that Self-sacrifice was made for you and for me.

This is the part of reality we try to convey to our children and grandchildren. We'll try to talk about this sense of peace in this Christian community.

The beauty and the sense of sacredness that we discover in others and in nature is ours. God is with us. And we are moving into the future, into the kingdom of God which is only partially disclosed in this life. For this, we live in gratitude to God because life is so much more than just "making it." Sometimes we *can* be still and know that God is near.

Some of us are very much moved by music. A while ago, we were privileged to hear a Beethoven piano concerto played by Immanuel Axe. As I sat there listening to this man play fifteen minute segments of

² David Mallett's "This Little Town" from his *Open Doors and Windows* CD

music from memory, it was difficult for me to believe someone could compose music like this in the first place. It was also moving to experience another musician who had committed it to memory and play it so skillfully.

As I watched the orchestra and this rolly poly pianist perform this concerto, the music rose up above them and carried my mind and imagination to other places. I imagined Medieval wall tapestries, almost enchanted with their interwoven detail which depicted scenes of life from previous centuries. And I was in awe that human beings could create such dazzling perfection. I wondered how Beethoven could have talked to anyone for weeks after he had finished the last chord of that concerto.

How could the musical genesis, Handel, for instance, create his works of brilliance and then carry on a simple conversation. "Say honey, I just finished a new piece and I need a name. I don't know whether to call it 'Ode for a Sunday afternoon' or 'The Messiah.' What do you think?"

But near the end of the Beethoven concerto, that night, I didn't want them to stop playing. I didn't want to lose the feeling of transcendence that the music had inspired.

I also happened to notice that my mouth had been hanging open in awe and total abandonment. If someone else would have looked over at me, sitting there gaping, they probably would have thought I had any number of neurological defecates.

But the pianist's name came to me again, "Immanuel." His parents were probably Jewish because Immanuel is Hebrew for 'God is with us.' So as the audience stood in applause to express their gratitude for the performance, I said to myself that his parents were right. God is with us. No One but God could have given human beings the genesis and the awe-inspiring creativity to produce such music.

Each of us have had "holy moments" when we were reminded of the beauty and sense of connectedness with which God has graced us. As you hear the words of this folk singer's song about a summer evening, perhaps it will remind you of times

when you have had a transcendent holy moment out
in nature.

“Midnight on the water,
Sunday on the lake,
A beaver or an otter,
Steels across the moonlight lake.

Foolish moth undaunted
By the screen upon the door.
Bumps his head instead of leaving,
Comes on back for more.

Choruses of cricket sounds,
The car across the way.
The dark of night, the covers down
Fond memories of the day.
Potted plants the dance of sweet ferns
Shuffled by the breeze.
The shadow of the back swing
In the shelter of the trees.

Northern lights that flicker
Wicker chairs upon the lawn
The coolness of late summer
And the still before the dawn.
Wood smoke from the camp fire
Drifting slowly to the sky.
The shimmer of a school of white perch
The spark of fire flies.

Midnight on the water
The sand and cedar air.
A quiet place, your suntanned face
And summer in your hair.
Boats and floats and wild oats growin’
Sweet beside the spring.
Midnight on the water and the owl is on the way.”³

Each of us have come upon these “chance” and fragile moments in our lives. They were holy moments.

For you, it might have been a quiet time in the woods, out in nature. You may have been driving down the street and seeing, for the first time in years, that the trees are fully alive. It may have been as you

³ David Mallett’s “Midnight On The Water” on his *Inches & Miles* CD

caught the light in the eyes of a child.

What made these moments extraordinary was that you felt an intense connection with yourself, with nature and with others around you. You may have had a clear sense of safety in being connected with and loved by God.

In these holy moments, you feel a sense of healing, not just in your body but in your soul. You may have had a surge of energy, as if your sight was fully seeing everything anew. And as we piece together these experiences, we find that there were many things occurring at once.

In this holy moment, you felt a sense of your own worthiness – an understanding that what God made in you embodies a sense of perfection. How all of your experiences, your thoughts, intelligence, all of your senses – everything that ever was and ever will be – has been made complete and is fully present in that moment. No words could adequately describe this experience. You felt that even with all of the mistakes you’ve made, for that moment, you had a sense that your soul – the core of your being – is completely pure. This holy moment is also what is described by those who have had near death experiences – approaching the Presence of God’s total and unconditional acceptance of them as a creature.

At the same time, you might also have had a sense of the perfection of all things in nature around you. In that moment, suddenly everything was just as it should be – that the universe made complete sense. Everything was uniquely sacred.

From the beginning of time, people have had experiences of the sacred and these moments have amounted to deep healing.⁴ We do come upon our

⁴ Today the medical field has come to recognize that in near death experiences, and in other holy moments of life, we *do* come to see something that we’ve never experienced until that intuitive moment. Even very clinical, rational and rigid medical personnel have turned away from their condition-response cause-and-effect categorizing to see that there are holy moments that can’t be explained away by biological endorphins and other metabolic chemical reactions. So even science has come to recognize that there is a spiritual dimension to human life. See the works of Dr. Joan Borysenko, who has been a pioneer in research in the fast-

sense of connectedness with our soul, with all of life and with God. When it happens, sometimes it is so profound that it changes the rest of our lives.

Most of the time, through, we're so distracted with the noise and busyness of life that we don't notice. The schedules, the deadlines and real and artificial "musts" and "shoulds" that make up our definition of "a fulfilled" life.

Some of you may have had a holy moment while you were in your garden or watching a blue jay land on a nearby tree. As a holy moment came to you, it was a time of awakening to more and perhaps all of life.

These moments come to us despite the fact that the world is *not* perfect. It's full of disappointment, unfulfilled dreams, sometimes suffering or unfairness. Yet in these holy moments, the veil drops and the mystery is there in us and around us. Suddenly the perfection is there.

People of other cultures and times have experienced these things. Holy moments are a *felt* sense of things – a realm of healing. "In a way I know my heart is waking up as all the walls come tumbling down" as Faith Hill sings.⁵

Sometimes holy moments come to us in a time of suffering. They occur when we find our way back to our true sense of the core of our being. They are a whole other order of coming home to who we already are because when the barriers come down, we have the chance to be real with one another. It's when we are able to say what we want to say, to another, without fear – without fearing that we might be judged as 'not good enough.'

Sometimes, through suffering, we become alive to our true oneness with others around us. For years, we've been so distracted with the less important things in life that our suffering has caused us to slow down and finally stop – long enough to be fully present in our life, . . . to *truly* see what is sacred. For some of you, it might have come to you when you slowly woke from surgery and found that you are

growing field of mind-body body medicine.

⁵ As Faith Hill sings in "Breathe" on her CD by the same title.

alive and there are wonderful and caring human beings around you in the recovery room. When you've found that you have been given the privilege of another day of life.

When we've slowed down and realized our connectedness with everyone around us, we've remembered our own true nature. We've found healing. We've taken off the masks we felt we've had to wear in order to feel worthy. When we have come to see our own true nature, we become more open to the beauty that has been obscured by other things we've placed in our view.

In these special moments, we realize that there isn't a need to *fix* something that is broken. We realize that it isn't a matter of us *getting* something that we do not already have. When we come home to our own true inner beauty and worth, we come home to who we already are as a child of God. It is like the first few moments a new mother has with her child whom she has just brought into the world.

It is like the moments when you're holding the hand of a dear person who has slipped off into a coma and is now near death. In those moments, you have a sure sense that as you are touching this wonderful human being, feeling their faint pulse in their hand, that their spirit is fully present and that God is fully present with both of you.

The beauty that the world has to offer, sometimes takes our minds from the clutter of our everyday responsibilities and complexities. It's the infinite beauty you can catch in the eyes of *anyone* who is standing before you. But you don't take in that beauty unless you're open to receive it in that moment.

So whether in nature or with others, be open for and cultivate the holy moments in your life. When you do, God will speak to your soul. God will blow a gentle breeze of healing over your troubled emotions. You're never alone. You're constantly in the Presence of a very Holy God Who loves you. ■

